

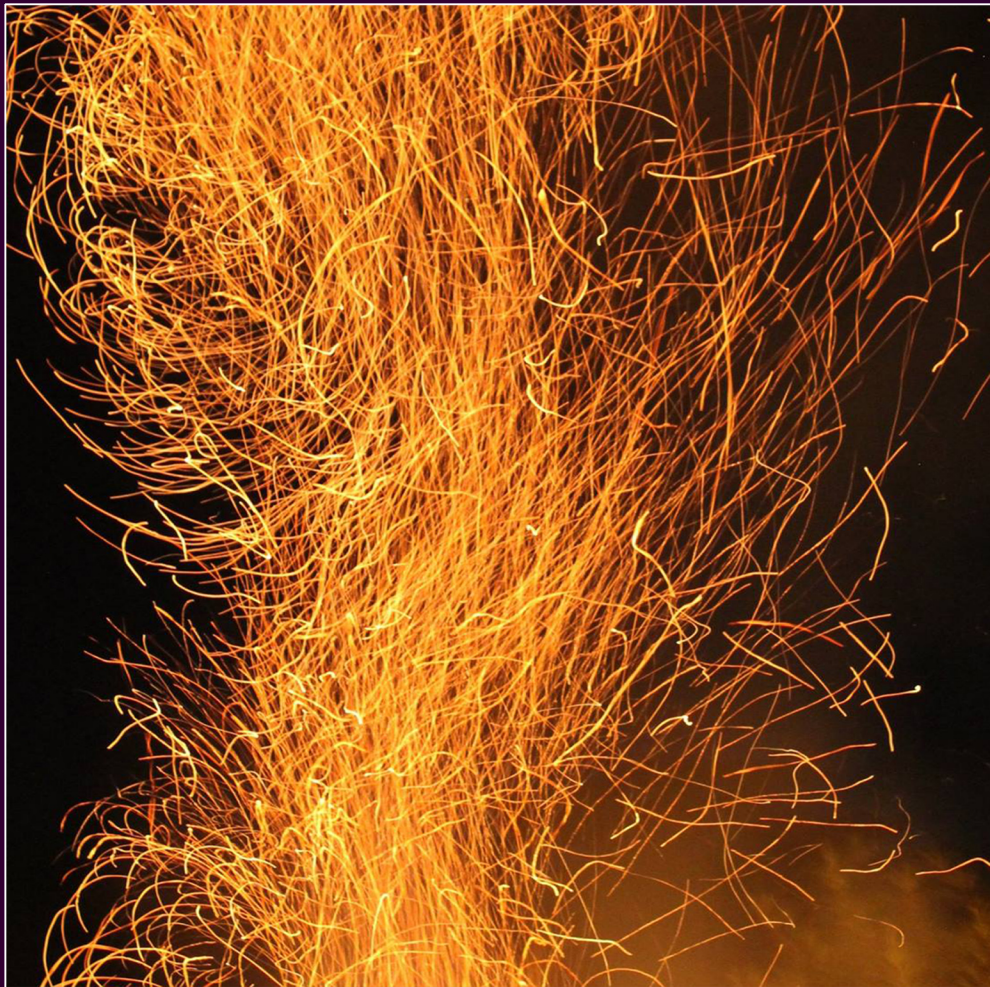


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THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



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The Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

ISSUE 4, February 2010

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Issue 4 – 2010

The Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago: A Case Study

Valerie Youseff

Defining Terms and Purpose

The plan for this Special Issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* came from a Workshop which Paula and I ran with the support of the Centre for Gender Studies at St. Augustine in May 2004. At that time we were working on *Writing Rage* (Morgan and Youseff, 2006), a collection of essays in which we explored the treatment of violent encounters in Caribbean society through diverse discourses, both spoken and written. As we delved through not only the literature, but the media, the judicial record, personal narratives and the history of the region, we rediscovered how deeply ingrained into the fabric of Caribbean society are both the violent response and its diverse interpretations. There was a strong gender and family element in the violence, both historically and currently, since women and children inevitably bore the brunt of the violence, as being the weaker, both physically and socially; while the male was more often the perpetrator of violence but yet emerged as deeply scarred by it, lashing out at myriad overwhelming situations and circumstances. We felt that if we could bring together those diverse persons in society who experience or deal with violence in their work and home contexts we could better pool our resources towards healing this scourge. That was the purpose of that initial gathering and remains the purpose of this Issue; several of the papers within it were first presented on that day.

But what do we mean when we speak of a *Culture of Violence*, and further, can one nation, as a case study of a region, have relevance for the rest? To answer these questions we must unpackage our terms Culture, Culture of Violence and Case Study.

Let us begin with some well-accepted definitions of culture with a focus on way of life:

Culture: learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism (Damen 1987, 367).

Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values. (Hofstede 1984, 51).

Culture then constitutes:

- Shared patterns of living which pervade societal interaction;
- A society's primary adaptive mechanism;
- The distinguishing collective programming of the human mind;
- A system of collectively held values.

Culture is, of course, learned and transmitted from one generation to another. The reasons why we cannot simply put slavery, indenture, and colonialism behind us, and move on, is because the cultures which developed in those times became an inheritance for following generations. As Bridget Brereton's Historical Background, which is necessarily the first paper in this Issue, indicates clearly, the violence meted out in those times was sufficiently brutal, not just to the body, but more significantly to the human psyche, that it evoked a plethora of violent responses not merely against the oppressor but against the self, and these violent responses are far less readily resolved than the mere removal of the original heinous imperial system of governance. In Caribbean societies, colonialism is deeply implicated in the manner in which violence has become a variously way of life, a means of adaptation to problems too profound to plumb, a value system which, paradoxically, brings status and reward in a world that appears to offer little by any other means. Many of its victims do find effective and productive means of overcoming, but others do not, such that the violence implodes on itself and becomes a self-perpetuating force. As we immerse ourselves in a culture, however, we come to comprehend it; and our comprehension empowers us to mediate and to change it.

Our focus on a "culture of violence" needs to be distinguished from the use of the same term by the United Nations, since the latter has become sufficiently well known that it might be assumed we are talking about the same thing. When UNESCO in 1994, moved to replace a culture of violence with one of peace, they were conceptualizing the term in the broader context of world nations' engagement in war. Later in the 1990's the larger body of the United Nations also took up this task, aiming not just to build peace after conflict had occurred but to promote a culture of peace which would actively prevent violent conflict from arising. In this context the UN General Assembly designated the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Its ongoing programmes to promote a Culture of Peace are wide-ranging and include the eradication of poverty; the preservation of the environment; the empowerment of all oppressed groups including,

especially, women; the equipping of peoples with dialogue and mediation skills; information-sharing and transparency among governments. It must be clear then that its agenda is somewhat different from our own more contained approach.

Ours is not a world agenda but a local one, and it focuses not on nations and national wars, global environmental and socio-economic issues, important as these unquestionably are. It is concerned with the comprehension and eradication of a societal malaise, which, like a cancer, eats away at the mind and body of a people, until it consumes them. It looks deep within the society, puts the society under a microscope if you will, in order to determine the cause of the disease, the environment which enables it to flourish, and to find means, by a collaboration of minds, to suppress the virus which is feeding and undermining the body politic.

There will be many times when global and local movements will interface with each other. And we are reminded of a project undertaken between UNESCO, the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, UWI, Mona and the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication, in April 2007, when they jointly launched two educational videos, produced under the supervision of Pro-Vice Chancellor Ronald Young: one on the challenges of representation of violence and crime in the media by Franklyn St. Juste; and the second on the link between violence and brain function, specifically examining the effect of negative social and environmental experience on the brain. Such opportunities for meaningful collaboration are indeed of the utmost significance, enabling the work of one nation to have an impact on many others.

The works in this issue, however, represent a society examining itself in the profound hope that internal healing can be achieved, and a reinvigorated impetus to collaboration thereby achieved. The issues which it examines, while not unique to the Caribbean region, are certainly not common to all nations to the same degree for they represent the challenges facing a multi-ethnic, multi-religious New World nation in transition to independence and autonomy, but yet dealing with the psychological damage of the past. Former colonial powers do not have these encumbrances in the same way, though they certainly have others.

The papers in this issue then look first of all at the legacy of history, to the deliberate destruction of male-female relationships and families during slavery and the objectification of men, women and children as labourers in the productive, reproductive and sexual sectors. They move on to examine the raw violence of indenture, where males tried to effectively reassert their loss of control of their women by any means possible in a society which emasculated them too and positioned them in an adversarial manner against the colonial powers on the one hand, and the emancipated African population on the other. They deal with violence against children which became institutionalized as the cycle of violence turned inwards on itself; violence against women who became the scapegoats of men who had lost their role and purpose and needed to blame someone within their reach for their aimlessness. It deals with homophobic violence, loosed primarily by men against one another in a world where the capacity for violence has become the prime identifier of maleness, and others subscribing to a different, less

violent signifier, must be undermined before they undermine that image. Women who love women also bear the onslaught of violence, for their same sex desire similarly undermines the fragile male psyche. Indeed, in a larger frame, the analyses deal with male marginalization, whether real or perceived; for whichever pertains, the male feels threatened, undermined, in education and the working sphere, a public domain over which he had once held control. The papers examine how the abusive male sees his own situation and how the abused female works through her pain.

When we examine the range of issues dealt with it becomes clear that Trinidad and Tobago can stand as a very real case study for the region. Notwithstanding that indentureship and the wholesale import of a large number of persons from the Indian subcontinent over a period of seventy years was peculiar to Trinidad and Guyana alone, the overall dynamic of a small post-Independence state in which there is a culture of violence imploding on itself remains the same.

A case study looks intensely at a single case, whether that may involve an individual, a corporation, or any other small grouping in order to describe it as effectively and comprehensively as possible. When large scale studies fail it is because there can be no detailed investigation of subparts of the universe under investigation; and the individual becomes lost in the overall generalizations which can become so vague as to be meaningless. Researchers agree as to the value of case study investigations but disagree as to their wider applicability. It is generally held that a case study can tentatively stand for a larger body of groupings, where they can be established as having sufficient in common.

Not every manifestation of violence in Trinidad and Tobago can be expected to show up in other states of the Caribbean; Trinidad is relatively large with an overpopulated capital and is highly industrialized and heavily dependent on oil and natural gas; poverty is still high and infrastructural development not what it should be in a state which appears highly prosperous and spends wantonly on superficialities. Tobago retains a more rural culture than Trinidad but the interface and exchange between the two islands has become significant, and a drug and transactional sex culture, underlying a tourism-based economy with considerable underemployment, has brought its own share of violence, though on a much smaller scale. We are relieved that our problems are not altogether shared by countries like Grenada and St. Lucia which have retained a more rural lifestyle and share much in common with Tobago rather than Trinidad. Each state, each island, has its own distinct culture and character, but what we can say is that where the issues are shared, our case study can prove instructive. If we can come to comprehend the psyche of the violent individual in Trinidad and Tobago, some of the causes of violence, some of its ramifications, some of the means of overcoming it, then that will be instructive for the rest of the region to the extent that those problems exist within it.

The papers

The first article in this Issue has, as mentioned earlier, been produced by historian Bridget Brereton and documents succinctly the ways in which Trinidad was historically forged in

a crucible of violence which goes a long way toward explaining the endemic violence that persists today. She briefly documents the depraved and sustained levels of violence which decimated the original Amerindian population of Trinidad, followed by those inflicted during slavery and finally those of indenture. What emerges is a picture of violence inflicted by the empowered against the disempowered at such levels that it could not but re-emerge in a parallel violence of the people against themselves. The systematic dismantling and undermining of the family under slavery, the violence of African-Indian relations under indenture, and the violence of Indian men against their women, the intra-racial violence which flourished especially in the cities and especially in the context of steelband rivalry in the early twentieth century, and the consistency of violence perpetrated against children even by their families, all indicate how 'violence' has indeed 'bred violence' in the Trinidad and Tobago context. If a more peaceful way of living has characterized Tobago, despite a similarly violent history, Brereton indicates that this is because of a pastoral community style of living and a strong Christian ethos which has been challenged in recent years as the smaller island also gradually succumbs to a measure of violence unprecedented in its earlier history.

There has been little written on the ways in which male abusers see themselves and their difficulties with their female partners. Jennifer Holder-Dolly and Valerie Youssef address this significant gap in a paper that analyses discursively extracts from a focus group discussion among six male abusers in Trinidad who have undergone counselling and remediation. The paper examines three major areas that the male discussion addresses: the ways in which they see their positions vis-a-vis their women and the wider society, their perceptions of their roles in domestic violence including why they abuse and their responses to the infidelity of their partners, perceived or real. The study shows that they perceive themselves as marginalized and misunderstood by society in contrast to women whom they see as strongly supported. While they make suggestions for mutual support these are only interim measures and they have no real advice to give younger men but rather use avoidance strategies, self-exoneration and defensiveness. They have a unidimensional view of women, do not seem to see a way forward to positive relationships, and are unable to express exactly what they want or need. Their vulnerability, isolation and incapacity to find meaningful solutions are instructive to social workers, psychologists, case workers and others who can use analyses of this nature to build empathy and to inform the design of counselling programmes geared to offer support and pose meaningful resolution to those who perpetrate abuse.

Professor Gordon Rohlehr's paper focuses on the calypso 'The Equalizer' sung by Singing Sandra in the 1998 calypso season, as his base for discussing in considerable detail the era of violence through which Trinidad and Tobago passed in the 1980's and 1990's, and how this was dealt with in society at large and through calypso. He makes the profound point that The Equalizer (based on the television series of the same name) prescribes the most extreme violent reprisals against men for their crimes of rape, murder and abuse of women but in itself reduces the situation to one of a balance of terror which can benefit none. He notes that the calypso is by no means unique in the stance it takes, either within this genre or in society at large, but he illustrates powerfully through a discussion of the activities of the vigilante groups set up by Hulsie Bhaggan in Central

Trinidad in the mid-nineties, that such solutions only rebound on themselves, creating a pandemic of violence which is uncontrollable, given its nature and the kinds of persons it attracts to its cause. He makes the point also that Bhaggan created a race war which was to a large extent unwarranted since much of the violence against Indian women came from Indian family members generally and particularly from a group of marauding Indian rapists who so understood the power of racist ideologies in creating a dynamic of terror that they masked themselves in rastafarian wigs. He noted the fact that the violence ultimately spanned every kind of human relationship in the context of an interrelated web of violence, a culture of violence without limit, and beyond the capacity of the state to control. More than any other paper in this Issue, this one demonstrates in profound detail how deeply Trinidad and Tobago society has become permeated by this scourge. He ends on a note of some hope though, citing calypsoes which advocate mutual understanding and gender and ethnic reconciliation: "In the end the struggle has to be relocated in the theatre of the human heart and the eye must see beyond the perspective of a balance of terror."

In "No Money, No Love" Paula Morgan also examines calypsos including *The Equalizer*, as well as ranging through a recent press article and Caribbean literature as she explores the role that poverty plays in the cycle of violence and abuse which characterizes society. She notes the ways in which an implicit view of the rights of the male in the home continues to pervade even our most recent media articles on family violence, and in addition, an acceptance of the failure of the social services to provide any support when called upon to do so. These inadequacies compound a situation of the most extreme stress for females in impoverished situations, but seem to be accepted as part of the impoverished woman's burden. As she ranges through the recorded agonies of both male and female experiences of poverty down through the twentieth century, she demonstrates how gender inequities become more explosive in the crucible of poverty and social disadvantage. It is as if the impoverished environment undermines and destabilizes, calls forth blame and mutual recrimination, and exacerbates a cycle of family violence which is the more heinous because the social condition seems accepted and self-perpetuating.

Geraldine Skeete gives a telling and succinct overview of some of the works of Caribbean fiction which deal with homophobic attitudes and violence, verbal, emotional and physical, which are meted out to persons suspected of being homosexual. She explains this homophobic trait in the Caribbean man, as deriving not just from the Biblical perspective but, perhaps more pervasive in its effect, the intense hypermasculinity that the Caribbean male feels he has to espouse, having been emasculated himself by his violent and systematic sexual and psychic undermining during slavery. She indicates how homosexuality remains an illegal act in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as elsewhere in the Caribbean, and notes that homosexuals and disabled persons are lumped together with criminals in their exclusion from society. Drawing on the works of Shani Mootoo and Lawrence Scott, she demonstrates in particular the isolation and condemnation in which the potentially homosexual child grows up, as he/she is flagrantly abused in both home and school; but she does not stop there, examining the violence of marital relationships in which lesbianism intervenes, as well as the violence meted out to adult homosexual couples and the clandestine nature of their

activity, short or long term, as they negotiate a hostile world. Skeete shows how these fictive accounts are most significant for “unsilencing...the problem of a culture of violence against non-heterosexuals in the Caribbean”.

David Plummer and Stephen Geofroy deal with the same issue of homophobia but through their analysis of interviews with young men interviewed throughout the Caribbean in research undertaken by Plummer while UNESCO HIV/Aids Professor at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. This research highlights the pressure put on young males growing up, to conform to the accepted standards of hegemonic masculinity or fall foul of homophobic abuse. They show, in particular, how the capacity for violence is prescribed by the peer group as a requisite demonstration of masculinity and that the very failure to participate fully in this culture of violence may lead directly to accusations of homosexuality or femininity and to violent reprisal. Pressure to conform to the peer group is cited as a major cause of violence among young males, particularly in the absence of other kinds of male role model, which might foster alternative and more positive exemplars.

The brief Dialogue by Merle Hodge focuses specifically on the Caribbean tradition of meting out violence toward children and indicates very clearly the element of hypocrisy entailed in society’s responsiveness to child abuse. There is clearly an issue here as to what level of violence constitutes abuse and whether there is justification for any form of corporal punishment to children, given the capacity for its misuse.

In addition to the six full essays and the brief polemic dialogue, a number of creative works on Violence are included. There is also a Tribute to Estella Scott, a martyr to the cause of violence against women who was murdered in the Cayman Islands at age 33 after eight years of intense advocacy for gender equality and the rights of women to remove themselves from abusive situations. This piece has been written by Marilyn Connolly. We are pleased to include this tribute to Estella, in particular, since it stands as a testimony to the uncompromising and heroic way in which she upheld right in a society which would rather hide its sores and mask its inadequacies. Her work is continued through the Estella Scott-Roberts Foundation and the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre. A Book Review by Barbara Lalla of *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse* is also included as this text is the root of this project and it has a pedagogical application since it has enabled us to establish a first interdisciplinary course on Gender, Trauma and Violence in Discourse at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

The creative works comprise Rhoda Bharath’s short story: “Before I Dead”, three poems by Jennifer Rahim—“Washing Dishes with a Crab in the Sink”, “There Will be Time Enough for Laughter” and “The Secret of Fruit-bearing Trees”; and a short video, “Ketch Dis: Envisioning Alternatives to Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean”, produced by Gabrielle Hosein with an accompanying explication. “Ketch Dis”, in the words of its creator, depicts symbolically how “an awareness of...rights, choices, selfhood and belonging may be denied. It also refers to consciousness of alternatives to an unjust social order”. It is a brief word music video that effectively crystallizes feminist perspectives on gender, patriarchy and violence in a Caribbean world space. Additionally, Marrielle Barrow’s visual representations complement the whole by demonstrating symbolically the colours and tinctures, shapes and depths, shades and shadows of the

darkness of violence.

It is often the case that raw violence and its effects can be better represented through creative evocations of them than by any factual depictions since they enable the writer to represent not just those harsh facts but, more important, imaginaries, symbolisms, representations and feelings relative to them. Who else can represent the entrapment not just of the body but of the soul, entailed in the sustained victimization of those who are systematically abused over an extended period? Rahim captures that reality symbolically in her first poem. Who can effectively speak of an ultimate redemption within this life or beyond it for the child victims of the most extreme abuse imaginable? She achieves this in her second. Who else can represent the feelings of the potential criminally violent youth who ultimately, like so many others beside him, becomes the victim? Bharath works this through in effective and insightful detail in her short story.

All in all, we believe that this Issue deals effectively with some of the major issues that have perpetuated a Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago as well as in the wider Caribbean region, and does so through a variety of effective discussions and creative depictions which bring breadth and depth to our understandings of the complex issues entailed. We perceive it as a further step in our movement towards the understanding and eradication of this phenomenon since it is only through self-examination that remediation can be recommended and healing achieved. We are still only beginning the process and look forward to the further discussion and action which this work will provoke.

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The Historical Background to the Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

Bridget Brereton

Abstract

This paper examines the historical background to the present-day culture of violence in Trinidad and Tobago, with reference to the period from pre-Columbian times to the mid-twentieth century. After noting the horrific violence associated with initial Spanish colonization and the decimation of the indigenes, the paper goes on to examine the nature of enslavement and its links to coercion and brutalization of the enslaved people. After the formal end of slavery, the paper considers the system of indentured immigration, which, though less violent than enslavement, was nevertheless a harsh system of forced labour. Aspects of the history of Trinidad in the period between the 1830s and the 1940s, as they helped to shape an often violent culture and society, are considered, especially those relating to domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. Finally, the social evolution of Tobago is examined, to show that by and large, that island had not developed a culture of violence comparable to that of Trinidad, at least up to the mid-twentieth century.

Key words: violence, slavery, indenture, Trinidad, Tobago

Introduction

This article will analyse the historical evolution of a “culture of violence” in Trinidad and Tobago, from the first contact between Europeans and Amerindians to episodes in the mid-twentieth century. Clearly, developments after 1962 in the post-Independence period—which this article does not examine—constitute a fundamental part of the reasons for the country’s current situation with respect to crime and violence. But the foundations for it had, tragically, been extensively laid in the preceding centuries.

The recorded history of the Caribbean began in sustained violence against the indigenous peoples of the region, the first great genocide of modern history. The enslavement of Africans, which followed on the extermination of most of the indigenes, was a peculiarly violent system of coerced labour and social control. Post-slavery contract or indentured labour schemes, though less overtly violent than African slavery, still rested on coercion and the actual use or threat of force. By the end of the nineteenth century a culture of violence certainly had been established in the Caribbean colonies, and Trinidad and Tobago was no exception. While this culture was pervasive and in some respects “gender neutral”, there is no doubt that women of all ethnicities were prominent among its victims—as well as being, in some situations, its active agents.

Genocide and the indigenous peoples

Almost from the moment of first contact between Spaniards and the indigenous Lokono (Arawaks) and Kalina (Caribs) settled in Trinidad, the latter were attacked and enslaved. Most were seized for slave labour in the Greater Antilles (depleted of their own Taino population within just a few years of Columbus’ first settlements) or in the pearl fishing grounds of Cubagua, near Margarita. In the early part of the sixteenth century, long before the Spaniards had established any permanent presence in Trinidad, the Amerindian population was being steadily depleted by frequent slave raids. (Boomert 1984, 141–55)

Bartolomé de Las Casas, the famous defender of the Indians in the New World, described a slaving raid to Trinidad carried out by one Juan Bono. He tricked the friendly Indians into entering a large house they had built for the Spaniards, then tied them all up and whenever any tried to escape “he was cut to pieces. Some of the Indians managed to escape, either wounded or unharmed, and they, with the villagers who had not entered the house, seized another house and with bows and arrows defended themselves against the Spaniards until the Christians set fire to the house, burning to death all the Indians inside it. Then, with their captives numbering 180 or 200, the Spaniards went down to their ships, hoisted sail and voyaged to San Juan [Puerto Rico], where half the number of Indians were sold as slaves, after which they voyaged to Hispaniola where the remainder of the captives were sold.” (Johnson 1997, 28–29)

Others went to the infamous pearl fisheries of Cubagua, where the slaves were forced to dive for pearls under conditions that guaranteed a short and miserable existence. It is Las Casas again who describes their work: “They put them under water some four or five ells deep, where they are forced without any liberty of respiration, to gather up the shells...sometimes they come up again with nets full of shells to take breath, but if they stay any while to rest themselves, immediately comes a hangman rowed in a little boat,

who as soon as he hath well beaten them, drags them again to their labour...they lie upon the ground in fetters, lest they should run away; and many times they are drowned in this labour, and are never seen again...oftentimes they are also devoured by certain sea monsters...or succumb to a death so much more painful, by reason that by the coarctation of the breast, while the lungs strive to do their office, the vital parts are so afflicted that they die vomiting the blood out of their mouths. Their hair also, which is by nature black, is hereby changed and made of the same colour with that of the sea wolves; their bodies are also so besprinkled with the froth of the sea, that they appear rather like monsters than men". (Johnson 1997, 26)

By 1592, when a permanent Spanish settlement was established at St Joseph, the local population had already been drastically reduced by aggressive slave raiding. This continued and perhaps intensified after 1592, with Indians enslaved and sold to settlers in Margarita, and their lands seized and given to Spaniards, provoking significant rebellions by 1593–95. Spanish slave raiding was the main reason for the flight of Indians from Trinidad to the mainland in the 1590s and early 1600s. With frequent slave raids; losses from disease; the disruption of traditional subsistence activities; and flight to the mainland, depopulation accelerated in the first part of the seventeenth century. Probably less than 4000 survived to the 1630s, as compared with some 40,000 a century before. (Boomert 1984, 155–62; Naipaul 1973, 25–69)

Insurrections against the Spaniards were frequent in the seventeenth century, followed by “pacifications”—executions and destruction of huts and gardens. Some Indians were herded into “encomiendas”, villages where they were effectively slaves of Spanish landowners. Others lived precariously in the forests. The last Indian rebellion in Trinidad was in 1699, when some under the charge of the Capuchin missionary order killed friars, the governor and a few other Spanish notables at Arena. The reprisals were predictably brutal; many who survived the final conflict at Punta Galera drowned themselves, but 61 were captured, tortured and executed, their bodies quartered and the pieces displayed on spikes on the St Joseph public road. This was the final “pacification”. The Indian population dwindled in the eighteenth century to about 2000, and by the next century a distinct Amerindian group no longer existed. (Naipaul 1973, 117–21). Trinidad’s modern history had been inaugurated with violence on a scale that amounted to genocide.

The violence of enslavement

It is well known that the enslavement of Africans for labour in the New World was accompanied by massive violence and huge levels of mortality. The Middle Passage was a veritable “Way of Death”, and loss of life, from the initial capture of victims in Africa to the enormous mortality of the “seasoning” process during the first two years after arrival in the Americas, was so unthinkable great as to constitute a genuine “Holocaust”. The great principle of New World slavery was that the owner should have absolute power to coerce and punish his chattel.

In Trinidad and Tobago as everywhere else, corporal punishment (usually flogging) was a routine aspect of plantation discipline, and—short of actual murder—no effective

restrictions existed on the right of an owner or manager of slaves to punish at his discretion. Governor Picton's Slave Ordinance of 1800 put the limit at 39 lashes at any one time, but no serious attempts were made to enforce this and it was only in the last decade of slavery (1824–34) that half-hearted efforts were made to restrict corporal punishment. Moreover, quite apart from floggings administered as punishment for "offences", a heavy cartwhip was routinely carried by the slave drivers in the field, to be casually applied to the bodies of the workers (male and female) as a spur to labour. This was considered to be indispensable for exacting sufficient amounts of work from the field gangs, just as the right to punish by flogging was considered to be necessary for maintaining discipline and control over the slave population as a whole. And it was not only field slaves who were flogged; domestics (men and women, but especially women) were also flogged or otherwise assaulted, sometimes by the mistress of the house personally. Corporal punishment was a norm of the domestic routine during slavery as much as it was in the plantation fields and factories.

The centrality of corporal punishment to plantation discipline and to the slave system as a whole was illustrated by the hysterical reaction of the Trinidad slave owners to the announcement, in 1823, that the British Government had decided to embark on some modest reforms: the abolition of the use of the whip in the fields; a complete ban on the flogging of women; and restrictions on the flogging of men. Reports from indignation meetings held all over the island poured in to the governor (himself very doubtful about the proposed reforms). "To deprive the master of inflicting corporal punishment on any slave, male or female, would subvert the discipline of his estate," declared the Arima slave owners. The abolition of whipping would be "virtually a deprivation of property" in slaves, said their counterparts in North Naparima. "Flogging is the most *humane*, prompt and efficacious mode to crush disorderly behaviour," stated the planters of Pointe-a-Pierre; while W.H. Burnley, the island's largest owner of slaves, felt that the idea of prohibiting the flogging of women was "so monstrous and extraordinary that I hardly know how to approach the subject"; and ending the use of the whip in the field was "a fatal error" in view of the "habits and morals" of the slaves. (C.O. 295/60 and 295/65; Brereton 1989, 58–60)

The traditions and accepted usages of slave control in Trinidad were largely dictated by the French settlers who came to the island after 1777 from the French colonies and Grenada, including a few influential refugees from the slave rebellion in St Domingue (Haiti). With support from the early British governors, especially Picton and Hislop in the years between 1797 and 1811, the brutal methods of controlling slaves which were the norm in the French colonies, above all in Martinique, were introduced here. Of course the British were not exactly backward in such methods, and it is noteworthy that the infamous British tradition of excessive flogging of soldiers was carried on in Trinidad. Every Sunday morning, it seems, soldiers (black and white) were ceremoniously flogged on the parade grounds outside the main military barracks at St Joseph, Port of Spain and St James. Such spectacles no doubt made the even greater brutality meted out to slaves more acceptable. (Naipaul 1973, 185)

While whipping and flogging were routine aspects of the slave system in Trinidad and in Tobago, with both women and men the victims, at least up to 1824, even more horrific punishments were devised for enslaved people accused of crimes. They were the main victims of the refined cruelties devised to terrorise the whole population. In the Port of Spain jail, the keeper received fees for each flogging and mutilation carried out (runaways had their ears cut off). In 1801–02, men and women “convicted” of poisoning livestock and slaves were sentenced to horrific punishments by special “poisoning tribunals” organised by the powerful Martinique-born planter, St Hilaire Begorrat. Torture was used to exact “confessions”. One man, Pierre François, was burnt alive, along with the headless corpse of another, Bouqui, who had been hanged and then decapitated (his head was spiked for public display on the St Joseph road). Besides Bouqui, four others, including a woman (Thisbe), were hanged, decapitated, their bodies publicly burnt and their heads displayed on spikes; those sentenced to lesser punishments were forced to watch the grisly proceedings. Others were branded, flogged, had their ears cut off, and were sold out of the island. That was how they did it in Martinique, where they knew how to keep the slaves under control. When an apparent plot to rebel was discovered among the slaves of the Diego Martin valley at Christmas 1805, the reprisals were similarly brutal. Four were hanged, decapitated, their bodies displayed hanging in chains and their heads spiked at the entrance to their plantations. Many were flogged (up to 100 lashes), mutilated, sold off the island, or forced to wear heavy iron collars or chains for long periods. All this London approved of. (Naipaul 1973, 196–201, 209–14, 291–99; de Verteuil, 1987, 51–54, 63–64, 71–72 and *The Plates* 111; Brereton 1989, 35–40, 47–48).

Of course, these spectacular punishments, intended to terrorise the enslaved people, were not an everyday affair. But violence in the form of regular, routine whippings and floggings was a normal part of the slave system, sanctioned by both law and custom (except during the last ten years of slavery when corporal punishment of women was prohibited and that of men was restricted). So was sexual abuse of enslaved women. It was normative for white men, and indeed for black men in positions of authority such as the drivers or headmen, to coerce sex from enslaved women, regardless of their age or involvement in sexual relationships. A few such women might gain privileges from unions with white men, especially if they were based on some mutual affection and if the men were well-to-do and possessed of some sense of decency. But for the majority, coerced sex and outright rape were part of the violence endemic to slavery.

It seems clear, too, that the conditions of enslavement encouraged “black on black” violence: fighting and assaults between slaves, wife-beating, and excessive punishment of children. Mrs A. C. Carmichael, the wife of a British planter who lived in Trinidad in the 1820s, claimed that slave *parents* objected when the 1824 Order prohibited the owners from flogging women. They objected because they preferred the master to punish their “girls”, knowing that they themselves would flog them far more severely! Though this is a dubious assertion, especially granted that Carmichael’s polemical book was mainly an attempt to discredit the British reform programme, there is little reason to doubt that severe child-beating was a normative feature of slave life. The beating of a child by a parent or relative, of course, was a very different thing from the overseer’s whipping

workers in the field or flogging slaves as a punishment for offences; but it seems very likely that such beatings were often quite severe, originating an African-Trinidadian tradition of excessive corporal punishment of children. As Naipaul puts it, the “drama of the plantation whip” was transmuted into community and family rituals of punishment. (Naipaul 1973, 373, 384–86; Carmichael 1834, Vol.11, 140–47)

The violence of indenture

Violence in the sense of outright kidnapping of persons for forced transportation and labour, and in the sense of a legally sanctioned right to inflict corporal punishment on indentured workers, was not as salient in the system of Indian indentured immigration to Trinidad (1845–1917) as it had been in African slavery. Employers of indentured labour had no legal right to flog or whip their workers; the main legal sanction for the enforcement of the indenture laws was prosecution in the courts, followed by fines or (more likely) jail sentences. Incarceration in jail as a criminal, for breaches of the indenture laws which were really civil offences, was the major form of *legal* “violence” against the indentured Indians—the jail substituted for the whip. Nevertheless, physical violence against indentureds on the Trinidad plantations enjoyed customary, if not legal, sanction; and Indian workers, including some who had served out their contracts, were routinely beaten, cuffed and kicked by managers, overseers, sirdars (Indian foremen, the successors to the slave drivers) and, at times, African labourers or policemen. In the towns, the few Indians who lived or worked there (usually as porters, gardeners or domestics) during the period of immigration were often the victims of casual brutality from Africans or others, including policemen.

As Trotman has shown, a great deal of (extralegal) violence was inflicted on the bodies of the “bound Coolies”, and the perpetrators were rarely punished, even when death resulted. In 1867 Soudar Singh was severely beaten by the owner of his estate and seven African labourers; they were all acquitted. In 1871 an estate manager was fined six pounds for horse-whipping two Indian women, one of whom subsequently died. This woman, Labjadee, was whipped and kicked on three consecutive days. The manager was not even *charged* with manslaughter because of medical evidence that she was in poor health before the whippings. In 1899, a woman called Sahti died 14 days after a beating by the son of the estate owner; he was charged with manslaughter but the coroner’s verdict was death from natural causes. “East Indians could be whipped, kicked and beaten to death with impunity,” Trotman concludes. This was violence against Indian workers on the estates, sanctioned not by law but by the brutal customs of plantation life and found all over the British Empire where indentured Indians were employed under white management. The most spectacular incident of violence against Indians in Trinidad, however, was the Muharran (Hosay) massacre in 1884, when at least 16 persons were killed and over 100 injured when the police fired on persons taking part in Hosay processions who were trying (as had become customary) to enter the town of San Fernando. (Trotman 1986, 139–42; Singh 1988, *passim*)

Some Indians retaliated against estate owners, plantation staff and African or Indian foremen. In 1870, two indentureds were convicted of the murder of an African foreman on Macoya estate; they were sentenced to death, but the governor commuted the

sentence. In 1911, on the Sainte Marie estate, 11 indentureds beat an Indian sirdar to death over a wage dispute. But the more common pattern was for the Indians to vent their aggression and frustration against the weaker members of their own community, above all, but not only, the women. As Mahabir has expressed it poetically (based on oral testimony from surviving immigrants): “Indian must fight/if e play bad/e start to fight/ if e do wrong/ e start to cut e arse/dat time so/no Indian cyan play bad/beat e arse/if e run away nex man daughter/e go beat e arse too/if you have to run way wid man wife/leave one time/dat man go kill e wife/kill two a dem.” (Trotman 1986, 141–42; Mahabir 1985, 56)

Indians in Trinidad soon acquired a reputation for violence, including murder, against members of their own community. In the 1880s they committed sixty percent of all murders in the colony, while constituting only about thirty per cent of the total population; in the 1890s the figure was seventy per cent. The great majority of their victims were fellow Indians, and most were women. Between 1872 and 1880, 22 Indians were murdered by Indians, and all the victims were women; between 1901 and 1910, 62 Indians were murdered by Indians, with 20 of the victims women. Between 1872 and 1900, there were 87 murders of Indian women, of which 65 were “wife-murders”. The tragic “Coolie wife-murders” reflected the skewed sex ratio on the plantations during the period of indentured immigration, the abnormal living conditions in the estate barracks, the disruption of traditional gender relations and patterns of marriage, and the concentration of young single males competing for the small number of Indian girls and women of marriageable age. Women who left their mates for another man—or were believed to have done so—were often the victims of homicidal rage by jealous and frustrated men; these men were usually tried and convicted for murder and duly hanged. Inward looking violence was also inflicted on Indian men, with the ubiquitous plantation tool, the cutlass, the weapon of choice. Disputes over dowry and marriage, over land and wages, could all lead to violence and murders. Moreover, suicide by male immigrants was quite common, suggesting again an inward looking violence, and often apparently linked to marital disputes and jealousy. (Trotman 1986, 169–75; Brereton 1979, 182–83; Reddock 1994, 34–35, 44–45; Mohammed 2002, 45–46, 155, 169, 180–81, 186–92, 202–05)

The plantation barracks during the period of indentured immigration were a fertile breeding ground for Indian-on-Indian violence; the incidence of such crimes, especially the “wife-murders”, declined significantly when large numbers of Indians moved off the estates to settle in independent villages and peasant communities. Declined, but certainly did not end. Violent crimes by Indian men against women continued to be a tragic feature of the post-indenture ethnic community, as Patricia Mohammed shows in her study of that community in the period 1917–47. A characteristic case occurred in 1919: “On Sunday morning Palwan, immigrant on Exchange Estate, killed his wife Mukdeah with a cutlass. It is stated that the parties were not on good terms. Palwan was jealous of his wife who was about to leave him to live with some other women on the estate. This annoyed Palwan and it is alleged that he seized his cutlass in one hand and the woman by her hair with the other, and inflicted three fatal blows on the neck while severing the head from the body while he held her down...” Mohammed shows that the number of such

cases reported after 1920, when all indentures were terminated, consistently decreased; but this certainly does not indicate that there was a reduction in the actual numbers of violent assaults on Indian women by Indian men. Many such cases never reached the courts, or the newspapers. “Violence as a means of control and a male assurance of continued ownership of women as property persisted,” Mohammed concludes, “and was manifested through murders, woundings, beatings and threats to Indian women.” (Mohammed 2002, 103–04, 189–90, 192, 210–13)

A culture of violence, 1840s–1950s

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Trinidad, states Trotman, was “a violent society”, with a “high incidence of crimes against the person and other forms of violence”. The legacy of history and the nature of the colony’s society bred “a pattern of violence which was both impulsive and implosive: that is, it manifested itself as the violent actions of irrational men [and women] wreaking havoc on themselves rather than on the source of their frustrations and oppression.” Slavery had been intensely violent, indenture only a degree less so. Colonialism rested on racism which meant “separate and unequal” treatment for the non-white majority, psychological violence against the “inferior” groups, and disrespect for the culture of the people. This was a climate in which violence (physical and psychological) could thrive. Colonialism and racism made possible atrocious living conditions and a low quality of life, which in turn promoted a milieu in which violence and aggression were salient. (Trotman 1986, 134–39)

Slavery was ended in the 1830s, indentured immigration in 1917, but colonialism rested in the final analysis on force, on the infliction or threat of official violence against the people. Official violence was a reality in colonial Trinidad. Policemen and at times troops were ordered to fire on protestors and demonstrators and deaths and injuries resulted; subsequent enquiries rarely apportioned blame to the men who did the shooting or gave the orders. In 1884, as we already noted, at least 16 Indians were killed, and over 100 injured, in the Hosay massacre outside San Fernando. In 1903, 16 men and women were killed and 43 injured in the Water Riots in Port of Spain, when the police fired on, and in some cases bayoneted, rioters in the area of the Red House. These victims were urban blacks. And in 1937, during the island-wide strikes and riots associated with Butler, 12 civilians were killed and 50 injured (African and Indian) by police action (two policemen were killed, and nine policemen or Volunteers injured, by the rioters). (Singh 1988, *passim*; Brereton 1989, 149–51, 180–81)

Though British troops or naval personnel could be summoned in a grave emergency, as in June 1937, it was of course the colonial police force which inflicted official violence as a rule. It is not surprising that the police were hated and despised by the ordinary people of all ethnic backgrounds during this period. The force was reorganised in the last third of the nineteenth century along the lines of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), as a paramilitary force operating in a society where large segments of the population were opposed to the system of law and justice the police were defending, as—in effect—an alien occupying army. Non-commissioned officers (NCOs)—sergeants and corporals—from the RIC were imported into Trinidad and soon became the men who really ran the local police force and created its professional ethos. The officers were all white—English

or Irish; the NCOs were mostly Irish, ex-RIC; and the rank and file were nearly all from the smaller islands. In 1895, out of 537 “other ranks”, 301 were Barbadians, only 47 had been born in Trinidad, and there were no Indians. Poor working conditions, low educational levels and minimal pay, along with the foreign origin of the great majority, all encouraged a tradition of brutality and abuse of power on the part of the local policemen, who earned a well-deserved reputation for being rough, unsavoury characters who had often “left their country for their country’s good”. On a day-to-day basis, Trinidadians of the working classes, African and Indian, were subjected to violence of different kinds from these agents of the colonial state. They often retaliated. In 1891, for instance, an Irish sergeant was critically wounded and other policemen injured when they tried to stop an illegal drum dance at Arouca. (Trotman 1986, 95–102, 284; Brereton 1979, 12728)

Official violence might include the infliction of corporal punishment, an immensely emotive issue in a society of ex-slaves, for fairly minor offences. Ordinance 6 of 1868—just thirty years after the end of slavery—allowed corporal punishment for praedial larceny and the practice of Obeah. In 1882, one person was sentenced to four floggings of 36 lashes each by a Couva magistrate; it was the governor who remitted three of them. A petition organised by a Methodist minister in 1883 to abolish flogging (“the great and disgusting vice of slavery in the brutal practice of flogging to blood the labouring population for petty larceny and other crimes”) failed completely; indeed, a 1893 Ordinance actually extended the practice by making flogging mandatory for a second conviction for praedial larceny. (Brereton 1979, 126–27)

Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the incidence of violence against the person was relatively high in this period, especially in Port of Spain and the other urban areas. Trotman shows, for instance, that over 16 months in 1870–71, there were 445 court cases of assault against the person brought in Port of Spain alone, the vast majority “by and between” working-class individuals and located in the barrack-yards and tenements where the urban poor crowded together. This was typical of what Trotman terms “implosive” violence, turned inward on the oppressed community. Guns were relatively widespread in Trinidad at this time, triggering an 1877 Ordinance imposing registration and a licence fee on gun-owners; but for the most part violent crime did not involve shooting. On the plantations the cutlass was the weapon of choice. Elsewhere, knives, razors, sticks and stones, as well as fists, feet and heads, were generally used. Barbadian immigrants were blamed for introducing the razor to working-class Creoles as a useful weapon, and “cutting and wounding” became a typical form of urban violence. (Trotman 1986, 143–45; Brereton 1979, 126)

Almost certainly the incidence of violence in the urban areas increased from the 1880s onwards, the result of increased population as people flocked in from the countryside to escape the effects of the sugar depression, and as immigrants from many places, but especially the eastern Caribbean islands (including Tobago), came to Trinidad. Overcrowding in the urban slums worsened, while conditions on the estates also deteriorated. Many of the urban poor were chronically unemployed, or at best found odd, irregular jobs. The cramped, unsanitary barracks in the towns, especially the colonial

capital, with their tiny tenement rooms and teeming open yards, were notorious breeding grounds for crimes of violence and dangerous quarrels. Alcohol use was widespread and often precipitated violence. These brutal living conditions, which probably worsened between the 1880s and the 1930s, encouraged fights and violent quarrels. The period 1875 to 1899 saw an annual average of 240 *jail committals* for fighting (the number of *convictions* for this offence was much higher, for many paid fines rather than go to jail). (Trotman 1986, 146–69; Brereton 1979, 116–120; Cummings 2004, *passim*)

Many of the men and women habitually before the magistrates for crimes of violence belonged to the urban “bands”, or gangs, whose members were loosely described as *jamettes* and *badjohns*. It was especially at Carnival time that clashes between rival bands caused an increase in crimes of violence, but they could occur all year round. The female *jamettes* were famous for violent quarrels with each other and for larger-scale clashes during Carnival. Stick-fighting, the favourite sport of the band members, was quite violent in this period, with serious injuries common. *Canboulay*, the night-time procession of men armed with sticks and carrying *flambeaux*, which opened the Carnival on the Sunday night, before its suppression in the early 1880s, was often the occasion for injuries and arrests. As is well known, the *Canboulay* men inflicted serious damage on Captain Baker’s policemen when they tried to stop the procession during the 1881 Carnival. There is no doubt that the working-class districts of Port of Spain and (perhaps to a lesser extent) other towns were fairly violent places in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. (Brereton 1979, 124–25, 128–29; Trotman 1986, 167–69, 180–82)

It was out of this urban matrix that the steelband violence emerged in the 1940s–50s. The newly created steelbands clashed over territorial rivalries (just like the late nineteenth-century bands), over women, over musical disputes, and over unpopular decisions by the judges at pan competitions. As in the period of the *jamette* Carnival, the festival provided the main arena for these clashes, which could attain considerable proportions. The accounts of these fights indicate that it was supporters or followers rather than the *pannists* who usually initiated the violence, but once started everyone joined in, using cutlasses, knives, razors, bottles and stones as the main weapons. Injuries were common though fatalities were quite rare. Serious clashes began in the 1947 Carnival and worsened in the late 1940s, with long-running feuds like that between *Invaders* and *Casablanca* causing major affrays, many injuries and hundreds of arrests. Efforts by the *pannists* themselves, and by middle-class supporters, did lead to an attenuation of the violence in the 1950s. But the special “Coronation Carnival” in 1953 was marked by eight major clashes, about 200 injuries, and the fatal beating of a car driver in the middle of a steelband fight. According to the newspaper accounts, the “proletarian” bands deliberately targeted the “social” bands—middle-class youths who were apparently getting the gigs at the clubs and dances at the expense of the grass-roots bands—and attacked them with baseball bats, sticks, bottles, whips, razors and cutlasses. Not until the late 1950s was steelband violence at Carnival more or less contained. (Stuempfle 1995, 60–64, 86–94, 110–112)

We have noted that the severe corporal punishment of children was, at least in part, probably a legacy of slavery traditions, as well as of exaggerated Christian notions of “sparing the rod and spoiling the child”. It continued to be normative among all groups in the post-slavery period, but especially among African-Trinidadians. Severe and prolonged beatings of children by mothers, fathers and other relatives, often conducted in public (in the yard or on the street) with an admiring audience, sometimes with a ritualistic or even theatrical element, remained a feature of the culture. Indo-Trinidadian parents were also enthusiastic beaters of children, though perhaps with less of the public performance aspect. This routine brutalisation of children (including the very young) by parents and relatives had other causes also. Men and women were, no doubt, venting their frustrations on small, defenceless, easily accessible victims. But it was also probably an unconscious or conscious process of initiating the child into a harsh world, teaching him or her to suppress individuality and aggression, to know his or her place. And certainly there was an element of public performance and ritual. No doubt the violent norms of slavery and indenture lay behind this kind of “performance”, as well as the very “public” lives of the barrack-yard dwellers. (Brereton 1979, 121–22; Trotman 1986, 174–77; Cummings 2004, *passim*)

Of course, as Trotman reminds us, corporal punishment of children was also a staple of the colonial school system (as indeed it was in Britain in the nineteenth century). Virtually all teachers, at all levels of the educational system, used the strap or whip, and were encouraged to do so by the pedagogical principles of the day. Many teachers saw themselves more or less as lion-tamers, struggling to keep little savages under control. Though the great majority of the teachers were black or mixed-race, with some Indians by the early 1900s, they had no doubt internalised the racism of the period and sincerely believed that African and Indian children had to have “learning” beaten into them. And the whip was the teacher’s badge of authority in a world where black or brown men and women enjoyed few other forms of prestige or privilege. Beaten at home, in the yard and in the schoolroom, it is hardly surprising that the young colonials grew up with a firm commitment to physical punishment as a mode of control.

These aspects of the society also help us to understand the ubiquity of violence against women, especially “wife-beating”, among all the social and ethnic groups. It went almost unchallenged and virtually uncriticised; it was often carried out in public (especially among Africans), and an element of ritual and performance might also be present. Calypos of the first half of the twentieth century illustrate how pervasive, and how accepted, was the culture of violence in marital or common-law relationships among all sectors of the society. Not until the mid-1950s did a women’s group—the Caribbean Women’s National Assembly led by Christina Lewis—campaign against attacks and assaults on women and girls. (Reddock 1994, 251; Cummings 2009, 57–66)

Indian men perhaps outdid the Africans in wife-beating, often precipitated by the consumption of alcohol on plantation pay days, so that “Saturday night beatings” became almost a domestic routine in many Indian households. Mohammed’s oral testimonies reveal a kind of fatalism among the women who suffered from spousal abuse of this sort. “If your husband drinking rum in a shop you can’t go,” one such woman said. “You just

have to stop home and till he come and if he come he quarrel or he eh quarrel, he beat you or he eh beat you, or he go and sleep..." Mohammed concludes that "women were forced to undergo ritual beatings from their husbands as part of the marital contract"; male control was enforced by alcohol-fuelled violence. Moreover, marital rape—or at best, sex demanded by a drunk and violent husband—was also a routine feature of many Indian marriages. But whether perpetrated by Africans, Indians, or others, whether carried out in the yard, on the street or in the domestic space, wife-beating was virtually a norm in the society, and intervention was frowned on except when it seemed that the victim was in actual danger of death. The home was no refuge from violence in colonial Trinidad. (Mohammed 2002, 169–70, 212–13)

Violence in Tobago

Colonial Trinidad was, unquestionably, a violent society. Tobago, joined to Trinidad administratively in two stages between 1889 and 1898, was perhaps less violent if only because of its stronger rural and peasant ethos and its more cohesive village and church-based culture. Yet slavery in Tobago was every bit as brutal as in Trinidad, perhaps more so, and lasted longer too. In 1819, Tobago's slave population had the lowest rate of natural increase and the highest crude death rate in the whole of the British Caribbean, and its 39% decline in the period 1807–34 was the greatest in the region. Physical violence against the enslaved was routine; a British eye-witness told a 1790 parliamentary committee that "the greater part of the plantation Negroes" he saw in Tobago "were marked with the whip". No wonder that when Emancipation finally came, Tobago ex-slaves sang "No mo' driver's lash for me/ No mo', no mo'/ Many a t'ousan' gone." (Craig-James 2008, Vol. 1, 36, 55, 66)

Tobago also developed a tradition of violent resistance to enslavement that has no parallel in Trinidad. A major rising in 1770, led by an African known to us only by his slave name Sandy, and taking place only six years after the real start of plantation development in the island, saw at least twenty whites killed. It raged for six weeks before it was crushed. There were risings in 1771, 1773 and 1774. Savage reprisals and brutal punishments followed these heroic but doomed rebellions. In 1774, seven of the captured rebels had their right arms amputated and were then burnt alive, in public of course; Sampson, a ringleader, was hung alive in chains, taking seven days to die. Even after the last major rising in 1801, by which time the British authorities were becoming more squeamish about savage public spectacles in their dominions, several rebels were decapitated and their heads were mounted on poles in the centre of Scarborough as a gruesome deterrent. (Craig-James 2008, Vol. 1, 56–57)

After Emancipation, the Tobago masses continued to protest injustices and oppression, violently at times. In 1853, prisoners in the Scarborough jail rioted, seizing cutlasses, stones and other weapons, forcing all the warders to flee; soldiers from the garrison had to be called in. In 1867 there was a riot at Mason Hall, close to Scarborough, against an oppressive and unreasonable tax on dog ownership. Some one hundred villagers, armed with cutlasses, sticks, stones and "bludgeons", beat up the policemen who tried to enforce the law. The largest post-Emancipation protest, the "Belmanna Riots" of 1876 in the Roxborough area, involved the brutal murder of Corporal J.H. Belmanna by a mob of

labourers enraged at the earlier firing on a hostile crowd, which had resulted in the death of a woman. The rioters described their actions as “war”—war against the planters and their agents—and it was known as the “Belmanna War” throughout Tobago. (Craig-James 2008: Vol. 1, 140–41, 240–41, 243, 249–51)

Despite this robust tradition of resistance against slavery and post-Emancipation oppression, Tobago was a less violent society than Trinidad in the decades between the 1880s or 1890s and the 1950s. Susan Craig-James notes that “serious crime was rare” in the first half of the twentieth century. At this time it was common that, when the chief justice came for the Scarborough session of the colonial Supreme Court, there were no cases for trial or appeal. This was “a homogeneous society with strong social ties,” Craig-James states; intra-village ties were pervasive and powerful, and in the small-scale, close-knit, “face to face” village societies, behavioural norms were strongly entrenched and effectively sanctioned. Those who flouted the accepted norms tended to leave Tobago for Trinidad, or further afield. This village society, based as it was on land ownership and own-account farming and marketing, was powerfully shaped both by African traditions of communal solidarity and respect for elders, and by the moral teachings of nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity. Both traditions inhibited criminality and social disorder. Moreover, Tobago remained essentially rural until after the 1950s, and Scarborough was hardly more than a village itself. It was the absence of significant urban slums, the more homogeneous society, the rural and village culture, the widespread land-holding though cash-poor peasantry, of the period from the 1890s to the 1950s, which made Tobago culture in general less violent than that of Trinidad up to the mid-twentieth century. (Craig-James Vol. 2, 40–41)

Sadly, in the second half of the last century, and especially since the 1980s, this picture has changed. As the cohesive village society based on peasant farming and independent own-account activity has collapsed, as the Christian and communal traditions of that society have weakened, Tobago has begun to approach Trinidad in terms of violent crime and other forms of social disorder. But this is largely a development of the period since 1990. (Craig-James 2008: Vol. 2, 235–37, 240–43) Up to the 1950s, though far from a wholly “tranquil” place, Tobago was clearly a more orderly and a less violent society in comparison with the larger island to which she had been joined at the end of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

This article has tried to demonstrate the historical foundations of a culture of violence in Trinidad and Tobago. Colonial society began in an orgy of violence against the indigenous people, and was consolidated through the exceptional brutality of the slave system. Enslavement was abolished in the 1830s, but it was replaced by indentured immigration, another system of coerced labour, though admittedly less violent than slavery. By the middle of the twentieth century, a culture of violence was clearly entrenched in the colony, even if it had not yet taken on all the characteristics of the contemporary (early 21st century) period. While the culture of violence in many respects transcended both ethnicity and gender, there is no doubt that a gender dimension was salient. Violence against women, especially murderous attacks and marital abuse (“wife-

beating”) by men, was a pervasive feature of the society, and the latter at least was widely accepted, by women as well as by men. Violence against children, meted out by men and women who were their parents or care-givers, and by teachers, was equally pervasive, and even more strongly supported and condoned. These tragic historical legacies helped to shape the current crisis of crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

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‘You Have No Friends, You Have to Stand Up for Yourself’: Men Negotiating Domestic Abuse

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Abstract

Little is known of how men feel about their own acts of violence and other abuse towards women and the causes thereof. This paper sheds light on the male perspective using data from interviews between male abusers and a support counsellor. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do men experience intimate relationships?
- What makes them so vulnerable that they go “off the deep end” and no longer see the relevance in living for themselves or for their partners?
- What are men’s overall perceptions about domestic violence?

The male speech is analysed using discourse analysis techniques, specifically associated with critical linguistics, a discipline which unlocks the meaning potential in spoken and written language through analysis of structure and word choice.

A contradictory role is worked out by the men for their own positioning in society, for they are at once victims and heroes, condemned and marginalized but at the same time the ones who are supposed to be dominant in their relationships. They perceive that women are given

opportunities that are not open to them, that they have to give up valuable occupational space to their educated and empowered women, but yet are the supposedly stronger sex, endowed to have authority in the home. They feel the responsibility of living up to the expectations of their perceived role and have no real support in addressing the challenges of their intimate relationships. Self-respect and a sense of self-worth emerge as critical to the management of domestic violence by perpetrators.

We must re-examine our belief systems, our values, our parenting, our educational system, the legal system and popular culture in order to redefine gender relations in ways that are mutually sustaining. Only by attacking this problem on all fronts can we make some headway towards its resolution.

Key words: men, domestic violence, perception, control, anger.

Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago has experienced an unprecedented increase in the visibility of crimes related to domestic violence within the last decade. This has been all the more troubling because of an upsurge specifically in reports of murders of wives and their children followed by the suicide of the male partner. In 1999 alone, there were some 80 cases of murder/suicide (Trinidad and Tobago Police Service 1999). While graphic reports appear in the press, concern is articulated by citizens in the media through popular call-in radio programmes and letters to the editor. Despite the expressed concern, the crisis continues to escalate.

As a society, Trinidad and Tobago has paid significant attention to legislation and improvements in the criminal justice system to respond to domestic violence issues. As a result, it has the most comprehensive legislation on domestic violence in the Caribbean, a dependable and developed grid of places of safety, vibrant organizational responses and several community initiatives. Notwithstanding these advances, however, there is no sign of real resolution of the issues.

It should be noted that the country is not singular in this respect. Domestic violence is worldwide and increasing (Counts, Brown and Campbell 1999; Green 1999; McWilliams 1998). It is not confined to so-called third world territories but is also rampant in the first world. The BBC World News of May 17, 2009, for example, reported a 20% rate of abused women throughout Austria, a territory in which a grandfather was recently arrested for keeping his daughter in a cellar for 24 years and fathering her seven children. While domestic violence appears private, it reflects the constructions of the public sphere and the global quest for power and domination. Indeed, as Holder-Dolly has argued elsewhere (2003), such phenomena in the Caribbean can be traced back to some of the earliest formations of Caribbean society beginning with the devastation of the native people, the enslavement of African peoples and the indentureship of Indian peoples (Beckles 2003; Brereton 2004). Under slavery, for example, the extreme brutalization of all; the encouragement of intra-group violence; the deliberate breaking down of family units; and the absolute subjugation of the African male to inhumane white male “owners” and overseers, all contributed to a legacy of violence through these practices’ devastating effects on the human psyche. In such an environment, women and children were particularly vulnerable and men were both the villains and the abused.

One continuing cause of domestic violence is undoubtedly the difficulty men find in managing conflict and disagreement and their own sense of powerlessness; in relationships marked by unresolved conflict between women and men, the latter often take the offensive at the expense of women and children, in their bid to maintain power and control. Further, women’s development has, of necessity, required them to take control of their lives, personally, professionally and by advancement in the public sphere, and this very advancement seems threatening to men: measures

intended to enhance the position of women are being interpreted as steps toward the marginalization of males. This interpretation, though more perceived than real, has added to the spiralling patterns of domestic violence (Morgan and Gopaul 1998). Violence, then, is exacerbated as an inevitable result of extreme male insecurity. In a study of male views carried out by the Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago in 1993, men readily expressed their concern that the education and working sectors were hostile to their interests, and that it was “only through the sex act that they are able to display power over women” (Babb 1997, 107).

A number of fundamental questions arise and demand answers:

- What is it that men experience?
- How do they experience intimate relationships?
- What makes them so vulnerable or fragile that they lose control and operate in a way that suggests they no longer see relevance in living either for themselves or for the objects of their desire?
- What are men’s perceptions about domestic violence?

These questions formed the core of the research focus of this paper and framed it as an exploratory study into the ways in which men describe their relational issues. The male speech analysed is extracted from interviews with Trinidadian men and analysed using discourse analysis techniques, specifically associated with critical linguistics, a discipline which unlocks the meaning potential in spoken and written language through analysis of their structure and word choice.

Background

Despite the significant body of work that exists on the subject, domestic violence as a social phenomenon has eluded full explanation and has not been fundamentally redressed.

Relatively little has been written in Trinidad and Tobago about domestic violence and virtually nothing about men’s views on it. Some important work has, nevertheless, emerged including that of Creque (1994), which provided a set of statistics that began to capture the magnitude of the problem. Gopaul, Morgan and Reddock (1994) also contributed to our understanding, by analysing family violence through historical and sociological lenses to demonstrate the significance of historical and sociological factors in shaping the patterns of interaction between women and men, family values and family forms.

A further exacerbating factor has been the publicity given to male marginalization, a notion introduced most saliently by Miller (1986) and expanded later in his work *Men at Risk* (1991). The male’s status as the breadwinner in the family has been considered as threatened by female success in education and the working sphere and by women’s entry into and success in a number of careers that were previously the

sole preserve of men. Economic crisis, along with further psychological bruising, is thereby added to that already engendered by historical-sociological circumstances. Miller's writing embraces traditional notions of patriarchy (cf. Mohammed 2004, 63) and may be perceived as inflammatory, particularly if decontextualized as often happens in the passing on and retelling of information. He states that "women will not only continue to progress...but will go on to assert themselves and seize power from men in some societies." (282)

Much publicity has been given to the female majority graduating from The University of the West Indies since the early 1990's and far less attention to the fact that men still hold the top jobs, that women are underpaid for what they do in comparison with men and that men still favour jobs that are not necessarily academic (Figueroa 2000; Reddock 2004). While women have simply shown more adaptability than men in pursuit of improving their circumstances, there has been considerable hostility to them in articles (cf. Rennie 1999) and letters to the press, citing their "taking over" in the male domain.

Lazarus-Black (2002) has discussed the law's response to domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago, which has been effected most specifically by the Domestic Violence Act of 1991. She has made the point that, despite increased protective measures becoming law, women who have been battered and who have sought the protection of the law find that acquiring agency is complex and challenging as they must negotiate several, often fraught, legal processes in filing charges, contending with the police and dealing with adjournments. She has argued that, contrary to the view of women as victims, battered wives who have sought recourse through the legal process have demonstrated agency despite the difficulties inherent in the procedures. Here too, the remaining difficulties appear not to have been noticed by the males in society, who feel their marital rights are being further eroded by unjust legislation (Rennie 1999), thus contributing to their further perceived marginalization.

Most recently Morgan and Youssef (2006) completed an interdisciplinary study which explored the causes of family violence, some possible means of resolution of its traumatic effects, and also addressed squarely the ways in which representatives of the legal system, the media and the police force all exacerbate the problem in diverse ways. They examined the male view specifically through analysis of a male judge's summing-up speech in the appeal of a woman accused of murdering her common-law husband and through analysis of a male-authored newspaper article. In both cases the built-in prejudice against woman as a creature deserving of agency and self-actualization came across starkly.

All of these studies have advanced the understanding of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. There has, however, been no study that explores directly the views of men who have abused women.

The literature from the North is more extensive. Research has indicated that there, also, physical, economic, and social power and control differentials are significant contributors to the battering of women (Yllo and Bograd 1988; Dobash and Dobash 1979; 1998; Johnson 1995; Kirkwood 1993; Pence and Paymar 1993; Stets and Straus 1990).

Several psychosocial causal factors have been linked to domestic violence. It has been shown that men who batter women do so out of the need to exercise personal control over their partners (Umberson et al. 1998); that battering is perpetrated by individuals with low levels of social integration (Stets 1991); and that high levels of stress and substance abuse are significant contributors (Gelles 1993; Straus 1990). Several studies have focused on the widespread societal beliefs sanctioning male dominance, which beliefs normalize the occurrence of violence within the home (Straus and Smith 1990b; Yllo and Straus 1990; Dobash and Dobash 1979), and they have highlighted the relative power differences of partners, arising from beliefs sanctioning male dominance, as a key element in the abuse of women (Anderson, 1997; Horning, McCullough and Sugimoto, 1981). Research has also focused on personality traits and the presence of mental illness or pathology as reasons why men batter women (Dutton 1995; Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart 1994; Jacobson and Gottman 1998). Dutton (1995), drawing from his clinical experience with research subjects, asserted that “abusiveness is not a copied behavior but rather a learned means of self-maintenance” (xi) and a factor arising from “personality constellation” This is in stark contrast to Dobash and Dobash (1998), who positioned this behaviour as a complex social construction.

In the text *Men who Batter Women*, Adam Jukes (1999) asserts:

At its root, men’s abuse of women, and our need to have power over them, both individually and collectively, is a simple frustration pre-emption strategy. The intensity and severity of that abuse varies enormously in accordance with three variables: the intensity of the original frustration; the models of masculinity available to the developing infant and young male; and the extent of culturally approved and legitimized violence in the culture in which he is raised, especially in relation to women. (159)

He arrived at his conclusion from research in clinical settings also. His location of men psychologically within the socio-cultural sphere is part of the allure of this psycho-dynamic exploration and his conclusion solidifies the position that while there is a psychological dimension to battering or violence against women, the behaviour is socially constructed and thus needs to be understood within that context.

Straus (1979) identified a number of culturally held values and mandates with punishments and rewards attached to them that permit and encourage husband-on-wife violence including greater authority of men in the culture; male aggression posited as masculinity; wife/mother as the preferred status of women; and male domination and orientation in the criminal justice system.

The issue of wife abuse was also firmly located by Dobash and Dobash (1979) within the social and gender constructs that shape it. They argued that the issues of gender and gendered relationships as well as general beliefs and attitudes about the relationships between men and women in intimate relationships were central to effective exploration of the emergence and continuation of domestic violence. Their research identified four levels of exploration needed to address the phenomenon: the individual, the inter-personal, the institutional and the ideological and created a significant framework for further research on domestic violence.

Later they (1998) examined violent acts perpetrated by men within their marital relationships; they examined men's behaviours, rationales and justifications for their violent behaviour using three sources of data—the Violence Assessment Index (VAI), the Injuries Assessment Index (IAI), and the Controlling Behaviour Index (CBI). These indices were used to compare the accounts of men and women and to reflect on the similarities and differences between them. Framed within the ideological position that violence perpetrated by men needs to be understood as an “intentional act, undertaken in order to achieve ends that are deeply embedded in the circumstances of daily life”, the study identified a “constellation of violence” made up of physical acts of violence, injuries and various forms of controlling behaviours (141).

One thing which stands out in the literature from the developing world is the importance of contextualizing the phenomenon under study (Green 1999; Bradley 1994). Care is taken to locate the cultural context within which violence between intimate partners is perpetrated and to make connections between the community response to this violence and the perpetuation of the violence. Writers theorize about masculinity and male power in relation to the differences between acts of violence perpetrated by men against other men and those perpetrated against women. They argue that when men perpetrate acts of violence against women, their identity as men, social ideals about gendered relationships, personal privilege and material benefits are at stake. That is to say, the outcome of the acts is valued and at stake (such as being able to control the behaviour of women). These motives contrast with those seen in violent encounters between men, wherein processes in validation of their manhood are not the primary concern.

We are most persuaded by the argument that domestic violence needs to be understood within the contexts that shape it. Further, it needs to be understood dynamically, as conditioned by a continuous interplay of social, economic and

psychological factors that are structurally sanctioned and interpersonally based. In that case, while many of the patterns and issues of the North American context and of developing countries, such as Africa and India, may seem to find resonance in the local setting, the question arises as to what factors shape domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. In the specific case of this paper, we explore the way in which domestic violence is explained by “men on the street” in Trinidad and Tobago, meaning specifically the average, non-intellectualizing individual, reacting presumably out of his own life experience and personal struggles and issues.

Methodology

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, domestic violence is defined as the emotional, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse perpetrated against a person by someone with whom they share or have shared an intimate relationship. The inquiry was confined to an exploration of the perceptions of men who have abused women.

Informants and Data Collection

The men in this study were mostly in the middle income range. All of them had been in some form of therapy initiated either by their partners or voluntarily because of the threat of loss of their partner. The discussion was facilitated through a focus group that dealt with the following themes:

- Why do men abuse women?
- What happens when men become abusive?
- How do men define domestic violence?
- What needs to happen for domestic violence to stop?
- Perspectives on relationships with women.

The use of focus groups as a tool of qualitative methodology has been well documented (Cherry 2000; Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell 1996; Creswell 1994). It was felt that this method was suited to the nature of the topic under inquiry and the possible sensitivity of the men to discussing and acknowledging themselves as perpetrating abusive behaviour. In addition, advice given by male counsellors who had worked with men who abused women was that a positive response would more readily be elicited from men in the context of a group than in singular interviews.

The assistance of a male therapist was solicited to interview the men since it seemed likely that they would more readily talk in his company than in that of a woman who might well have been perceived as being biased against them as perpetrators of violence. Moreover, the therapist in question had already won their confidence in his role as a counsellor. From among his clientele, 12 male participants were targeted. The sample group was chosen for its availability. What this meant for the analysis was that we had men who had already engaged in some therapeutic intervention, whether willingly or not, and had therefore had some opportunity for reflection on their behaviours.

A differently situated group of men might have yielded other results. Nonetheless, in the absence of any data on men, the exploratory nature of the study of this group was warranted and it was felt that the results were bound to offer some insights that would be useful to an understanding of domestic violence from the perspective of males, albeit males who had been through some form of remediation in that area. The other benefit of working with this group was that they had already begun the process of reflection which gave a head start to the process of engaging them in reflection about their role in domestic violence.

Once the decision had been made as to the approach, telephone calls were made by the therapist to each potential participant informing them of the study and asking about their interest in participation. Of this initial group, six men indicated their willingness and availability to participate; four men were unavailable (no personal contact made); two were not willing/available. The decision was made to reduce the sample size to six men on the basis of their availability. A date and time were established for the group meeting. The therapist was briefed on the qualitative approach to data gathering using the guided questionnaire that had been developed (Cherry 2000; Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell 1996; Creswell 1994).

At the outset of the group process, the study was discussed and the voluntary nature of the study underscored. Participants were asked to sign a consent form giving permission to have the group's proceedings taped. The initial focus group was conducted over a two-and-a-half hour period. An unexpected outcome with this group that was of particular interest was that the men decided they wanted to continue the discussion and to meet again. They articulated their need for a support group and noted that they had experienced the group in that light. This request was facilitated and the group gave permission for a second session of similar duration.

A particular outcome of the group session was that one of the men who was at risk of being a danger to himself and his partner was able to receive the immediate support of the other men during the session in which they both validated his feelings and challenged or helped him to reframe his thinking about his situation. The outcome of this engagement was that a network of support was specifically organized to see him through the crisis period "until he (was) safe". This support included the exchange of telephone numbers, visits to the home, 24-hour call access to any one of the group members and taking the troubled individual out. In short, the men met the challenge of operationalizing their position that men need support systems in respect of their domestic situations.

Data Analysis

The data were then transcribed and have been analyzed for this paper using the critical linguistics approach to discourse analysis; undergirding this approach was our

concern to validate the experience of the research subjects through listening to their voices and hearing their stories, their analyses, their frames of reference, their perceptions and problem-solving. In a discourse analysis frame attention is paid to *how* informants express themselves, in addition to the content of what they say. The data were clustered thematically and, again for purposes of this paper, salient perspectives under three main subheads were isolated and analyzed. Only typical samples were selected representing common attitudes of the group.

Findings

The position of men in relation to women

The central theme emanating from the discussion of the men was the critical need for an “institution for men”. As the men shared stories about their different situations one painful fact stood out and that was the belief of the men that there was no one to whom they could turn when they were undergoing a crisis. One man put it this way:

1. *“You have no friends. Your house could be full of a lot of people and still you have no friends. You have to stand up for yourself.”*

We notice here the repetition of “no friends” in two consecutive sentences. The emphasis created by this repetition speaks to an overarching sense of aloneness in this man’s experience. The casual but impersonal “you” is used as subject to distance the individual from a sense of aloneness that is clearly very personal. The choice of the verb “stand up for” seems paradoxical in a situation where it is the female partner who is under physical threat. It raises the question of the need for self-defence, though whether against this female partner or an outside threat remains unclear. The philosophical recognition in sentence two of that aloneness which is particular to being part of the crowd is juxtaposed with sentences one and two which seem peculiarly childlike in the concern being expressed.

The participants also believed that because men did not speak about their issues, their opportunity for uniting and organizing themselves was significantly and negatively affected. One of the men made the point this way:

2. *“Dey ever had [was there ever] a march of men in Trinidad and Tobago? Men don’t come together. They will suffer in silence.”*

The initial rhetorical question speaks once again to a sense of abandonment, reminiscent of the previous statement of there being “no one to stand up for” them on the part of the male group. “Dey” is the hostile collective society that marches readily for women rather than for men. The march is used here as a symbol of collective action and, moreover, perhaps also as a symbol of the need to unite against an oppressor, for marches are called to combat injustice. This is reinforced by sentence 3 where the cliché is telling: “They (now referring to men) will suffer in silence.”

In comparing the situations of men and women on this issue of women having a cohort to whom to turn, the men noted that women seemed much more able to develop close

relationships with other women with whom they could share things. The point was made that there was a difference between the sexes even in their approach to marriage. Women seemed to be better prepared for relationships than men. One man said:

3. *“Men are still at the place where this is a nice girl and they only want to please. But women seem to have a better understanding of what they want in the relationship.”*

Again here we note a childlike simplicity in the expression “only want to please”. By implication, pleasing or not pleasing defines the goal of relating. When juxtaposed with the women’s expectations it is noted that the latter are fully cognizant of what they “want in a relationship”. The man has a simple need and expectation, whereas the woman is more knowing and, by implication, more powerful.

In furthering this discussion, one of the men finally said the following:

4. *“Men just do not have the knowledge of what is happening to men and they are afraid to come out and talk about it.”*

In claiming that men lack knowledge of their situation, there is again an implicature of helplessness against manipulation, of something “happening” of which they are unclear, alongside an incapacity to verbalize their concerns.

Taken as a subset, which represents the men’s situation in their relationships, these utterances share a commonality of perspective that is telling: their perceived innocence and gullibility as matched against an unseen oppressor, whom we can only assume is the female partner, the larger female body, and/or a nebulous society which supports them; all of these then render them vulnerable and isolated, without a voice. Their silence is mentioned twice, fear once, ignorance once, isolation twice.

The men further described the society’s treatment of them in the working sphere as distinct from its treatment of women, which latter treatment they perceived as advantageous to women. Examples included:

5. *“Women getting more jobs now. Men used to be in charge before and they didn’t care about men. Now that women in the same jobs they taking extra safety precautions.”*
6. *“Women get preferential treatment on the job. They get to do what they want to do. Even if it’s a dangerous job if she wants to do it, then she gets to do it.”*

Once again, here we sense immediately the injury felt by the men and what they clearly perceive as male marginalization. “Women” are the focus, the subject, they are getting more jobs and “preferential treatment”. Again there is a reference

to an unspecified “they”, the wider society, who victimize men in not caring about them. Whatever the woman wants to do she manages to do and care is taken for her safety. The only sentence in this subset which considers the male position, sentence 2 in example 5, not only makes the contrast as to how they are treated but laments a lost ascendancy in the habitual “used to” whose meaning excludes any present continuation.

In the social sphere also, the men believed that women were again given preferential treatment:

7. *“Yuh ever see a party advertised where men are free? Is always women free, never men—that is the power of the woman.”*

A rhetorical question again, relying for its force on the shared understanding of Trinidad “party” norms, speaks again to a perceived male marginalization. The marked front focusing on women in the following sentence brings force to the assertion and belief that women are always favoured, and the recurrent theme of female dominance surfaces again in the following clause: “That is the power of the woman.” Free access to a party could be a device to bait the woman in a male enclave, but it is not so perceived by our speaker.

The male perception of society’s bias against the male gender was further evident in their commentary on the criminal justice system’s treatment of them in domestic violence cases as well as the media’s treatment:

8. *“If you hit your wife and she report it to the police, you could get lock up. If your wife hit you and you go to the station, dey [they] will laugh at you, they will say—you go let your wife hit you?”*
9. *“Men are condemned by the media. Men are seen as bad. They never talk about the women’s role [in domestic violence].”*
10. *“Take the courts. It have a lot of female magistrates. That is why I take a female lawyer to fight my case. I feel she will talk the language that the magistrate as another woman could understand. Women express themselves differently in a way that no matter how good a male lawyer is, he will not get through.”*

A common practice in these utterances is for the speaker to juxtapose the treatment of men with that of women. We see it in both 8 and 9 above again. The parallelism of structure in 8 brings emphasis to the point, which ultimately is a weak one, because the incapacity of our police force to respond to female complaints is legendary, contrary to this man’s assertion. It nonetheless underscores the sense of intense injury and discrimination which appears to be a reality for the men. Another common theme resurfaces in Example 10, that of the incapacity of the male to combat the female psyche. It surfaced earlier in relation to the male’s relationship to his partner but now is extended to the legal profession. There appears to be a conspiracy of womanhood: “I feel she (his

female lawyer) will talk the language that the magistrate as a woman can understand” and which “no male lawyer” can succeed against for “women express themselves differently”. Clearly again the perception of disempowerment and incapacity to cope on equal terms is salient for the speaker.

Perceptions of their role in domestic violence

11. *“I am not an abusive man. I have done some abusive things.”*

This statement encapsulates the fundamental position of the men concerning their roles in domestic violence. They make clear distinctions between what they do (their abusive behaviours) and who they are (their essence). They consider themselves to be husbands who love their wives, as men who love their partners and as men with nowhere to turn to learn how to address their problems differently.

12. *“All I want to be,” said one, “is to be a good husband. I don’t drink, I doh [don’t] smoke, doh run women—just a good husband.”*

We note the repetition in the parallel listing here, an emphatic gesture, focusing on the series of negative virtues displayed by the speaker, presumably put forward as the antithesis of the typical “bad” husband. We notice also the concerned emphasis in prefacing the sentence with “all”.

They believed, for the most part, that they did not have the skills to work through some of the difficult situations that faced them in their intimate relationships with women. In this regard, the number one difficulty that they had was what they termed their partner’s “lack of respect” for them. The discussion on this issue seemed to be pervasive. This “lack of respect” made them feel “small”, “hurt”, “humiliated”, angry and “less than anything”. Some of the cited incidents of lack of respect included a wife leaving the home and not letting her husband know where she was going or of coming home late without explanation and in one case having an affair openly and letting him know of it.

One of the men expressed the position that he did not set out to be abusive but it sometimes “*just happens*”. He noted:

13 *“It comes down to the manner in which she responds to you as you try to correct her. I don’t set out to be in control but the circumstances would get to me. Then I lash out and then you don’t feel good about yourself.”*

This statement clearly points to the perception of this man that his role, as a man, is to be the advisor and guide to his partner, the superior in effect. Having been forced to “lash out” by his wife’s ignorance of his correction, he claims some benevolence in the self-reflexive assertion that having to do this does not make him happy. It is interesting to note how his ownership of the controlling and lashing out is personalized to the pronoun “I” before he shifts to the more impersonal “you don’t feel good about yourself”. One

assumes that the personal statement reflects an engagement with the position he describes, a lack of capacity to distance, which is itself of note. Also noteworthy is the self-concern, with no mention at all of how this behaviour affects the woman.

The men could recognize that there were others whose behaviour was very abusive but they did not put their own in this category:

14. *“I eh (ain’t) lying, dey have (there are) men who does drink and smoke and ting and get really abusive. But I not like that.”*

Again here we note the stereotype of the bad man, epitomized in drinking and smoking “and ting”, this Trinidadian generalizer being used in cases in which there is a shared understanding between speaker and hearer as to the range of negative attributes not specified. The simple statement “But I not like that” allows the speaker to separate himself from the abuser, to justify his stance.

The men discussed the negative responses of the women that followed when they “lost it” (abused their partner). They found that the women became more cautious of them and withdrew—“went into themselves”—even more and that this was really the opposite of what they wanted. One man expressed it figuratively this way:

15. *“When you have a little thing [abusive behaviours] is like the pot on fire, the pot warm. But the woman not waiting for it to boil; they start pulling back one time.”*

And another in similar vein:

16. *“When you have abused a woman, she will throw it back in your face...until eventually everything break down. The woman will cut off her feelings while you trying to make the relationship work.”*

The telling simile in Example 15 suggests that the abuse is just a stage in a situation which might lead perhaps to love-making and the men appear to resent the withdrawal of the woman in response. There seems to be a measure of surprise and blame for the bad fallout of the situation and in both cases, the responsibility is placed on the woman. Transitivity is manipulated to place her in control: “the woman not waiting for it to boil” and “The woman will cut off her feelings”. When the man is the actor, however, he is positively “trying to make the relationship work”.

If the above positioning is difficult for the reader to view positively because of a clear lack of empathy on the men’s part, one should note that one of the participants does say:

17. *“I don’t really blame them. I could see that it will be difficult to trust after you lose it and get hurt, but still.”*

In response to the question of whether men could turn off their own pots, there was some hesitation among the men and some talking around the question until one said reflectively “we have to.” He later noted: “For you to move forward you have got to get out of the situation.” Such statements evidence a desire to get beyond the abuse. However, the overriding positioning in respect of their own culpability is denial, or if not denial, at least minimization of the incidents, self-justification through alleging the women’s own causal behaviour or wrong response, and lack of apparent capacity for self-condemnation.

In the discussions regarding the men’s awareness of the feelings, thoughts and behaviours that made it difficult for them to control themselves, most had difficulty speaking directly. Rather, it seemed easier to share thoughts on the physical signs that they should look for and to discuss how to avoid the stimuli that generated the build-up of the explosion inside of themselves. It was evident from these discussions that different levels of self-awareness existed in the group and that it was often easier to suggest interventions for another than to mediate one’s own. For example, one of the men was recovering from a broken relationship and the others were trying to help him see that he might again explode if he continued in his present state. In addition, they were helping him to find ways to manage. Within this context, the behaviour of choice for the men to address the range of feelings that they experienced seemed to be avoidance of the stimuli presented by the women. Further, one of the men offered this advice:

18. *“You have to try not to lose your cool. When you abuse your woman, the society starts getting down on you. Just by your action whatever the woman does is nullified or minimized. As a man you feel like the earth could open up and take you where you are...It really is not a nice feeling.”*

It is telling in the above that the rationalization given for “not losing your cool” is that “when you abuse...the society starts getting down on you”. Once again, we see here culpability being put at the woman’s door and simultaneously the society’s exoneration of her: “Just by your action whatever the woman does is nullified.” Once again we are forced back on the failure to accept culpability and the feeling among the men that they themselves are being victimized by society.

Dealing with infidelity

Infidelity, perceived or real, is another of the significant traumatic issues for men to deal with. A great deal was said about this since one of the men was trying to deal with a recent situation of infidelity which led to a break-up in the relationship between the couple. One discourse chunk is abstracted below:

19. A: *“Sometimes, I feel like the hardest thing for a man is to accept that another man [is] with the person that you are with. I have a problem dealing with that.”*

B: *“Sometimes you find yourself competing with the outside man. He is in control.”*

C: *“That’s what you feel!! He and all in doubt.”*

A: *“I feel the outside man knows more [about the wife] than you. She always says that he makes her feel good and she could talk to him.”*

D: *“But how you will get to know more about her? ... your time [with her] is when it is convenient to her especially when children involved.”*

Within this conversation are two major concerns. First of all, the issue of “control” is clearly of paramount importance. The initial claim is that “the outside man” is in control but then speaker C suggests that it is rather the woman who is calling the shots. His exclamatory rejoinder: “That’s what you feel!” puts control in the woman’s hands; by implication she is manipulating the situation. The issue of the woman having an alternative relationship seems to be more about control than about emotional fallout from loss of affection. The other concern raised surrounds the men’s inability in communicating effectively with their women, to which they allude. There is betrayal associated with “the outside man” knowing more about her “than you” and again the perceived shortfall on the husband’s part to satisfy his wife in this area: “She always says that he makes her feel good and she could talk to him.” Speaker D is defensive, for he suggests that she calls the shots in this area too and he seems to resent the time taken up by the children.

While there is an attempt at mutual support in the above extract, it is clear that the level of subjectivity involved for all the men does not necessarily make for the positive outcome which is needed. Rather speakers B, C and D support their friend by undermining his wife on several fronts.

When real anger sets in two of the men refer to thoughts of suicide, which are of extreme concern, given the extremely high rate of murder-suicides among Trinidadian couples:

20. *“If you not careful, I could find myself thinking a whole lot of things...Let me tell you the Devil is a serious man. A serious, serious man! Man I fight the Devil for a whole night...I sit down in my gallery with a rope ready to kill myself (and my wife). Then I say no!! No, not today!! You ain’t going to get me today.”*

21. *“I driving home and I watching a lamp post on the Churchill Roosevelt (Highway). I watching that lamppost and heading towards it...Is only the will inside of me, only the will that keep me from doing it. Man you have to always be conscious of it.”*

Both men noted the intensity of the feelings that they experienced. The first in example 21 spoke of thoughts that he could not control and of a night of warring with the “Devil”. The use of the unmarked Creole verb form for foregrounding vivid events is noted here in

the three verbs “*fight*” “*sit down*” and “*say*” (Youssef and James 1999). When contrasted with a range of other forms in the stream of narrative they serve to render the events they describe as most salient to the speaker. Here, there was a clear sense that the impetus to live, to find the strength to fight the mental war (one man articulated it as a spiritual war) needed to resist undesirable actions, rested entirely with the men themselves. There was no externalizing of responsibility at this juncture other than spiritually. Both men spoke of a battle of wills and used emphatic repetition to express their ultimate resolve not to commit the acts they felt driven to. Once again in these extracts as in the one below the sense of isolation felt by the men comes through:

22. *“You have to remember that you have to stand up for yourself. You have no friends. You have to stand up for yourself.”*

The sense of a battleground on which the individual is responsible only to and for himself appears to loom large for these men, who do indeed emerge as victims themselves in their potentially life-threatening struggles.

Discussion

The data indicate that for some men who have abused women, there is confusion about gender roles and relationships in a changing context and a cry for external help. The focus in collecting and subsequently analyzing the data has been to understand the experiences of men who have been in situations of abuse and battering in Trinidad and Tobago as they perceive them. Out of this analysis we would obviously want to extrapolate suggestions for positive resolution to spousal conflict and to the patterns of abuse which these men had all, to a greater or lesser extent, developed as coping strategies. We have become aware of their feelings of isolation and of failure to communicate, their sense of insecurity and inferiority vis-à-vis the women in their lives and their sense that society itself is against them.

Among the strategies they themselves identified to address the building-up of the internal stresses related to their relationships with their partners were the following:

- Development of alternative relationships: “Someone who was interested in you and someone who will listen to you and talk with you and accept you with all your faults”;
- Finding interest in other things, for example, sports.
- Rationalization; self-distraction: “I train my mind to think about other things. Sometimes I will retreat and read the papers. I try to rationalize in my own mind what I am thinking and doing—whether anything wrong.”
- Ending the relationship: “Walk away from the situation and if necessary the relationship.”
- Not expecting resolution through discussion: “Don’t look for answers when you ask questions because that is where the trouble does start.”

All of these strategies are stop-gap devices, none of which leads to a positive resolution of their conflictual relationship. They suggest coping with an ongoing problem rather

than resolving it. Indeed, there is a predisposition to avoidance rather than healthy engagement, collaboration and confrontation. Joint problem-solving, as an interpersonal relationship strategy with their partners is absent, and the relating is instead often posed in “win-lose” terms which negates productive resolution.

A contradictory role is worked out by the men for their own positioning in society, for they are at once victims and heroes, condemned and marginalized in society but at the same time the ones who are supposed to be dominant in their relationships. They perceive that women are given opportunities that are not opened to them, that they have indeed to give up valuable occupational space to their newly educated and empowered women, but yet they are the supposedly stronger sex, biologically and societally endowed to have authority in the home. They feel the weight of the responsibility of living up to the expectations of their perceived role and have no real source or structure that addresses the challenges of their role within the context of their intimate relationships. They exonerate themselves from responsibility for their actions.

Also noteworthy was the difficulty that the men had in identifying advice that they could give to a young man beginning a relationship. They advised holding back and not giving all of one’s self to the other party, again a defence strategy aimed at minimizing hurt and motivated by a fear of disillusion. Men’s advice to each other seems to convey the impossibility of pleasing a woman and of constructing a meaningful relationship with her. On the one hand, we see that men may not know what is entailed in being a man in a positive relationship. On the other, there is the tendency noted to look outward for an explanation of their behaviour, to make others culpable for their shortcomings. This often makes it difficult for them to conceptualize what they need to know or what need they are trying to meet in discussing their problems. They set up for themselves idealistic constructs which their own perceptions of their role contradict to some extent. For example they suggest, “treat her kind and she will love you to death” but never forget you have to “lead”, “supply all her needs”; “make sure she doesn’t spend all your money”. Respectful engagement in intimate relationships is necessarily disadvantaged in this context.

As noted earlier, this discomfort with the ideal can be traced back, in the case of the Afro-Trinidadian, to the earliest clashes surrounding gendered roles between European males and African men. It spawned a contestation that, given the system of enslavement, resulted in the dominant European culture becoming entrenched throughout the period of colonization by means of the colonizer’s active efforts to dispossess the African man of his family and thereby his responsibilities to it. On the Indian side, indentured men appear to have been desperately insecure because of the lower numbers of women among them and their tendency to have come to this alternative world expressly to forge their independence. The situation is compounded by the fact that women are now outstripping men educationally (Reddock 1997, 10–12) and increasingly taking up demanding but well-paid employment—achievements which directly challenge the notions of control created by men for themselves. These developments not only challenge the men by increasing their sense of insecurity but deprive them of a modern means of self-affirmation derived from their perceived role as “provider”.

An important challenge to the widespread applicability of this data for men who abuse women is that the men who volunteered to attend this focus group had each been in therapy whether voluntarily or involuntarily. This process is likely to have triggered a journey of introspection which is not necessarily typical. It is well documented also that there are a number of patterns of abusive behaviour, which make it difficult to generalize findings (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). The concern of this research then is not to generalize the findings but rather to enter the world of some men who have battered women to understand why this has happened. It is important that we understand the vulnerability that they feel, the sense of aloneness that they experience and the lack of equippedness that they have for addressing their shortcomings. In a sense, the men feel that women are responsible and should bring about their healing and are only reluctantly becoming aware that it is they who will have to engineer the changes.

Women and men are located within a dynamic system of interrelationships, evolving out of the historical, cultural and socio-economic systems that have shaped their behaviours. The abuse is the culmination of a process of socialization that needs to be addressed. A complex fabric of issues needs to be resolved so that gendered relations are redefined along lines of equity and shared responsibility. Self-respect and a sense of self-worth are critical elements to be engaged in the management of domestic violence. Thus, we have to look at our system of beliefs, our values, our parenting practices, our educational system, the legal system and popular culture. We must stop and take heed. We must take a multi-pronged approach to addressing the problem.

The data deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence and create a frame of reference for enhancing the quality of service delivery in an arena where established services already exist but are largely unsuccessful. At the end of the day, the data are intended to facilitate an appreciation of the uniqueness of the experiences of men in relation to domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. It is our hope that the experiences of the men herein described will provide the impetus for other men to confront and define their own needs and shortcomings so that they can take steps to address them; it is also hoped that the role of helping agencies will become one of fostering opportunities to facilitate this self-development.

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Deconstructing “The Equaliser”: Beyond a Balance of Terror

Gordon Rohlehr

During the Calypso season of 1998 a well-known calypsonian, Singing Sandra, presented her major offering for the year at Kaiso House; it was the calypso *The Equaliser*, which like her 1999 smash hit *Voices from the Ghetto*, was written for her by Christophe Grant. It was mainly *The Equaliser* that was responsible for her presence at the Calypso Fiesta semifinals and for her winning of the “Peoples’ Choice—Female” title in 1998 even though her memorable performance of the song was insufficient to gain her a place in the Calypso Monarch finals.

There had been twenty-seven women murdered in 1997 in incidents of domestic violence, and there had been 2,282 reports of domestic violence that year.¹ *The Equaliser* was condensed into four stanzas and its choruses represented the enraged outcry of women against all categories of male violence against women: rape, incest, child molestation, battering, and verbal and emotional violence such as insults, threats and terrorism. *The Equaliser* was an appeal for vengeance in the form of punishments that were meant to be poetically appropriate to each crime of violence. Among the punishments recommended were the castration, embalming and cremation of the testicles of sexual perverts; dephallication; public execution in Woodford Square for rapists, whose rotting genitals would nourish a small percentage of the nation’s vulture population; branding the brow with 666, the mark of the Beast, the Anti-Christ; forced

copulation with a gorilla in heat for the over-libidinous; the unscrewing of the “nuts and bolts” of batterers and the feeding of their dismantled parts to hungry piranhas.

The violence and extremity of this list of suggested punishments were meant to mirror the sadistic extremity of the crimes that were being committed daily against women and young girls. According to one report, there had been 213 rapes reported in 1996, a figure that had almost doubled to 420 for the first ten months of 1997.ⁱⁱ *The Equaliser* celebrated the prospect of female empowerment against such acts of war, recommending that male-engendered violence, sadism and terror be met with equal and opposite violence, sadism and terrorism on the part of women who, aroused and enraged, were now exchanging their status of victim for those of rebel and vindicator.

One of the many incidents that inspired the composition of *The Equaliser* was the daylight rape of a female student of The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, in mid-November 1997. In this case, the rapist was waiting for his prospective victim, condom and penis at the ready, in one of the women’s washrooms. The sentiments of sympathetic fellow students differed from those of *The Equaliser* only in degree.

According to one student:

Rape apparently is becoming a part of our culture and we have to stop it.
Once a rapist is proven to be a rapist, brand him. He acts like an animal...
brand him like an animal!

We have to walk with some kind of weapon, teach ourselves in the event that we have to use it, and use it. If we have to emasculate them, then we emasculate them, so they cannot do it to somebody else.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here were two of the punishments, castration and branding, recommended two months later in *The Equaliser*. The student did not say who was to do the branding, but she did reserve the joy of castration for the self-empowered, armed, trained and self-defending woman. One week later, a female journalist contributed yet another idea that would be incorporated into the calypso. Dismissing arguments then current among certain lawyers about the human rights of rapists, Suzanna Clarke outlined “drastic punishments” for those who are caught.

My irrational solution to this problem is simple and cheap. All I would need is a piece of cloth, a pair of pliers, a \$5 knife and a length of two-inch pipe with a condom on it. Now think.^{iv}

Nothing better illustrates the extreme terror that rape itself and the very idea of rape awaken in the minds of victims and potential victims than these grotesque fantasies of retributive sadism through which aggressor and victim, victor and vanquished, rapist and “equaliser” are converted into mirror images and monstrous doubles of each other. *The Equaliser* grows out of this anguish of rage, vulnerability, crisis and terror. Its atrocious

punishments would, if enacted, transform the victim into the rapist and the rapist into the terrified and utterly ruined victim.

Singing Sandra provides an account of the circumstances that drove her to ring Christophe Grant at the outrageous hour of three, one morning late in 1997, demanding that he write the song that became *The Equaliser*. Sandra said that she had been speaking to several victims of rape and domestic violence and mentioned “the case of a fifteen-year-old girl who was so traumatised by the sexual abuse of a relative, that she now ‘jumps’ every time a man comes near her”.^v The particular incident, however, that brought home to Sandra the extremity of the crisis that is rape occurred around two o’clock one morning late in 1997 while she was in a taxi returning home from a performance at the Upper Level Club:

When we reached Morvant Junction, I saw a young lady running in the street in a blue nightie, covered in blood... Running behind her was a goodly gentleman in his underwear, who didn’t find she was hurt enough and was pelting her with big stones... I told my driver to stop, and the passenger in the back seat opened the door and told the lady to jump in. We took her to the Morvant Police Station and she told us that she was from the country, and that she went against her parents to be with this man. But that still didn’t give him the right to beat her.^{vi}

This incident, witnessed by Sandra and in which she became fortuitously involved, along with the UWI rape and the impassioned discussion that followed it, and, to crown them all, the early morning rape of a sixty-five-year-old woman while she was before the altar praying in a Catholic Church in Morvant, suggested the need for an “Equaliser” who would function on behalf of the female victim. Such a champion, the calypso stated, would need to operate outside of a law that was perceived to be inadequate or impotent to deal with such horrible crimes:

... the authorities is nothing they doing
The law needs reviewing
It’s time to get tough
If they don’t really have a clue
I know exactly what to do
Send them by me, enough is enough.

Sandra’s “Equaliser” has given up on the Law and the Constitution whose sanctions have, in her opinion, been more readily employed to protect the human rights of the violent transgressor than those of his victims. So she sings:

But when dey hold dat son of a satan
Doh tell me bout no constitution
With me he don’t have a prayer
Hang him high in Woodford Square.

Sandra's Equaliser, then, is as comfortable with lynching as was Caruso's indignant citizen in *Run the Gunslingers* (1959). Caruso then advised, as a male:

Hang them in the square
 Let everybody be there
 Beat them with the cat
 All who see boun to done wid dat.

It is clear that the rhetoric of violent reprisal transcends gender boundaries.

For her performance of *The Equaliser*, Singing Sandra wore the overalls, hard hat and utility belt of a "Home Improvement" handyman, equipped with shears, pliers, monkey wrench, knives and all the tools necessary for bobbitization or detesticulation. She might through costume, have been suggesting several things:

1. that the only answer to male violence would have to be an equivalent female violent reprisal;
2. that in the process of executing such violence the woman would have of necessity to assume and appropriate a typically male role, that of fixer, handyman, technician—the worker with tools;
3. that the end result of the woman's movement into male-dominated space and the adoption of typically "male" aggression and violence would be home-improvement via the neutering of male gender aggression against females.

The Equaliser in the television series of that name is a white-haired middle-aged Caucasian male who, retired from the intelligence agency for which he once worked, has chosen a humanitarian vocation of protecting the weak, innocent and helpless from the unfair and cruel machinations of the powerful and vicious. Singing Sandra's self-empowered female, a sturdy, strapping and darkly sullen version of Xena, subverts and appropriates the male/hero/avenger role. Her objective is not the prevention of violence, but its punishment; not so much the protection of the helpless female as her empowerment through access to and skill in plying the tools of emasculation. Relieved of the genitals around which he has constructed masculinity and exercised dominance, the male sexual transgressor becomes what he most fears: effeminised, cut down to size, in the words of *The Equaliser*. He becomes "equalised" in the sense of having been reduced—quite literally—to the role and condition of the frightened female victim, vulnerable and violated. By contrast, the triumph of Television's Equaliser over nefarious individuals or systems is always a restoration of patriarchy.

Bearing in mind that Sandra is singing her own sentiments but yet the words of another person, that person being an empathising male, we need to read *The Equaliser* carefully as a layered text in which two voices, one female and the other male, are subsumed.

Female womanist indignation at abuse is filtered through the male imagination of retributive violence. What we may be hearing, therefore, is the conscience of a male who feels some guilt by proxy for the crimes members of his gender have committed, and continue to commit in such shameful abundance, against women and children. *The Equaliser* becomes for Christophe Grant, its author, a sort of redemptive castigation; an exorcism of shame and guilt felt on behalf of his gender.

Curiously enough, the first calypso that Singing Sandra performed when she crossed over in 1984 from the Best Village stage to the calypso tent, was Dr Zhivago's *The Raper Man Coming*.^{vii} Three years later (1987) her dynamic rendition of Tobago Crusoe's *Die With My Dignity* (or *Sexy Employers*) converted her into calypso's flagwaver for militant womanism. Her years as a Best Village singer and actress and the fifteen years that she spent in the tent between *The Raper Man Coming* and *The Equaliser*, were years that witnessed both the phenomenal increase in violent crimes against women and children and a corresponding growth of concerned and articulate feminists, including a number of outstanding journalists, whose outspokenness in raising women's and family issues was mainly responsible for the campaign in the mid-eighties for the retention in the Sexual Offences Act of "Clause 4"—the clause which made marital rape a criminal offence.

Sandra found in the calypso a means of raising crucial women's issues in a manner and through a medium that could reach tens of thousands. Male calypsonians—Tobago Crusoe, Bomber, Trini, Watchman among others—were freely employing the calypso medium to express a wide range of male reactions to legislation such as "Clause 4" and new definitions of terms such as "sexual harassment". Women too, Sandra felt, were crying out to be heard and taken seriously on issues that affected them.

Female calypsonians, however, were like voices in the wilderness. "They tired trying for somebody to hear them," Sandra complained, "and nobody listening to them."^{viii} An embittered Sandra complained in 1998 that her failure to gain selection for the Calypso Monarch finals of that year, after the enormous popularity of *The Equaliser*, was only the most blatant evidence of the calypso judges' disregard for female singers and the women's text.

There were twelve women in the semi-final, and they were equally strong, but only one ended in the final. This shows me that calypso is still a male-dominated art form. Although women have proven themselves and made great strides in calypso, they are still being left in the back. I don't know why...we have already risen above this male domination thing. Women are involved in every aspect of life now...even on construction sites. But we, female calypsonians are still being left in the back.^{ix}

Sandra also recorded her deep disappointment that the female calypsonians fared so badly at the semi-finals despite the presence of three women among the panel of judges. She felt that there was a bias toward both the calypsos that were attacking the Government and the party songs, many of which she considered disrespectful of women. In light of this dual bias, serious feminist songs were being sidelined. If the Singing Sandra of 1993 thought nothing of participating in the grand sexual horseplay of the performance of *Whoa Donkey*, where substantial females rode submissive and compliant male “donkeys”, the Sandra of 1998 had become the bell-ringer for a grim militancy that no longer had a place for such carnivalesque unleashing of female sexuality. Her second song for 1998, *No More Hard Work*, also written by Christophe Grant, was meant to be an answer to Denise Belfon’s 1997 song which said “gie meh hard wuk, round de clock.” Yet Belfon, of *Kakalaylay* fame had simply inherited the spirit of female sexual challenge, in which the woman openly baits and teases the male, that had found prior expression in the United Sisters’ *Whoa Donkey* and in the brash and sexually aggressive performance styles of popular dancehall queens such as Patra, Lady Shabba and Lady Sawh.

Murder in the nineties

One must assume, then, that something had developed between 1993 and 1998, something so dire that it had converted Sandra from “donkey-dancer” into “equaliser” and changed utterly the image through which she, as woman, was prepared to represent herself on the stage. What had happened was the significant increase in crimes of violence, including violence against females, in the post-1990 years. Between 1982 and 1991, the reported instances of rape, incest, unlawful carnal knowledge and suicide—classified together as “Other Crimes Against the Person”—had risen by 80% from 336 in 1982 to 604 in 1991.^x The years after 1991 were progressively worse, with 1993, the year of the United Sisters’ *Whoa Donkey*, providing several grim examples of wives and sometimes entire families slaughtered by jealous, depressed, demented or enraged husbands; of rapes with or without murder. Nineteen ninety-three was that horrible year when Hulsie Bhaggan mobilised her Chaguanas constituents to march against crime and to form themselves into two hundred vigilante groups, in order to eradicate what she termed Bosnia-type “ethnic cleansing” being carried out by “African men” who were deliberately targeting Indian homes in Central Trinidad. “Ethnic cleansing” took the form of armed robbery and rape. Several homes and businesses had been attacked and eleven Muslim virgins had been raped.

Nineteen ninety-three, then, was a year in which any even minimally conscious feminist would have become concerned and alarmed at what men were doing to women in “sweet T and T” as we call it. Many citizens lived with a sense of total mayhem and deep social crisis. The nineties—beginning with the Muslimeen uprising, the destruction of Police Headquarters, invasion of Parliament, the wounding and murder of MP’s, the gutting and looting of many business places and warehouses along the East-West Corridor and in Port of Spain, the symbolic decapitation of the State—continued as the decade of escalating drug trafficking and its corollary: contract killing, banditry and gangland executions that at times involved literal, not symbolic, decapitation.

Nineteen ninety-three, the year of the Donkey dances of Ronnie Mc Intosh and Singing Sandra and the United Sisters; the year too of Minshall's Trojan Donkey, Cyclops and transfixd suitors, was a year when members of the Police Service demonstrated in public against the Ministry of National Security. It was also the year when the Police were being investigated by a highly paid and deeply execrated team of Scotland Yard detectives, whose damning yet inconclusive report would be rendered useless by the government's failure to legally validate the presence of the "Yardies" in the country. In 1993, Russell Huggins, the Minister of National Security, tried to get the Police Service Commission to dismiss Police Commissioner Jules Bernard by sending him into retirement^{xi} and Commissioner Bernard startled the nation with his confession that he was "a toothless bulldog" who was ill-equipped to deal with either the growing corruption within the Police Service that he headed or the escalating crime in the nation that he was being paid to protect and serve.^{xii}

Nineteen ninety-three, it may be concluded, was a year when the forces of Law, Order and Justice seemed to be working resolutely to negate or neutralise each other: Ministry of National Security versus Police Commissioner; Police Service versus investigating Yardies; Yardies unsupported by the Government that had hired them. The impact on public morale was devastating. The increasing sense of social crisis and the recognition of the impotence and corruption of the agencies of Law, Order and Justice, together created the hysteria that Hulsie Bhaggan skilfully and dangerously manipulated in Central Trinidad in June 1993, when she enhanced her image as a woman of action and a defender of women's rights by racializing the issue of rape. The hysteria of the early nineties would take up permanent residence in the public mind as the decade proceeded and nothing changed to make women—or, indeed, men—feel that the nation was becoming more secure or less violent.

A calypso such as Singing Sandra's *The Equaliser* is, as Hulsie Bhaggan's terrified vigilante groups were in 1993, an illustration of the grotesque extremes to which individuals and communities can be driven when they perceive themselves to be the endangered targets of violence in a context where the official agencies of Law, Justice, Public Safety and Protection seem to have collapsed. It is no coincidence that in 1997, the year before Singing Sandra's *The Equaliser*, the title of a calypso composed by Penguin (Sedley Joseph) and sung by Explainer (Winston Henry) was *Out of Control*, while the title of another one, composed by Brother Marvin (Selwyn Demming) and sung by Explainer was entitled even more ominously, *Edge of Darkness*. Of some significance, also, was Brother Marvin's (Selwyn Demming's) composition *We Need Help* which was performed by Denyse Plummer. Together these three calypsoes and 3-Canal's ominous chant *Blue* divined a nation and/or a world free-falling and in a state of humanly irreversible entropy. *The Equaliser* (1998) is the product of that perception of entropy.

Nineteen ninety-three, that crucial year in Sandra's development—located as it was almost midway between *Die With My Dignity* (1989) and *The Equaliser* (1998)—was, as we said above, a terrible year for women. Even as the echo of “Whoa Donkey” vitalized the Carnival fetes, Andrew Abraham, 48-year-old vice-principal of the Penal Rock Road Presbyterian Primary School and chairman of the local board of Brothers Road Presbyterian School was stabbing Omattie, his wife of twenty years, to death, slashing his daughter Abel on both arms and setting himself on fire at his Williamsville family home.^{xiii} Omattie Abraham had filed for divorce after a “stormy relationship” with her husband.

On April 26, a mere five weeks before Bhaggan commenced her campaign to protect the Indo-Trinidadian centre from “African”-engendered rape and “ethnic cleansing”, Winston Ali, an unemployed management consultant with a fake doctorate who had been an unsuccessful PNM candidate in the 1991 elections, sank into a deep depression, which he was unable to articulate to anyone. His way out as the edge of darkness loomed was to shoot his wife, his three children and himself at his Valsayn Park residence [See Kamla Rampersad, “The Very Secret Life of Winston Ali”, *Sunday Guardian*, May 2, 1993.].

Early in September 1993, three months after Bhaggan had saved Caroni from “ethnic cleansing”, Deonarine Mohan, gardener of La Seiva Village, Maracas Valley, chopped three of his children—Diana (ten), Danny Boy (six) and David (two)—to death and then hanged himself. Fareeda Gill, his common-law wife of sixteen years, fearing for her own life with this quarrelsome and at times violent alcoholic and ex(?) drug addict, left the home for the twenty-seventh time and for good when Mohan began to threaten her life. One might say that she had followed Singing Francine's advice and put wheels on her heels^{xiv}, when she left Mohan and returned to her former life as a nightclub entertainer, but in so doing she had also critically endangered the lives of three of the six children she had borne Mohan.^{xv}

Two weeks later, Daniel “Jap” John, coconut vendor of Barataria Roundabout, cut the throat of his little son and seriously wounded his wife Ambica Dass and another child. They had lived together for six years since she was fourteen, and she had borne him six children. Jap John then climbed a mango tree and hanged himself. Jap's story is significant for this paper. In an agonized suicide message written in chalk on a concrete slab, he claimed to have loved his children and “whoring” wife very much. Ambica Dass, however, had in the spirit of Singing Francine's renegade woman, not run away, but served her husband a restraining order which she had obtained under the Domestic Violence Act. As male reactions to the Bastardy Ordinance had illustrated in the thirties, legislation meant to protect and empower (however minimally) women and children, has tended to expose the vulnerability and economic powerlessness of the otherwise falsely self-confident and cocky male, and to drive some delinquent fathers to acts of extremity that create even greater marital stress than had existed prior to the harshening of the Law.^{xvi}

On the 27th of September 1993, Shirley Wilson, a 54-year-old music teacher of Valsayn, was chopped to death by her 67-year-old husband of thirty-one years. She too had sought to free herself from an unhappy union, in which she had emerged as the main breadwinner and mortgage payer after her husband's business foundered during the recession of the eighties. Like Ambica Dass, Shirley Wilson had made use of the Domestic Violence Act (1991) in her legal proceedings against her husband. They had duly separated, the property and assets had been divided, and she had gone back to the house in the company of a Marshall of the Court and two police officers to collect her belongings. Her husband, a soft-spoken gentleman, relic of a bygone era, had greeted the company politely, and leading her to their bedroom had locked the steel door and hacked her to death with a cutlass. He then attempted to slit his own throat, but he was not quite as successful in that venture.

Wilson's intended suicide note accused his wife of having taught their daughter dishonesty, a crime that he said he considered to be worse than adultery. His wife had approved the daughter's relationship with a man Wilson considered to be a cocaine dealer and accepted a bribe of a motor car in payment for her parental consent. The motive of sexual jealousy, so prominent in the cases of Mohan and "Jap" was absent from his suicide note, though it crept into subsequent statements that he would make at his trial where he said that his wife had betrayed him from the very start of the marriage, in that she was not the virgin she had claimed to be.^{xvii} His suicide note, however, excludes any such hint of sexual jealousy. It does not mention either the terror and despair that Wilson, who was given the mortgage-ridden house and little else, felt at the divorce; and the necessity he now faced to go it alone. Instead, unctuously self-righteous, Wilson gives himself a "noble" motive for his mad act of violence, concluding his note with the words:

Suffice it to say that I have given up the will to live, and therefore the time has come for me to leave the land of the living and as a precautionary measure, I thought that you should leave also for if left alive you will surely destroy another man's life.^{xviii}

Far from being jealous of the prospective rival lover, Wilson was actually protecting him from destruction at the hands of his wicked wife.

Shirley Wilson's death, the bizarre manner of it, filled women and many men too, with despair. It seemed to symbolise the true impotence of the Law when confronted with the madness, the extreme drivenness, the hurtling toward the edge of darkness that ends in such acts of rape, murder and suicide. There was Wilson, crystal clear about what he was about to do; there was the Law, Policemen and Marshall, one stone wall, one steel door away from such atrocity, and unable to stop him or protect her. Some commentators spoke of obvious flaws in the Domestic Violence Act (1991). Others contemplated the difference, sometimes an extreme one in Trinidad, between drafting and passing a law

and effectively implementing it. Yet others blamed the Act itself for the increase in violent crimes against women seeking the protection of the Act. The Leader of the Opposition, Basdeo Panday, was reported as having said that

...the psyche of a Trinidadian male was such that he would “lose his cool” when forbidden to enter a house he may have built and in which his wife and children live and in which other men may be welcome.^{xix}

The women’s organizations that had campaigned for legislation to protect women against violence of any kind were reported to be feeling stunned and paralysed by this unforeseen turn of events. According to Roberta Clarke, attorney and member of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA):

There is a prevailing silence among women’s groups and it means something. They are...in disbelief that no matter how much was done, the violence continues. We feel paralysed. What more can we say? What more can we do now?^{xx}

Singing Sandra’s answer, five years later when things were even worse, was “get an Equaliser”. Unfortunately, the Equaliser, as described in Sandra’s calypso, can become operative only after the crime of violence has been committed. What sort of Equaliser could help, say, three young children ritually murdered by their parents and offered to Kali;^{xxi} or the young woman from the squatter settlement behind St Joseph farm whose spouse beat in her brains and the heads of her mother and sister with a plank of wood one fine afternoon? The arguments for the Equaliser are essentially the same in kind as the ones for capital or corporal punishment: that the punishment should mirror the crime and that the severity of the punishment will serve as a deterrent to prospective violators of the Law. The calypsos of the mid-forties and onwards that advocated the return of the cat-o-nine tails for crimes of violence^{xxii} were of the same spirit as those of the eighties and nineties that have been calling for hanging; Cro Cro’s *Hang Them High* (1993), Luta’s *Hang Them High* (1993), GB’s/Sugar Aloes’ *Twenty-four Hours* (1994), Contender’s blunt and crude *Bruck Dey Neck* (1999) are examples that spring readily to mind.

Bhaggan and the Caroni interlude

Out of the perception of extremity has come, consistently over the decades, the advocacy of desperate measures. Hulsie Bhaggan’s highly successful call for vigilante patrols in June 1993 was to a certain extent one of these desperate measures, though it was regarded by some commentators as the exploitation of Indo-Trinidadian xenophobia in the service of Bhaggan’s agenda of self-promotion. The first reports of unusual criminal violence in Central Trinidad appeared in the *Sunday Mirror* in early and mid-April 1993.^{xxiii} The first article was headlined “Racial Drug War Brewing” and the second, “Guns Against the Indians.” The articles themselves, based on information supplied by “an underworld

source” attributed an increase in crime in Central and Southern Trinidad to a “racial” war that had begun to develop within the drug world, between the Indo-Trinidadian rulers of the Central/Southern turf and their Afro-Trinidadian subalterns.

The *Mirror’s* “underworld source” speculated that certain Afro-Trinidadian gang members who had contracted their services out to Indo-Trinidadian drug barons had become embittered when their employers organized the assassination of Deryck King, one of their bandit brethren who had been a witness to a murder committed by one of his gangland bosses. With the Chadee/Boodram clan, hub of the Indo-Trinidadian drug syndicate, behind bars, the delicate balance of terror through which an uncertain peace is preserved among cutthroats was upset in Central Trinidad, and the gang that had worked for them now sought reprisal against their erstwhile employers. These initial reports did not yet include any stories of Indian women being raped. The bandits’ focus at that time seemed to have been on bars and pubs. The bandits wore stocking masks and surgical gloves and the *Mirror’s* source could not say for sure who they were, though he strongly suspected that they were members of the “King” gang.

The second phase in this crime wave in Central Trinidad was reported in the *Express* of April 23, 1993, under the headline: “Reign of Terror in Central”. The scope of the bandits’ activity had expanded. The *Express* reported that:

Residents of Ragoonanan Road, Enterprise, and Pokhor Road, Longdenville in Central Trinidad, are now observing a self-imposed curfew following the rape of two teenaged girls, the shooting of two men and the robbery of 17 persons, including a family of 11, by three armed bandits. The bandits started their rampage around 10 a.m. on Sunday.^{xxiv}

By early June, 1993, the areas of Munroe Road, Charlieville, Longdenville, Ragoonanan Road, Pokhor Road, Felicity, Pierre Road and Endeavour were being described as a “targeted crime zone”.^{xxv} The bandits and rapists, operating in gangs of two or three, usually wore “ski masks, dark-coloured turtleneck jerseys, dark trousers and elbow-length gloves, reminiscent of the comic book character Phantom.”^{xxvi} Police confirmed reports of seven rapes by hooded men. Other commentators claimed that some of the rape victims were reluctant to report their ordeal to the Police.

Hulsie Bhaggan’s achievement was to convert this gang of largely unidentified criminals—who may have been former employees and cutthroat partners of their criminal Indo-Trinidadian counterparts—into representatives of the African race, involved in “an organized assault... to humiliate Indian women.” She claimed to have interviewed eleven Muslim virgins who had been raped and theorised that “cultural jealousy and material wealth were the motives.”^{xxvii} Bhaggan was able to do what none of the victims could: identify the rapists and determine their motives. It did not matter that her interpretation of events did not coincide with what had so far been reported to the Police, since after all, the nation had lost confidence in the Police Service.

Up to June 1993, the Police had received reports of thirteen rapes in Central Trinidad, seven of which had been committed by hooded men whose identities were as yet undetermined. Five of the thirteen rapes had been committed by Indian men, and one of the seven women raped by the masked men was of African descent.^{xxviii} Comparing the statistics of Central Trinidad with those for the rest of the island, the Police provided the following data for 1993 up to the month of June:

Port of Spain 15; South 15; Western 16; Eastern 9; North (outside Port of Spain) 24; Central 13; South Western 13; North Eastern 17 and Tobago 8. Of these figures 91 adult women were raped, seven girls between the ages of 14 to 16 were raped, and one adopted minor and a mentally sub-normal girl were raped. There were also 14 cases of incest reported.^{xxix}

These were chilling, frightening statistics, which verified the conclusion that the nation was in a state of deep crisis. It is easy to see how any militant woman who is faced with this sort of evidence of the terrorism that was destroying so many women's lives could become an advocate of desperate measures. In 1993, Bhaggan called for vigilante groups; in 1998 Singing Sandra called for an "Equaliser". The difference between the two demands was that while Sandra's Equaliser sought to inflict her macabre punishments on proven violators and could act only after the crime had been committed and proven, Bhaggan's vigilantes were hoping to anticipate and forestall the act of violence against women and households by the threat and execution of a retaliatory communal violence against those presumed to be of criminal intent. Acting outside of the Law and under the presumption that the Law was impotent to act on the people's behalf, Bhaggan's vigilantes were open to decisions made on "hunch", pre-judgement, gut-feeling and racial prejudice. Indeed, having simplified and racialized the issue of rape in Central Trinidad, Bhaggan's vigilantes, armed with staves but with cutlasses at the ready, were programmed to target African males who had become synonymous with the concept of "the rapist". Indian males, regular contributors to the statistics of rape and incest and robberies in Central Trinidad, Indian controllers of the drug trade in Bhaggan's and other United National Congress-dominated constituencies, whose impact on those constituencies and the nation at large had been devastating, were not the targets of Bhaggan's vigilantes. There was no outcry some months later when four members of an Indo-Trinidadian family in Williamsville were shot through the head by a gang of assassins whose Indo-Trinidadian leader was simultaneously a drug disseminator and a religious man who had built a mandir on his estate in Piparo.

The issue of violence against women was being converted into political capital by Bhaggan, who seized the opportunity to challenge the patriarchs in her own party by demonstrating that she was more "man" than her leader. For the Indian males of Central Trinidad, the vigilante patrols provided the illusion of a self-empowering masculinity; the opportunity to display their ability as men to protect their women folk from the age-old threat of the big black phallus. The actual achievements of the vigilantes were minimal. The most significant of these was that the criminal element had begun to experience

difficulty in Central Trinidad. Hulsie Bhaggan affirmed that “she had been receiving ‘messages’ of death threats from drug pushers claiming they wanted to ‘pass me out’ because the crime watch was affecting their business.”^{xxx} This achievement was, however, short-lived and, soon enough, some vigilante patrols began to display symptoms of the very lawlessness that they were trying to curb.

A *Trinidad Guardian* editorial in mid-June 1993 spoke of a state of tension and an “explosive situation” in Central Trinidad, where the Police Commissioner himself had “encountered a group of vigilantes in Preysal armed with cutlasses and pieces of wood about to go in search of someone they believed to be a bandit.”^{xxx1} Taking the Law into their own hands was proving to be a difficult matter, fraught with the dangerous possibility of scapegoating. The *Trinidad Guardian* warned:

This is an explosive situation that has to be defused. We have already warned about the dangers of aggressive vigilantism. Already, it seems, this kind of lawlessness has gotten out of hand and, before our worst fears are realised, we would call on leaders responsible for these communities to take the necessary steps to halt these growing bands of vigilantes.^{xxxii}

Bhaggan, who initially claimed to be empowering residents of Central Trinidad of all ethnicities to protect their communities from crime and violent intrusion, and in so doing to achieve what the Minister of National Security had failed to achieve anywhere in Trinidad,^{xxxiii} realised after a few days that she had initiated a process that she could not control. Vigilante groups, going well beyond the brief of protecting their households and womenfolk, had begun to arrogate to themselves the right to say who should and who should not be on the road. Some of the reported incidents of vigilante activity seemed to be the result of group hysteria, while others resembled frontier-type lynching.

The Central Trinidad interlude achieved nothing except the embittering of race relations and the illustration of the dangers of playing “equaliser” both before and after the atrocious crime. By mid-July 1993, Bhaggan was agreeing with her critics that “the vigilante situation [was] now out of control and that political intervention [was] necessary.”^{xxxiv} Such intervention she hoped would come through the auspices of the United National Congress (UNC) and its political leader. What happened instead was her political leader’s repudiation of her as a “loose cannon”, a judgement which he reconfirmed later in the year after Bhaggan, Nariva MP Krish Jurai and members of Bhaggan’s constituency caused traffic jams by holding a demonstration on the Butler Highway to protest heavy flooding in Central Trinidad in early and mid-November. Many, including Panday, recognized in her modus operandi a quest for visibility and a play for leadership of her party. Others “saw Bhaggan as a new Indira Gandhi, or in the mould of Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela.”^{xxxv}

The Hulsie calypsos, 1994–1995

Such amazing events as had happened in 1993 invited and received the scrutiny of some of the nation's calypsonians, for Hulsie Bhaggan had become an "Equaliser", matching terror with terror on the basis of a false argument of racial reprisal. A vibrantly energetic and articulate woman, in the process of constructing a political image and platform of her own, she was a challenge to both the heart-sick patriarchy of the politicians in the UNC and the ethnic and masculinist chauvinism of some calypsonians.

The major calypso responses began as early as the Independence Monarch competition of late August 1993, with Watchman's (Wayne Hade's) *How Low*. That song was followed by Tallish's (Francis Adam's) *Water* (1994), Cro Cro's (Weston Rawlins's) *Respect the Law* (1993), Brother Marvin's (Selwyn Demming's) *Miss Bhaggan* (1994), Bianca Hull's *Woman to Woman* (1994), Mc Gruff's *Caroni Bacchanal* (or *Take Your Dhoti and Run*) (1994) and David Rudder's *The Ballad of Hulsie X* (1995) a relative latecomer to what Bhaggan supporters deemed "Hulsie-bashing" calypsos.

These calypsos were quite different from each other in mood, mask and style, though together they commented on nearly every facet of the Caroni interlude. *How Low*, for example, began as a witty attempt to demolish the rather unfortunately worded motivational TV advertisement of the PNM: "Let us go down the road together and get the job done." The calypso depicted a nation already travelling downhill fast, and enquired of the Manning Government "how low" did the nation have to descend before the old corruption was rooted out. It next focussed on the bandits'/rapists' reign of terror in Central, and accused Bhaggan of igniting the racial fuse when she asserted that all the victims were Indians and all the rapists Africans. It also commented on Bhaggan's highway demonstration and her opting to go to jail rather than pay the fine. Unmasking this latter gesture as a piece of theatre, Watchman savoured the prospect of Bhaggan in jail among some of the very bandits and rapists that she claimed to be fighting through her vigilante groups:

Them bandits in jail wanted she to stay
They start drinking sea-moss and bois bande
If you see how they crying when Hulsie pay.

The implied sexism of these lines becomes explicit in the calypso's chorus at this point:

Hulsie Bhaggan, how low, how low?
How much further down you want the country to go?
You better get a husband—How low?
An African or Indian—How low?
Because all I want is for muh country to grow.

The notion that is clearly intended here is that Bhaggan's misdirected feminist activism really grows out of a sex-starved condition that would have been adequately remedied by

“them bandits in jail”, but now that she has foregone that opportunity by quickly paying the fine that she initially refused to pay, her condition could still be assuaged by the marital diligence of a good husband. The recommended husband can be of either of the two ethnicities between whom Bhaggan had tried “to start a race war”. The implication here is that, unlike Bhaggan and the lynchers from Caroni, Watchman sees little to distinguish between the sexualities of African and Indian men; though it is on such a stereotypical distinction that Bhaggan manipulated the gut-feelings of her constituents when, without proof, she declared that the rash of rapes in Central Trinidad were being committed by African males.

Black male calypsonians who dealt with the Caroni interlude chose to answer what they saw as blatant sexism and racism with an equal and opposite sexism and a self-defensive race-rooted and race-protecting rhetoric of their own. This is clearly the case with Tallish’s *Water* which examines Bhaggan’s two significant moments of 1993, the Caroni interlude and the Butler Highway obstruction, through the lens of a wickedly sexist pun which achieved what Bhaggan had accused the Minister of National Security of attempting: the reduction of serious protest to “pappy show”.^{xxxvi} Unmasking such protest as Bhaggan’s political bid for popularity and visibility, Tallish denounced her as unsuccessfully “imitating Indira Gandhi”.

In a calypso laced with sexual and sexist innuendo, Tallish outlines “interviews” that he has had with politicians of both parties who have either already given Bhaggan day-long supplies of water—a rarity in many areas in Trinidad—or are working diligently toward a future when she would be able to enjoy “pipe-borne water” both “in front and in the backyard.” Tallish also repeats Watchman’s fantasy of a Bhaggan imprisoned among sex-starved males:

Next time they lock up Hulsie, don’t give her no bail
And let them prisoners give she plenty water in jail.

Like Watchman, too, Tallish points out Bhaggan’s unsuitability to becoming a national leader in a multi-ethnic country whose supposedly separate ethnic spaces have over the five centuries of post-Columbian settlement been subject to constant overlap, interface, interpenetration, one with the other, in processes of intercourse, negotiation, contestation and confrontation, enacted with love, hatred, negative and positive tolerance.

The Caroni interlude that Bhaggan had engineered, simplified race relations to an embattled confrontation between heartland Indians and the rest, the rest being mainly Africans; it had simplified spatial relations to an attempt to create via vigilantism a delineation of exclusive ethnic territory and an erection of boundaries, barriers and barricades that was totally alien to the intermeshing and interweaving of spaces that, along with ethnic separateness, have been Trinidad’s true national history. Tallish’s reservations about Bhaggan are an accurate reading of the fanatical spirit that had, within

two weeks, begun to inform vigilante activity. Bhaggan is indicted for being the initiator of activity that revealed the racial hostility which informed relations between sequestered Central and the rest:

If she were the political leader
 To my country it would be disaster
 Indians and Negroes couldn't live happy
 Negroes couldn't enter her constituency
 If she ketch an Indian with a Negro Man
 She cut off she foot she two knees and hand
 And if she ketch an Indian with a Negro lady
 You could bet your life is castration for he.

Drawing boundaries to restrict the movement of the Afro-Trinidadian male has always led to violent verbal and physical retaliation. Such a curfew on time and movement strikes at the very heart of Trini-male machismo, which has never silently tolerated any proscription of its time and space. Consider the stickfighting bands with their frontiers and barriers and the bitter battles fought in defence of one's turf or in invasion of the next man's. Consider, too, the steelband clashes, often originating in quarrels over women, over whom the males in each band or area tried to exercise absolute proprietorship. The boundaries were impossible to defend, the male proprietorship impossible to maintain. The calypsos on Hulsie all proclaimed this truth in their different ways.

None made its statement more subtly than Mc Gruff's *Caroni Bacchanal*: Mc Gruff's calypso, which Bhaggan in 1995 described as her favourite calypso of 1994, concealed its anger beneath a mask of humour which, because it seemed to be self-directed, might have suggested to Bhaggan that she was not the object of its aggression. *Caroni Bacchanal* narrates the attempt by two Black males to visit their girlfriends in Caroni during the period of the vigilantes. They disguise themselves as Indians by wearing dhotis and turbans (which is about the surest way of their being discovered, since such articles of clothing have long ceased to be the daily wear of the Indo-Trinidadian male). The lynching patrols are suspicious and demand that they disrobe—presumably, so that the patrols can examine their “horns”, in the style of the folktale. At this point, they know that they are lost, so they sing the chorus “take your dhoti and run”. The implication is that the lynchers will be able to identify them as Africans by their penises. This is confirmed by the resemblance between “dhoti” the article of clothing and “totee”, the Indo-Trinidadian folk word for the penis that the dhoti conceals.

Mc Gruff's mocking laughter here is extremely complex. First, the disguise, the dhoti, is, as we said, no disguise at all, since it is worn mainly by very old Indian men or on religious and ceremonial occasions. In the calypso tradition, the dhoti as a disguise for the African male who seeks to enter an Indian ceremony as an uninvited guest, was twice employed by Guyanese calypsonian King Fighter: in *Indian Wedding* and *Indian*

Party.^{xxxvii} In both cases the protagonist, after consuming massive quantities of roti and dhal, is discovered, disrobed and beaten within an inch of his life.

So the dhoti has never been a very effective mode of disguise to protect the much-scorned, much-feared and bold-faced Black Anansi male gatecrasher and threshold-crosser from the fearsome and self-affrighted anger of the Indian male, whose sacred space he has violated with his sub-untouchable presence. Moreover, the dhoti was an obvious and visible marker of racial/ethnic difference, and at one time, a much-ridiculed article of clothing among Blacks who in the tradition of “seasoning” famous in slave society, laughed at both the dhoti and the newcomer who wore it. One should, therefore, be immediately suspicious of the calypsonian’s intentions here. He may be invoking King Fighter’s protagonist of the embattled 1950’s in Guyana to explore a similarly embroiled racial landscape in the Trinidad of the 1990’s. Or he may be mocking at the Indo-Trinidadian Other via the comic misrepresentation of the dhoti as ridiculous article of clothing and marker of ethnic difference.

In *Caroni Bacchanal*, just as the dhoti covers and conceals the guilty-as-charged Black penis, the word “dhoti” covers and conceals the word “totee”. In both the literal and the metaphorical contexts, then, the disguise is inadequate. This calypso, employing—like Tallish’s *Water*, the earlier Sparrow’s *Congo Man* (1965) and David Rudder’s later *Ballad of Hulsie X* (1995)—the ambiguity of all deconstructive humour, simultaneously celebrates the imposed and stereotypical myth of Black male sexuality, and scornfully repudiates those who have resurrected the myth in order to fulfil their own political agenda. The laughter of Mc Gruff’s calypso, then, which so delighted Ms Bhaggan, conceals the complex fear and bitter rage of its nightmarish origins; makes light of its consciousness of the history of lynching whose macabre climax used to be the cutting off of the Black Penis in an attempt to arrest or appropriate a sexual potency which, though fictional, was simultaneously envied and feared, dreaded and desired.

There can be no doubt that Mc Gruff understands that the vigilante patrols are lynching gangs on the lookout for and at war against the Big Black Penis. The logic of the calypso’s narrative and the circumstances that engendered the vigilantes both suggest this. For if the Caroni rapists were masked from head to toe, virtually the only means of identification would have had to be their unsheathed penises. (One notes that the humiliation of Black American singer Michael Jackson, who was made to present his penis for photographing by the FBI, was also a current issue in 1994 calypsos and received the same grotesquely comic treatment as Mc Gruff accorded the Caroni lynchings. Jackson, Sheldon Nugent declared in *Free Willie* (1994), needed to learn how to keep “Willie”—another folk name for the penis—under strict control, rather than to “free Willie”. Here the grotesque was achieved in the contrast between the heartwarming innocence of the movie *Free Willie* whose theme-song was rendered by the Peter Pannish Jackson, and the gross sexual crime of which Jackson was being accused.

If Mc Gruff's mask was one of laughter, Cro Cro's was one of exaggerated violence. On the surface of things, *Respect the Law* reads like a near lunatic response to the November 1993 Butler Highway protest. Cro Cro, to the delight of a screaming Calypso Fiesta crowd, outlines the things he would have done to Bhaggan had she obstructed his freedom of movement:

Ah pay mih licence and you cyan tell me ah cyan pass
If ah was coming ah would surely lick down yuh mass.

And in stanza three:

You should be glad ah wasn't driving a truck sistah
You woulda end up San Fernando on the bumper.

Then in the final stanza, the climactic couplet is left unfinished, though it requires little imagination for the audience to find the appropriate rhyming word for "front":

Whether I was coming from the back or coming from in front
If I was coming you would have to breaks.

"Lick down", in the tradition of Sparrow's *Sixty Million Frenchmen* and Shorty/Baron's *He Lick She*, suggests oral sex. "Truck" and "bumper" are obvious and grotesque phallic images here, while other words with sexual/sexist innuendos are "coming" and "breaks" both of which imply orgasm. The anal and vaginal sex suggested in Tallish's pipe-borne water "in front and in she backyard" is repeated here with the reference to "coming from the back or coming in front." In other words, *Respect the Law* is as much an expression of sexual resentment at the Caroni vigilante activities of June as it is an expression of exaggerated rage at the later November protest demonstration. Cro Cro's aim is to demolish whatever platform Bhaggan had hoped to build for her own expanding political career, by unmasking her motives as "selfish and unfair" and her behaviour as "lawless, arrogant" and hostile to the public interest. In his chorus he poses four questions to the public:

Ah want to know if you really agree with Hulsie?
No! No! No!
Do you think she has respect for anybody?
No! No! No!
Do you think that this woman should run the country?
No! No! No!
Do you think that this was a great example publicly?
No! No! No!

Cro Cro's raw aggressiveness was well within the spirit of the time when verbal violence and uncouth insult had become a norm on Morgan Job's very popular 106FM talk show. It, however, evoked hostile criticism from a number of commentators, especially those who were willing to ignore the narrowly ethnic chauvinist platform of the mid-year Bhaggan and accept her as a potential and militant voice for all women; which was how she preferred to be read. Bhaggan herself, though she claimed not to have heard any of the calypsos about herself, seemed to have heard most of the three hundred others and was eloquent in her rejection of the 1994 crop of songs:

Isn't Calypso supposed to be social commentary, political satire, picong, humour etc...? For example, I have absolutely no problems being criticised but I do not consider open vulgarity, racism and blatant sexism as criticism. The calypsonians who used vulgarity to attack me merely demonstrated their lack of imagination, creativity, artistic ability, talent and a general bankruptcy of human values and human dignity. Their attacks have merely strengthened my resolve to speak out against the breakdown in our society and to work with citizens to rebuild Trinidad and Tobago.

...Calypso, therefore, is becoming a weapon and a form of violence against women. Isn't verbal and psychological abuse a form of violence? Indeed, violence against women is very much linked to the male's perception of the woman as a physical being, an object to own and control, an object of sexual gratification.

In addition to projecting the woman as a physical being, there is a feeling that assertive and vocal women must be dominated in bed, hence, the cry, "You need a man!" That is a pathetic response to women's search for equality and social justice.^{xxxviii}

This letter/statement/manifesto was published a week before she said that she hadn't listened to any of the calypsos attacking her. It is a powerful response, but it is also a response that decontextualises the so-called "Hulsie-bashing" calypsos, which were the calypsonians' responses to what they saw as the sexism, racism, social divisiveness and unleashed, uncontrolled civic violence of the Bhaggan-inspired and catalysed Caroni interlude of mid-1993. Curiously, she responds to them by calling them racist and sexist and classifying them as an extension of the violence against women against which she had been fighting. Nothing better illustrates the point that was made much earlier vis-à-vis the violent sadism of the measures recommended in *The Equaliser*: that in situations of extremity such as the ones presented to society by rape, murder and the battering of women, aggressors and victims, vindicators of racial groups, class or gender interests and antagonists who are perceived as attacking those interests, generally end up saying

similar things about each other and wearing the same faces or masks of self-righteousness and indignation.

Bhaggan's manifesto received approval from the Hindu Women's Organization who attacked Cro Cro's and Brother Marvin's songs on her behalf:

Soon Cro Cro may be eligible for a national award, for he has inspired many other calypsonians to sing in the same crude and vulgar fashion. Brother Marvin, apparently, has even surpassed him in obscenities and disrespect for women. Of course, since the brunt of the attack is for Hulsie Bhaggan that does not warrant responses from women's groups as she is a politician and, worse, an Indian...

Finally, to Cro Cro, the Mighty Anti-Indian, if your calypso tent was situated in a different part of Trinidad, the answer to your chorus may have been different.^{xxxix}

There are hints here that the Hindu Women's Organization felt itself excluded from the general forum of feminist discourse, such as it existed. What is, however, not so clear, is whether that organization had ever made much effort to move beyond the boundaries of specifically *Hindu* women's interests, to locate themselves in the wider context of gender issues. The rage of resentment against Bhaggan had arisen not because she was an Indian, but because she was then too narrow-minded to recognize that Caroni was not special but typical of the entire nation in the ordeal of crime and violence that it had been enduring. Police statistics on rape, as we saw, indicated that the extensive Central District had suffered thirteen rapes, in comparison with fifteen each for Port of Spain and South, sixteen for the Western District, twenty-four for the Northern District excluding Port of Spain, and seventeen for the Eastern District.^{xl} These statistics meant nothing to either Bhaggan or the Hindu Women's Organisation who remained focussed on what they considered to be the uniqueness of their own situation. This extended platform in which they now seemed to be concerned with all women, was a new thing arising, perhaps, from Bhaggan's need of a national platform after her repudiation by Panday over the Highway demonstration.

Not everyone was impressed by this shift of position. Bianca Hull, the 1993 Calypso Queen, was not. Her *Woman to Woman* expressed disappointment that a woman of Bhaggan's obvious ability and dedication had limited herself to the defence of only Central Trinidad women:

As one woman talking to a next woman
You defending some and not all women
Yes one woman writing to a next woman

Dou dou you can't fight crime and make distinction
 You could be young or old, plain or pretty
 Black or white, the thief don't show mercy
 So how you could only make a fuss
 'Bout the woman in Chaguanas
 Hulsie, who standing up for us?
 Woman getting kick and cuss from Toco to Icacos
 So you see
 That's why I find you should fight for we.

Bianca Hull also questioned Bhaggan's emphasis on pursuing the enemy from outside while she ignored the enemy within. Amidst the racial polemic of 1993 there had emerged moments of hard analysis. In one of these, Suren Capildeo, an attorney-at-law and a UNC Senator, had disclosed that "over 90 per cent of Hindu women who apply for legal aid for help in divorce proceedings do so because of wife-beating alcoholic husbands and battered children." Bianca Hull reminds Bhaggan:

The most set o' wrongs, Miss Hulsie, that we women face
 Come from men we know, Miss Hulsie, home in we own place
 But Mr Panday
 And three doctors say
 Leave it so, don't pass no law
 Or the men goh beat we some more.

Since there was little that women could expect from such male parliamentarians, they had to cling to Bhaggan despite her limitations, and harangue her, as Bianca Hull had undertaken to do, into recognizing that a more extensive platform was both necessary and possible.

Brother Marvin, not yet the bard of *Jahaji Bhai* (1996), sang his outrage against Bhaggan's declaration that Bosnia-type ethnic cleansing had been taking place in Caroni. In his calypso, *Miss Bhaggan*, the anger is not masked and the language is plain and direct and even brutally insulting as it echoes the rhetorical violence of the age. This rhetorical violence, perceptively diagnosed by Bhaggan as a "reaction to a sense of powerlessness in our society and in a world where women are fast emerging" was, however, in no way confined to insecure males or unimaginative calypsonians. Some women—witness dancehall artistes—had been quite accomplished in both the articulation and the performance of a kind of violence. Prominent politicians, ideologues with narrowly focussed commitments to race, ethnicity, religion, talk-show hosts of the early nineties, were among those who had from time to time employed either violent or strident rhetoric in making their own partisan cases or attempting to demolish the positions of their opponents.

Brother Marvin, of mixed African and Indian heritage via his Indian grandfather, and married to an Indian woman, saw in Bhaggan's partitioning of the country into Indian and non-Indian space, the antithesis of all that he understood the Trinidad national experience to mean. He read the Caroni interlude in the context of the "douglarisation debate" which had been going on at one level or another since the fifties, but had assumed almost absurd proportions during the eighties and nineties. This debate involved the nature of what had been changing and growing out of the conjugal, sexual and cultural interface of Afro-Creole and Indo-Creole societies of Trinidad. Marvin was himself the product of this interface, and was in addition, the father of "douglar" children. This is why he considered Bhaggan's unsubstantiated accusation of African males "obnoxious", "petty", "dotish" anti-black racism. If Bhaggan diagnosed the "Hulsie-bashing" calypsos to be the work of insecure males in quest of a dominance they could no longer exercise over women or their circumstances, Marvin diagnosed her racialization of the rape issue to be the result of an obsession with Black sexuality which expressed itself in what was on the surface a fear of douglarisation, and beneath the surface a desire for what she feared.

Marvin, like Cro Cro and Watchman, attempted an unmasking of Bhaggan's real motives during the Caroni interlude, pointing out that by scapegoating the African male she was simultaneously protecting the home-grown, Caroni-indigenous Indian criminal from the type of scrutiny that could well provide a truer context for understanding what was taking place in contemporary Caroni:

Racial harmony
 Is what we really want in this island
 But this dotish woman Hulsie Bhaggan
 Trying to destroy this lil nation
 As far as I see
 She using them people in Central as a tool
 That woman is divide and rule
 Only making she self a damn fool

Ah wonder if she remember the Poolool brothers
 And Boysie Singh
 Is so much like me they kill
 But niggers didn't talk 'bout ethnic cleansing.

Boysie Singh, fighter, fisherman, pirate, gangster, saga boy, contract killer, preacher and murderer of the forties and early fifties, was from St James, though his activities may have extended to Caroni. The Poolool brothers, on the other hand, were legendary Caroni gunmen. There were nine brothers and five sisters in this family.^{xii} Two of the nine brothers committed suicide to end a massive manhunt. They had been wanted for murder. Another brother was shot to death at a wedding. A fourth died in an accident. A fifth was, in February 1968, awaiting trial for murder. A sixth was serving a fourteen-year jail term

for shooting a policeman. A seventh, Moonan Poolool, was on the run among the canefields. He too was wanted for murder. “In his hands was a 16-bore shotgun, and around his neck, dangling from a piece of string was a bottle of phosphono—deadly poison.” Of the two remaining brothers, one was nine years old and under his mother’s protection, the other, married with three children, was trying to live honestly after having been acquitted of murder charges.

Normally no one would cite people such as Boysie Singh or the Poolools as representatives of their communities or ethnic groups. Marvin, however, does resurrect them to make the point that there is a rich tradition of criminality in Bhaggan’s constituency, the recognition of which might lead her to a more realistic interpretation of the current gangsterism that pervades that district. The Boodram clan is to the nineties what the Poolools were to the sixties; and the spate of revanchist crimes of 1993 needed to be related to the historical and current realities of indigenous Caroni crime. What Marvin is implying through the Poolool references is that the citizens of Central need to focus more on *the enemy within*. He concludes that Bhaggan and the other political leaders of Central are less interested in controlling crime than in:

... using these crimes
 To gain political mileage
 As leaders abusing their privilege
 Just to keep the Central fief in bondage.

He ends by asserting his right to free passage through any part of Trinidad and Tobago: that is, he resents and resists the ethnic partitioning of the country

I just hope Mr. Human Rights
 Remember my rights clearly
 Tell them people in Caroni
 Trinidad and Tobago is for all a we
 Ah see they wrote up “No Niggers After Six”
 ‘Cause they sharing licks
 Well, this nigger say we going anywhere
 Without fear, they better take care!
 You see, ah born here!

Collectively, the Hulsie calypsos of 1994 constituted an unmasking in which the retaliatory sexism of the calypsos was their least important element. This unmasking prepared the ground for Rudder’s *The Ballad of Hulsie X*, whose method of attack was ridicule, but whose origin was anger.^{xliii} *The Ballad of Hulsie X* is a subtle, succinct, funny and deadly encapsulation of the many issues that arose from the Caroni interlude, the Highway protest and their aftermath in 1994. This calypso is rendered against a mock-heroic parody of a heavy reggae bass-line similar to the one in *Java*, a song from the 1970’s, or the beat employed by Chalice in their *See Mi Ya* album. This bass-line

conjures up the background music of several Western films, including the Sergio Leone “Spaghetti Westerns” of the late sixties and early seventies. The bass-line is part of the song’s mockery, establishing the wild West atmosphere—the “Get-off-my-land” attitude—that pervaded Central Trinidad in the time of the vigilantes during the brief reign of “the Sugarbelt Queen”.

The title “Sugarbelt Queen” is at once an allusion to a beauty contest that Bhaggan nearly won years before and to her delusions about her support in the sugar belt, Panday’s fiefdom. Bhaggan’s campaign for visibility and power, unmasked by the 1994 Hulsie calypsos, is reduced in Rudder’s *Ballad of Hulsie X* to the play-acting of a Phagwah band. Her departure in 1994 from the party position on the Corporal Punishment Bill is reduced in Rudder’s *Ballad* to “she do a dollar wine on we party line.” She had in fact done more than that. She had actually voted with the PNM Government, in support of a “Bill to Amend the Corporal Punishment Act”. The official UNC position was articulated by attorney Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj whose mask those days was that of a “human rights advocate”. Maharaj, all tenderness of heart, quoted several international reports all arguing that corporal punishment was “barbaric, inhumane and intolerable in any human society”. Maharaj also felt that the population at large needed to be consulted on the issue and asked:

Do we in 1994 consider that the problems in our society must be solved by the use of State violence? Do we consider that the example we accept as a State is to inflict violence? What message do we send to the other members of the society that our problems cannot be dealt with without the infliction of violence?^{xliii}

In reply, Bhaggan argued that “the scales of justice are tipped in favour of the criminal and the bandit.” Citing two current cases—the murder of a young mother and her baby and the rape of a two-year-old infant—she posed these questions to party whip Ramesh Maharaj and the House: “Do you speak about the human rights of those persons? What about the rights of the persons who were brutalised, battered and killed?”^{xliv} This, then, is what Rudder terms Bhaggan’s “dollar wine on the party-line”, the direct public challenge of its fake human rights position. Unmasked herself, Bhaggan had now become a dedicated unmasker of the party’s patriarchy. Rudder’s *Ballad of Hulsie X*, as full of politico-sexual innuendo as any of the other calypsos discussed, is a reductively comic allegory of her tragic encounter with a sick-hearted “Manday” and his side-kicks Wade and Ram.

Bhaggan, listening no doubt to Bianca Hull’s entreaty that she become a crusader for all oppressed women in a Parliament dominated by males who were indifferent to women’s issues, attempted in 1994 to create an independent base out of the fragile and fickle bourgeois-feminist platform. Her voice—reduced to a sing-song whine in Rudder’s calypso—joined the crescendo of voices calling for violent retribution, when in July 1994

two light-skinned young middle-class mothers of Westmoorings were raped and murdered by a teenager of mixed race and an Indo-Trinidadian young adult. Confronted with the demands of the white and off-white elite of the Western Peninsula for justice, the Manning Government hastened into the Glen Ashby hanging. Bourgeois rage and bourgeois hysteria were not things to be trifled with. The PNM knew it then; Bhaggan recognised it immediately; the post-1995 Panday Government also understood it.

What Rudder characterised as Hulsie X's "dollar wine" was her mid-1994 movement toward becoming a voice for the monied class of the Western Peninsula. Toward the end of the *Ballad of Hulsie X*, Hulsie X's whining voice joins itself to the narrator and chorus in a call to the French Creoles and the Westmoorings bourgeoisie to join the residents of Hulsie's heartland, the good folk of Penal, Couva, Chaguanas and even the newly discovered Laventille in the Hulsie X dollar wine. Even the silent, bitter "Manday" is invited to bestir his ancient, paralysed bones and "go down, do the Hulsie." The "dance" becomes Rudder's way of representing and ridiculing the distinctive Hulsie style of political performance. She is the Indian woman "breaking away" from all patriarchies via histrionic melodramas of her own invention. She thus creates history in Rudder's "strange land" and passes into legend, folklore and the immortality of the ballad that bears her name, even as she loses her moorings in Panday's UNC and passes out—perhaps temporarily—of national politics.

Balance of terror

Both the Bhaggan-inspired Caroni interlude (1993) and the Westmoorings rape-murders (1994) served to intensify the nation's focus on violent crime, especially crimes against women. Nineteen ninety-two with its 106 homicides had been described as a "record year for murders", most of which were "drug-related".^{xlv} Nineteen ninety-three was worse. Nineteen ninety-four, with 29 murders in the first six weeks and 55 by mid-April,^{xlvi} ended just as it had begun with murders occurring every day of its last fortnight. Nineteen ninety-four had started with thirteen murders in its first eleven days, including that of one man whose head and arm were discovered in a garbage bag on the Beetham Estate rubbish dump, while the body lay behind a house in Laventille; that of a sixty-five-year-old woman, who was raped, murdered and flung into a ravine at Aripo; and the murder of four members of an Indo-Trinidadian Williamsville family who were shot in the head by a gang whose devout leader had built a mandir on the state-owned lands where, as a squatter, he kept his extensive drug-financed estate. A bitter irony, surely, for Bhaggan to swallow; the sort of irony, indeed, that would have encouraged her to broaden the basis of her campaign against crime. Nineteen ninety-four ended with the 30th of December rape and murder of a young woman on her way home from a church dinner.

The nation, however, discovered good reason for rejoicing in the assurance given by Russell Huggins that crime would soon become a thing of the past; in his plan to equip the Police Service with bicycles and so facilitate neighbourhood patrols; and in Gordon Draper's soothing advice that the spate of murders in December was no cause for alarm since most of them seemed to have been crimes of passion. Thus assured and without

alarm, the nation stumbled into 1995 to be confronted with the now normal fiesta of chopped-up cadavers, one of which was discovered headless in the Dibe hills. Driven to the edge of darkness by such extremities of violence, the public began to call for its version of an “Equaliser”. For some, the Equaliser should take the form of a Police Death Squad; others joined the campaign to resume hanging. There were, as we have seen, a few calypsonians in this group. Retired Senior Magistrate and Independent Senator Carol Mahadeo recommended in the Senate a number of modest proposals, to address what she described as “*an extreme situation*”.^{xlvii} Among her recommendations were the digging out of criminals’ eyes and the cutting out of their tongues, the cutting off of hands and public floggings in Woodford Square. She had been the victim of a public mugging in the Central Market in October 1993 (1993 again) when a well-dressed young man had stuck a knife to her neck and ordered her to “pass it [her handbag] up fast.”

Senators Everard Dean, the Reverend Daniel Teelucksingh, a Presbyterian, and the Reverend Dr. Eric St Cyr, a Pentecostalist, supported the Corporal Punishment Amendment Bill with various levels of enthusiasm or sadness as a desperate attempt to remedy a desperate situation.^{xlviii} National Security Minister Russell Huggins, who introduced the Bill, when questioned about his position re the flogging of women, declared that while it was not usual to impose such sentences on women, a criminal was a criminal and there should be no gender discrimination in this matter.^{xlix}

One suggestion was that the Protective Services themselves needed to be cleansed before the society could think of introducing and enacting more stringent laws against crime. To this end, Wayne Brown suggested that the Scotland Yard Report be acted upon and the one hundred policemen named in the report suspended; that deficient judges and magistrates should likewise be suspended; the DEA called in and invested with the necessary authority and a separate court established to deal with violent crimes.¹

Replying to Wayne Brown, Joseph Toney, an attorney-at-law and former Minister of National Security in the NAR Government, suggested a few measures of his own: the dismissal of Huggins, the current Minister of National Security; the expansion and empowerment of the Police Service Commission; the purchase of necessary equipment and tools to enable the Police to function efficiently; the encouragement of the public to support the Police in their efforts to control crime; morale building campaigns to deepen police commitment to the ideals of the Service^{li}

Other suggestions came from the Full Gospel Movement, who viewed the increase of crime locally and internationally as a sign of the perilous times of the last days, “when men will love only themselves, and will be disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unforgiving, covetous, fierce.”^{lii} Increased crime, the culture of drugs and guns, were the result of the increased desperate activity of Satan who, in anticipation of the end of his reign on earth was seeking to corrupt as many of God’s children as he could. Phenomena such as family breakdown, crass yearning after material things, narcissism,

compulsive violence and drug addiction were Satan's methods for gaining control of the hearts, minds and souls of God's children. What was needed therefore, in the words of the Rev. Carlyle Chankersingh of the Faith Centre in San Fernando, was "the transformation of human life based on the changing of the heart"; a task, he said, that required the services of the Full Gospel Church, since neither the Protective Services nor the Government had the solution.^{liii}

Three factors emerge from this overview of the phenomenon of violent crime in the nineties. The first is the prevalence and extremity of inter-personal violence of all kinds: sexual, domestic, verbal, emotional and mental. These categories of violence were being continually enacted in a living theatre of man-to-man, man-to-woman, woman-to-man, woman-to-woman, parent-to-child, child-to-adult, student-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, parent-to-teacher situations.

The second factor is the relationship between these categories of violence, each of which is but a symptom of a wider culture of violence that permeates race, colour, class and the vestigial traces of caste. So, while the original focus of this paper was the question of responses to the extremity of violence against women, the focus quite naturally shifted to the general phenomenon of inter-personal violence of which violence against women is but a part. The suggested solutions to the scourges of rape and battering in Singing Sandra's *The Equaliser* are no different, essentially, from the sorts of remedies suggested by Independent Senator Carol Mahadeo and numerous others as means of curbing all categories of violent crime. The ethic behind both sets of solutions is the simple, primal one that violence can only be controlled or overcome by greater violence.

When the world was divided into two ideological blocs, Communist and "Free", with both violently militaristic and imperialistic in their attitude toward the rest of the world, there used to be a beautifully euphemistic phrase that summed up the violence and mayhem that both imperialisms inflicted on the rest of the world while preserving peace and stability between themselves. They called this equilibrium that was based on near equal military might, "a balance of terror". Both *The Equaliser* and the list of dire punishments that has emerged in public discourse are built on that same basic principle of the need for a balance of terror between criminal and victim. Ironically, though, nothing better illustrates the relationship between categories of violence than the ethic of a balance of terror, which inevitably converts oppressor and oppressed into monstrous doubles of each other, wearing the same mask of violence. Balance of terror has failed on the macrocosmic level to make the world a more peaceful place, and will undoubtedly fail on the microcosmic or domestic level to bring a greater measure of harmony to inter-personal relations.

The third outstanding factor of the nineties was the society's apparent impotence in the face of the rising tide of crime and violence. The legalised and recriminatory violence of the State and its officers of law seems to be a mirror image of the illegal violence of the

criminal offender but, despite the assurances of a diminished crime rate that each political regime dutifully offered the public, the tide of violence kept steadily rising, the cutlass having, between the mid- and late-nineties, made an impressive comeback in the midst of the gun and drug culture. It is out of such extremes of impotence and paralysis that desperate measures tend to be recommended. Singing Sandra's *The Equaliser* with its catalogue of sadistic punishments is the product of the same loss of faith in the Law and the protective services as Bhaggan's Caroni interlude and Carol Mahadeo's eye-gouging, tongue-cutting and hand-amputating proposals. Desperate measures for desperate times.

Almost every day the horror stories of rape, beatings and murder continue, inching society ever closer to numb acceptance of the inevitability of the Equaliser. Early in this essay, I quoted Suzanna Clarke who, reacting to the horror of 420 rapes reported in ten months of 1997, recommended castration as her "irrational solution" to the problem. In the midst of describing what she meant to achieve with her pliers, knife and length of two-inch condom-sheathed pipe, she recognised the uselessness of the Equaliser's fantasy of revenge:

We can write hundreds of stories, contribute thousands of articles and castrate dozens of men in the Promenade, but it won't mean a thing. Until men see women as their equals, human beings deserving respect, things will not change. Men must begin to see women as individuals, with lives, dreams, aspirations...^{liv}

The problem as diagnosed here is one of the heart and vision. *The Equaliser* begins with the conviction that no amount of pleading or moral suasion has ever made or will ever make a difference to the hardness of men's hearts or the blindness of their eyes. It then declares a new testament of retributive violence, a balance of terror to fill the interim between a desperate present and a future that is likely to be as fraught with extremity. But the trap of equal violence has always transformed the victim into a protagonist who wears the same face as the thing "equalised". In the end the struggle has to be relocated in the theatre of the human heart and the eye must see beyond the perspective of a balance of terror.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁱ Statistics taken from Ira Mathur, *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday November 5, 1998.
- ⁱⁱ Suzanna Clarke, “Advice to Rapists: Pump Some Iron Instead”, *Vox Magazine, Sunday Express*, November 23, 1997.
- ⁱⁱⁱ (No author indicated) “Brand Them Like Animals”, *Express*, Tuesday November 18, 1997.
- ^{iv} Suzanna Clarke, “Advice to Rapists: Pump Some Iron Instead”, *Vox Magazine, Sunday Express*, November 23, 1997.
- ^v Yvonne Baboolal, “Attack at Morvant Junction Led to ‘Equaliser’: No Place for Women’s Issues in Monarch Finals?”, *Sunday Mirror*, March 8, 1988, 3.
- ^{vi} Yvonne Baboolal, *ibid.*
- ^{vii} Rudolph Ottley, *Women in Calypso I*, (Port of Spain, self-published, 1992) 12.
- ^{viii} Rudolph Ottley, *ibid.*, 140.
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No Money No Love: Representations of the Social Impact of Poverty in Media, Popular and Literary Discourse

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Abstract

Within a global scenario that increasingly measures the worth and accomplishment of human persons, communities and nations in material terms, Caribbean societies continue to grapple with legacies of entrenched poverty and its intergenerational transmission. The challenge remains of transcending a brutal history of enforced and unjust labour systems, racialized inequities, multiple diasporas, structural adjustment and globalizing impulses. Moreover, traditional avenues of poverty alleviation and upward mobility, including education leading to professional careers, which undergirded the birthing of the new nations of the archipelago, are today proving increasingly distant or even unattainable for a widening cross-section of youths.

This paper explores extracts of literary, popular and media discourses for insights into the far-reaching social consequences of poverty, its intergenerational impact and prospects for alleviation. It examines poverty's differential impact as dependent on the age, gender and social locations of its victim. The paper zeroes in on the entrenchment and institutionalization of poverty and its impact on intimate and familial relations. It also identifies the points at which Caribbean discourses, in the process of defining a place and a way to be human, are working towards more affirmative measures of the worth of persons and societies.

Key words: social impact of poverty, Mighty Sparrow; Hurricane Stories, University of Hunger, media discourses on poverty, poverty and gender violence.

Introduction

Within a global scenario that increasingly measures the worth and accomplishment of human persons, communities and nations in material terms, Caribbean societies continue to grapple with legacies of entrenched poverty and its intergenerational transmission. The challenge remains of how to transcend a brutal history of enforced and unjust labour systems, racialized inequities, secondary migrations, natural disasters, structural adjustment and globalizing impulses. Moreover, traditional avenues of poverty alleviation and upward mobility, including education leading to professional careers, which undergirded the birthing of the new nations of the archipelago, are today proving increasingly distant or even unattainable for a widening cross section of youths.

The issue of defining poverty is as complex as designing and implementing measures for its alleviation. The statistical evidence provides a useful though severely limited way of knowing. The imperative to know poverty in greater measure in order to design appropriate interventions has been heightened given global interconnectedness in trade, finance, health, migration, drugs, crime, and war. The 2008 riots triggered around the globe by increases in food and fuel prices are a case in point that demonstrates the connection between poverty and peace. President of the World Bank Group, James Wolfensohn, addressing the 2000 Conference on World Poverty and Development: A Challenge for the Private Sector, argues as follows:

... the issue of poverty is no longer an issue that you can consider either within the developing world where there is poverty or the developed world looking out to the developing world. You have to consider it as an integral issue. And it is an issue not just of equity and social justice and morality. It really is an issue of peace, because it is unlikely that you will have stability in a world of inequity. People who have nothing, or have little, or no place to go or no opportunity, react like you or I would react. You want to protect your kids. You want to create a life...The issue is not just money. The issue is self-esteem. The issue is wanting a better life for your kids; a household free of domestic violence; protection against crime; security and opportunity. (www.washingtonspeakers.com)

The Caribbean is no stranger to this complex of issues. The island societies spawned by the forces of early capitalism and globalization demonstrate the unhappy outcome of the commoditization of the human. The Caribbean's formative labour migrations have been entrenched in racism and structural inequities. Indeed, to ensure the plantation societies' operation with the minimum of disruption, it proved necessary not only to draw the blood, sweat and tears of the labouring populations, but also to erode their histories, cultural moorings and self-esteem. Despite the success of Caribbean societies in creating viable social orders in the aftermath of this originary trauma, the legacies of these inauspicious beginnings underlie attempts at poverty alleviation even until today.

In Part One, “No Money, No Love” explores extracts of popular and media discourses to garner insights into the far-reaching social consequences of poverty and their correlation to gender-based abuse. In Part Two, it examines literary selections which represent the social impact of poverty in broad structural terms. The paper examines poverty’s differential impact as dependent on the age, gender and social locations of its victim, its intergenerational impact and prospects for alleviation. The analyses zero in on the entrenchment and institutionalization of poverty and its impact on intimate and familial relations. It also identifies the points at which Caribbean writing and popular expressions, in the process of defining a place and a way to be human, are working towards more affirmative measures of the worth of persons and societies. It is to literary expressions that the paper turns to examine the subjective experience—the sights, sounds, mood and tincture of poverty; it explores evocations of the intersection of gender and poverty. In other words, do men and women experience and interface with poverty differently? What is the correlation between poverty and impoverished social relations and poverty’s close henchmen—hunger, drug abuse, crime, underdevelopment and despair?

Poverty and Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary Media Discourse

The initial focus will be on the manner in which poverty cycles overlap with gender norms and assumptions to produce the all too common domestic disasters that are featured in newspaper reports almost daily. This is significant given the extent to which attitudes and orientations to these issues are in turn constructed in discourse. Media discourse is both mimetic and paradigmatic as it simultaneously shapes and reflects world knowledge. Societal and institutional perspectives exist in dynamic interplay with the reporter’s individual perspective. Readers in turn filter the reports through their own world views and social and psychological perspectives which are shaped by the body of knowledge, attitude and feeling they bring to the table. Analysis of media discourse yields significant insights into representational and ideological politics, because, as indicated in *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse*: “the complex representation of events and circumstance by different media and government agencies can often shroud events and motivations in the perspective of their agents, complicating and distorting an already complex picture.” (Morgan and Youssef 2006, 22)

The *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper, the nation’s oldest newspaper with the finest reputation for quality press, in its September 16, 2008 edition, carried a report about what has now become a typical case of gender-based violence. The case was given front page billing. In recent years there has been a growing trend in the *Guardian* towards tabloid format both in terms of the size of what had previously been a broadsheet and style of reporting. The September 16 report follows what has now become a generic style of lurid photos of female victims of abuse, direct quotations from victims, family and neighbour eyewitnesses giving details concerning crimes committed, with a strong focus on the basis of frustration of the assailant.

The report pictures two battered women in hospital garb. The headline reads:

Hungry man runs Amok

*Stabs lover, family
Torches house
Kills self. (Guardian 1)*

The front page headline is reflective of the highlight of the most significant news item of the day. It focalizes the event and creates a filter through which it will be read. Headlines and large photographs are displayed prominently to catch the eye of early commuters trapped daily in extensive traffic jams. In this instance, despite the pain and anguish inscribed on the faces of the women overlaid on their severe injuries, the headline which plays on the adage a hungry man is an angry man implies a measure of justification for this extreme act of violence. There is no censure or blame attributed to the “justifiably” angry man who throws a concrete sink on his common-law wife and a brick on her mother (*Guardian*, 3) and subsequently sets the home on fire. The grouping of the elements in the front page headline implies his ownership of the property; however, given the fact that there is no mention of the lover and her mother and sisters leaving the premises in order to effect the “clean break”, the strong possibility is that the house belongs to one of the women of the family.

The page 3 stories within written by two female journalists strengthen this range of assumptions. The page 3 story, headlined *Man Found Dead after Burning Valencia House*, continues to imply a measure of justification for the assailant:

*Determined to hold on, 24-year-old Jamel Sebastian refused to end his relationship with his common law wife Alisha Wellington.
But when the 21-year-old woman tried to make a clean break, Sebastian became enraged and went on a stabbing spree...(3)*

The stabbing spree included the lover, her sister (aged 25) and her mother (aged 43). The account casts the assailant as a man full of determination, steadfastness, even fidelity and commitment to a long-term love relationship. His admirable determination to hold on is placed in opposition to his common-law wife’s desire for a clean break. Diction and sentence structure work to impute blame and alleviate responsibility. The assailant is nowhere reported as one who attempts mass murder and succeeds in inflicting grievous bodily harm on three women and two children, all of whom were hospitalized for their injuries.

Even more bizarre elements appear in the reported interview with the mother. Rendered immobile in her hospital bed by the severe injuries, she offers apparent justification for the assailant based on commonly held assumptions in relation to a man’s rights in his home, even while stating of her severely burnt daughter: “*She is in the ICU right now. She is real bloated. She is unable to speak.*” The mother nevertheless reportedly directs all of her implied and stated criticism at her own daughter in extremely simplistic terms which are supportive of the hungry man–angry man connection:

*I heard him complain that he wasn’t getting any food cooked...
how could a man feel when he comes home from work and nothing is there to eat?*

When I had a man, I used to come home and cook and clean and do things for him.”

(Guardian, September 16, 2008, 2)

The report implies the mother’s distant, superficial knowledge of a disastrous scenario that was unfolding in a home in which she was co-resident with the daughter and her lover. Moreover, the mother who proffers her own appropriate behaviour (when she had a man) as exemplary, appears well schooled in the expectations and mores of common law unions. She has imbibed, and uses to imply judgment of her own daughter, a range of tacit though widely held assumptions about the privileges that a man should enjoy in his home and his right to do violence, should he not receive his due.

On what basis can we tie this all too common case to the social impacts of poverty. If the causative impact of poverty on the acts of violence in this scenario is difficult to discern from the flattened account which is inherent to newspaper reporting, the post-disaster outcome of poverty is clearly displayed on the same page, so to speak. The indicators are all present: the squalor of the incomplete, windowless, unpainted home pictured in the newspaper; the dependency of the victims on state services which do not work and which compound the suffering and neglect. In a small, oil-rich nation, in which state authorities are currently indulging an obsessive focus on large-scale ostentatious projects in the pursuit of developed country status, the poor are not only abused and disadvantaged within their domestic circumstances, but in seeking to cope with familial crises, they are oppressed and abused by the system. The newspaper reports a layering and multiplication of traumas. The Sangre Grande police did not respond because of lack of vehicles. A neighbour who walked to the police station to report the crime is quoted as saying: “But the police tell me to go home and sleep because they said they have no vehicles.” (3) Who can tell whether this is pure callousness or the frustration of officers who lack the resources to do a high-risk job? The Sangre Grande Fire Station was without a vehicle to send to the blaze. The Sangre Grande Hospital kept the injured women long hours awaiting medical attention. Thankfully, at the end of the extended period, this hospital had beds to receive them.

Too many cases of gender-based violence only become significant after the most heinous acts of brutality against the self and the other are perpetrated. When they do come to public attention based invariably on media reporting, these reports—written by two female journalists in this instance—speak reams based on what is not said. There was no mention of the violent tendencies of the young male, only of his faithful persistence. The former was not perceived as a salient issue. There was no attempt at an explanation for the woman’s desire to separate from the potentially violent mate. There was no attempt to delve beyond the most superficial of explanations for the crisis. No connection was made between the plight of the abused women and their ongoing abuse suffered at the hand of all the state representatives from which they had a right, as citizens, to expect support and service—the police, the fire services, the hospital. Neither was there any mention of the undervaluing of community, the impotence of the neighbour who sought to assist by walking to the police station to seek help (the implication being that telephone services were not available). The impoverished national becomes in effect a second-class citizen

who is constrained to live with, or in extreme cases to die because of, the outworking of inequitable distribution of the resources of the national coffers.

When you try to caress her, she will tell you' "Stop"
I can't carry love in the Chinee shop"
 —Growling Tiger "Money is King" (1935).

This contemporary crisis can be measured against countless similar tragedies that have played themselves out on the national stage since the beginning of the last century. Indeed, male–female violent conflict of every imaginable shape and form has occupied a prominent place in the Trinidadian imaginary. Since the 1930s, such conflict has been a constant theme of calypsos whose bards are seen as the people’s philosophers offering profound insights into social conditions, while speaking the language and reflecting the world view of the common man. The values presented in calypsos represent the views of the songwriters and performers, yet they present to the broader population an opportunity to negotiate a stance and formulate a value system in relation to what validly constitutes a positive quality of life and society. And these notions are constantly being constructed and reinvented. Gender critic Patricia Mohammed argues for the power of calypso critique to unwrap a complex process by which identities—national, cultural, ethnic, class and particularly gender—are cumulatively being fashioned. (Mohammed 2003, 130) V.S. Naipaul, who has indicated that it is only in calypso that the “Trinidadian touches reality” (Naipaul 1962, 58), structures his urban vignettes on the mock epic search for significance on Miguel Street, Port of Spain around a series of popular calypsos of the 1940s, the majority of which focused on chaotic gender relations (Naipaul 1959). And Gordon Rohlehr writing on “Images of Men and Women in the 1930s Calypsos” argues that “We are never far away from the context of hunger, unemployment, economic depression, worker militancy, desperation, struggle and sheer survivalism, out of which the fictions of the thirties were shaped.” According to Rohlehr the notion that “one’s domestic and marital relationship depends on money” emerges as “a cardinal truth” for calypsonians and the theme of “no money no love” has been recurrent in “Calypsos from the thirties to fairly recent times.” (Rohlehr 1988, 238)

The social context is that the Eurocentric Victorian ideology of family with its male breadwinner–female homemaker model, though patently unsuited for Caribbean gender relations, nevertheless sets up the expectation that men should provide for their women whether or not they were capable of so doing. This ideology was based on the ideal of conjugal union defined according to Christine Barrow as “marriages—legally and religiously sanctioned, co-resident, permanent and based on love and togetherness” with “distinct but complementary” male and female roles. The man inhabited the public domain as wage earner and discipliner and trainer of the children, while the woman’s place was in the home. (Barrow 1999, 459) Violence was one outcome of the spectacular failure of this model for Caribbean gender relations. Burdened by unrealistic expectations and bereft of skills, education, jobs and money, men were forced to face the humiliation of desertion by their women who opted for prosperous partners:

Relationships were based on the necessity for food, and hunger was a reality graphically portrayed in several songs. Hunger was evidence that the male provider could not adequately provide; that the bourgeoisie ideal of the household or family wage earned exclusively had not been attained. Hunger brought deep shame and was wherever possible concealed and denied.” (Rohlehr, 242)

The 1930 calypsos identified by Rohlehr focused on the male dilemma—his pain, anguish, sense of being used, despair and hopelessness at his incapacity to provide. Rohlehr’s exhaustive study of the output of the 1930s considers some 200-odd calypsos and supports the conclusion but not the cause posited by J. D. Elder in relation to over fifty years of calypsos: “Many calypsos were male rationalizations of felt inadequacies, or served as therapy via wish-fulfilment.” Conversely, Rohlehr points to male-female conflict as being rooted not in the Oedipus complex but in the “logical product of the context of survivalism in which both men and women were placed.” (306)

The most famous calypso on the theme was composed and sung by the Mighty Sparrow.ⁱ The conflicting vantage points expressed in this and the others of its genre clearly articulate the differential gender perspectives in the far from subtle negotiations in relation to food, money, sex and romantic and marital unions. Given the context of a long history of male self-aggrandizement and ego retrieval in the calypsos on this topic, Sparrow offers a relatively straightforward composition in *No Money, No Love* with an implied focus on the perspective, action and agency of the female and the impotence of the male that leads him to resort to violence.ⁱⁱ Significantly, the calypso holds love to be a constant. Down and out Johnny loves Ivy and Ivy loves Johnny greatly, but since he is without resources to supply her with the basic life’s necessities of food and housing, she has made arrangements to leaves him for a better provider, arguing:

We cyar love without money
 We cyar make love on hungry belly
 Johnny you'll be the only one I'm dreaming of
 You're my turtle dove
 But no money no love

The issue here is currency. Love and sex are the currency that Ivy brings to the relationship. In exchange, Johnny is expected to provide her with shelter, food and other material provisions. In the ruthlessly pragmatic scenario, there is no room for him to renege on his part of the exchange, so much so that she threatens police intervention if he seeks to detain her. Through the male-oriented calypsonian’s perspective, the woman is portrayed as possessing agency to fight back against debilitating constraints, decision-making capacity, and a voice to speak. Fourteen lines of the calypso are in the voice of the narrator, while 25 lines including the catchy chorus are dedicated to Ivy’s direct speech. The chorus is her definite and memorable statement on the matter while we are told indirectly and mockingly in relation to Johnny: “If you hear how he plead with she to get she to understand.” Outside of personal power, Ivy is portrayed as having power to access the intervention of state authorities. It is as if the poverty of the male has also

robbed him of all of the emblems of agency and power. Robbed of voice and capacity to reason persuasively, his avenue of first resort is to beg and his second and final resort is to beat.

Johnny nearly killed she with blows
 Poor Ivy bawl like a cow
 Rip up she wig and he tear down she clothes
 The South man ain't want she now
 Oh, Lord, what a fight
 They roll until broad daylight
 Charlotte Street was hot that night
 She get some good lick but she let go kick and some bite

The violence that ensues is constructed as rooted in his extreme need and desperation. Surveying the scene and imparting filters for its interpretation is the calypsonian acting as the voyeur and interpreter of the interaction and as the commentator who voices the collectivity's judgment on the values of this social interaction. What are these values? Love is commoditized. There is no assumption in the calypso of the woman's capacity to go out and earn a living except in this risky form of commodity exchange. The long history of women working, "making do" and often single-handedly successfully supporting the family is not honoured in calypsos of this thematic focus; neither does the imperative to feed clothe and educate their offspring. A stark focus is maintained on the couple. The male response to female agency and self worth is to damage the woman's value in the commodity exchange. Johnny unmasks the basis of Ivy's beauty as false accretions of wigs and clothing. Ivy is stripped naked. Blows and bruises further rob her desirability and render her as impotent as he is to effect change in her circumstances.

A lengthy tradition of calypsos of this nature and the widespread popularization of these and similar sentiments are the constitutive, ubiquitous, circling discourses which surface in the 2008 media reports and continue with all the power of discourse to shape lengthy, meandering trajectories of violence. Little wonder that when the female calypsonians enter into voice, they sound a very different note. The innocuous call is to flight. In 1979, Singing Francine counsels women to respond to violence with flight: The refrain goes: "Dog does run away/Cat does run away/Child does runaway when you treating them bad/Woman put two wheels on your heels/You should run away too." This evolves a decade and a half later into a strident call to vigilante justice and castration in response to violence, rape and incest. As Rohlehr explains in his critical commentary on the socio-cultural conditions within which Singing Sandra offered the composition "The Equaliser" in 1993, gender-based and other forms of violence had by then become so gross and gratuitous that the female calypsonian offers a far more terrifying alternative—for women to come out to equalise.ⁱⁱⁱ

Poverty and Hunger

While media reportage and popular cultural expressions yield insight into the outworkings of poverty within diverse social contexts, it is to literary expressions that this

enquiry will turn to understand the mood, taste, feel and tincture of poverty. Significantly media and popular cultural expressions focus on the practicalities of unemployment, food acquisition and gender-based violence, while the literary expressions produced by the male and female writers explored below address questions of the universality of poverty as ubiquitous and as the consequence of the sudden intervention of natural disaster.

Martin Carter's *University of Hunger* (1954) subsumes the specificity of the Caribbean social and political conditions and particularly his deep-rooted ongoing concern with the injustices perpetrated by the Burnham regime in Guyana into an elegiac exploration of poverty and hunger as endemic to the human condition.^{iv} Carter in descriptions of the traumatizing impact of poverty on individuals and communities is testing the boundaries of language by layering an array of rhetorical devices to give voice to the indescribable. In this sense, the narrative strategy mirrors the grim reality of poverty itself which layers impact upon impact until its victims teeter on the brink of loss of meaning. In this exploration, Carter does not lay emphasis on social and historical contexts. Note the elliptical nature of his allusion to the journey of enslaved Africans near the end of the poem, which reads "is they who heard the shell blow and the iron clang" (Carter 2006, 223) and connects the impoverished travellers to the enforced migration in chains from the villages where they were forcibly conscripted to the coastal slave holding bays; and from thence to the new world and beyond.

Carter's poem is rich in conveying the subjective experiences of poverty which propel a quest—the long long march of man in search of a better life. The University of Hunger—the dominant metaphor—speaks of a stringent institute of higher learning which schools men in gnawing adversities of the human condition—starvation, lack, vulnerability and frailty. The densely packed proliferation of meanings is illustrated in the phrase "twin bars of hunger mark their metal brows." (222) The metal brows represent the countenance of persons whose adversities have etched themselves on their permanently toughened and lined visages. The bars on the faces also convey the agony of souls imprisoned within bodies that are hungry for food, but more fundamentally for rest, order, beauty, creativity, purpose and self-esteem. All of these aspirations are held captive to that most basic, but not the most significant, of human needs.

The poor are characterized by a series of images of diminishment and debasement. Their stature on the landscape is compromised:

is the dark one
 the half sunken in the land
 is they who had no voice in the emptiness
 in the unbelievable
 in the shadowless (222).

The poor have no voice in the land, no stature and no social presence. Their ultimate lack of presence and substantiality is reflected in their shadowlessness. The misery and impotence becomes the impetus for migrations. But the multiple migrations do not necessarily bring relief. Migration in time positions them between the mocking twin

seasons of parching drought and flood, which represent threat to food supply, shelter and livelihood. Migration in space lifts them from the rural desolation of “broken chimneys, brown trash huts and jagged mounds of iron” to the urban landscape with its promise represented by the “moon like the big coin in the sky.” Yet the urban ghetto brings its own brand of woe—impoverished living conditions, overcrowding and lack of privacy such that “men’s huts are fused in misery.” (222) Here again, Carter deploys the metonymic transfer between the physical state of the living quarters and the socio-psychological and psychic state of persons huddled within such abject living conditions. Pushing the boundaries of meaning, he deploys metalepsis, that is, the combination of multiple figures of speech:

The long street of night move up and down
 baring the thighs of a woman
 and the cavern of generation (222).

Gender relations in this male-authored evocation are not explicitly adversarial because universalized victims of poverty are not gendered. Males and females are equally victimized by poverty, yet not equally susceptible. The commodization of sexuality brings enhanced vulnerability to the women and their offspring. Darkness personified as the long street of night is itself moving in search of empty release in loveless intimacies. The thighs of women by virtue of contiguity to the sexual organs is a metonym for sexual intercourse. The cavern which connotes a hollow cradling darkness becomes the birthing chamber of a new generation. The woman herself becomes a terrain which the streets of night penetrate, to produce children of darkness who are condemned in their own generations to the long march of man “the terror and the time”. (222) Arguably the woman, as opposed to the man, carries the anguish of her children’s migrations, poverties and failed quests within the bloodstream of genealogy.

The elegiac sweep of the poem is emphasized by the use of initial rhyme and particularly the persistent repetition of “is” as if in response to the question “what is the university of hunger?”:

is the university of hunger the wide waste
 is the pilgrimage of man the long march
 ...is air dust and the long distance of memory
 is the hour of rain when sleepless toads are silent
 is broken chimneys smokeless in the wind
 is brown trash huts and jagged mounds of rain.

Of the 54 lines of the poem, 17 begin with “is”. The experience of extreme poverty tinges one’s inhabitation of space time and even “the long distance of memory”. The poet implies not only that it is impossible to escape poverty by travelling from one place to the other, it is impossible for the family of man to escape poverty by travelling from one time to another; from one generation to the other. Barbara Lalla in her careful reading of conceptual perspectives on time in this poem argues that the *University of Hunger* rewrites “history as incomplete, progressive and current—unbounded action that

perpetuates the past in the present, and iterative action ... that unlocks closure... This is the big picture—vast landscape and seascape, vast movements of people over geographical space, irrational suffering of cosmic dimensions” (113). Poverty takes on the quality of a haunting trauma because notwithstanding its ubiquitous meandering imprint throughout the land, it remains elusive, horrific and amorphous. Hence, there is a dense layering and intermingling of its causes and effects—poverty and hunger head the list; and then drought; famine; dust; flooding; migrancy; urbanization; ghettoization; overcrowding; unwanted, impoverished children, and so the long march begins again.

Poverty and Natural Disaster

Olive Senior’s socio-historically situated *Hurricane Story* series delves into the poverty generated or exacerbated by natural disaster. Together they form insightful vignettes on coping strategies deployed over time and their interface with gender relations. For the Caribbean nations, hurricanes are constantly impending disasters and are becoming moreso in this season of global climate volatility. The sudden potentially devastating natural disaster can sweep away a nation’s development efforts in a flash and leave behind the threat of yet another onslaught next year. A current case in point is the severely impoverished Haiti which was battered by four hurricanes within an 8-week period early in 2008 creating in the hardest hit areas starvation, disease, anarchy, and mayhem such that international aid workers have termed the scenario hell on earth. This improbable occurrence was followed by yet another unprecedented event in January 2010. A devastating earthquake of 7.0 magnitude struck the Haitian capital and its environs creating an unparalleled humanitarian crisis which will test global good will and aid resources for months to come. According to Government estimates some 230,000 people are assumed to be dead, an estimated 300,000 injured, and an estimated 1,000,000 homeless. The cost of damage exceeds the nation’s gross domestic product. The irony is that poverty also militates against risk management for those who need it most.

“Hurricane Story 1903” and “Hurricane Story 1944” tests a range of coping strategies over the decades and exemplify how the definition and significance of poverty can substantially alter from generation to generation, place to place, and time to time. “Hurricane Story 1903” recalls, through the eyes of a young child, strategies deployed by her grandparent to deal with a hurricane. This is the rural, land-based peasantry who in the post-Emancipation period engage in the practical outworking of breaking free—clinging to the land, depending on subsistence agriculture, building villages, markets, schools and communities. Senior attributes the effective riding out of the storm to simple rooting in supernatural ethos, place and environment. The capacity to effectively deal with natural disaster hinges on faith, closeness to nature and the capacity to tap into intuitive ways of knowing: “...but he was the seventh son /of a seventh son and could read signs /and interpret wonders” (Senior 1994, 20). This is the early warning system which instructs in when to board up against the coming storm. ^v

The dominant metaphor which Senior deploys is that of Noah’s ark—that quintessential symbol of a structure built to withstand unprecedented disaster. The ark though crowded with people and animals rides to safety with its inhabitants calmed and comforted by

mournful Protestant hymns led by the grandmother schooled in the Sankeys^{vi} which themselves call upon the help of God:

... In our frail bark
in total darkness we passed through the eye
and out on the other side, till all was still.
When Grandfather opened the window the sun
was shining (20).

The simple cadences and sentiments of the poem echo those of the hymn to which it alludes:

And it holds, my anchor holds:
Blow your wildest, then, O gale,
On my bark so small and frail;
By His grace I shall not fail...
For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.

The biblical Noah's ark was also a gene conservation bank and this element surfaces in the poem, as indicated by the child's fascination as she eagerly awaits the offspring of the sensay fowl and leg horn rooster who survive the hurricane together in the cleft of the silk cotton tree. There is no sense in this poem of poverty; despite the family's survival on subsistence agriculture and the absence of all the trappings of modernity, the family is rich in coping strategies. The careful listing of what the grandmother as opposed to what the grandfather does to ensure the safety of all speaks to intergenerational, intragenerational and gender concord and complementarity, as much as it speaks to harmony with natural and supernatural realms.

By "Hurricane Story 1944", the coping strategies have changed to yield a counterproductive social dynamic. By this period the rigid system of class stratification with education as the passport to upward mobility has begun to take root. The nascent sense of self which emerges from this process is buttressed by stereotypes and assumptions which entrap persons in postures that are potentially deleterious to themselves, their families and communities. The father of this hurricane story has indeed become the literate, upwardly mobile dandy on whose shoulders the social standing of his entire family falls. The capacity to read the signs and wonders has been replaced by literacy and graduation away from land to white collar work, clerking in Solomon's Dry Goods and Haberdashery. The significance of status is reflected in the spatial and kinetic imagery which is the dominant motif of the poem:

and when he left
freewheeling downhill
his barefoot country brothers
ran long distances behind
falling back from exhaustion
while their pride

their hope
 kept riding
 on that frail back (24).

The father's aspiration toward upward mobility is reflected in his laborious pedalling uphill to visit his barefoot country brothers. Moreover, he carries the weight of their communal expectations of upward mobility as the one who transcends the hardship and the debasement of land-based poverty. The story demonstrates the extreme self-centredness and visibility of the upwardly mobile family member whose accomplishment becomes the source of pride for the entire family and emblematic somehow of its worth.

For the father, class aspirations prove to be noxious. The impulse toward upward mobility proves to be his downfall for when the hurricane forces the closure of the dry goods store the father is left without work. His incapacity to dirty his hands renders him impotent in crisis and ashamed of the "low class" occupation of his wife. Conversely, his wife invokes the traditional though effective coping strategies of the past: coaxing the land to produce bountifully by hard work, faith and mournful hymns. In the midst of harsh, abusive circumstances, she becomes emblematic of wholeness enjoying oneness with nature, peace and productivity within her body, peace with her God. Her reproductive function and harmony with God both infuse her agricultural production producing high levels of synthesis and integration.

My mother who hardly ever spoke
 crooned hymns in the garden
 to her skellion tomatos pumpkin melon
 which thrived (as everybody knows)
 from her constant labouring
 (nothing like a pregnant woman to encourage
 pumpkin and melon)
 she sang mournful hymns as she reaped

Like the Ivy-Johnny debacle of "No Money, No Love", the woman finds a coping strategy while the man, to cover the shame of his dependence on his wife who becomes a haggler, resorts to violence:

Meantime
 he coasted downhill
 and we settled onto our new routine
 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday our Mother worked in the fields
 Thursday Friday she went to market
 Saturday she left him money on the dresser
 He took it and went to Unity Bar and Grocery got drunk
 Came home and beat her
 Sunday she went to church and sang (27).

The closing stanza zeroes in on the dull routine cyclic nature which informs the correlation between poverty and domestic abuse and the tacit institutional complicities that sustain its cycle. The male, floundering under personal and societal expectations that he cannot meet, is disappointed with his incapacity and imbibes alcohol to soothe his shame and insufficiency and dull his pain. With inhibitions lowered by consumption, he turns his self-hatred, disappointment and aggression on his wife, on whom he is reliant for his daily bread. The wife beaten and intimidated into silence submits to her abusive husband and sublimates her discontent with her lot through worship. Senior alludes indirectly to the complicity of religious organizations and belief systems that keep women subordinated to patriarchal structures and strictures and tolerant of abuse.

These extracts from popular, media and literary discourse selected for analysis of the social impact of poverty are exemplary of a far broader corpus of material on the subject. The examples in this paper turn the spotlight on poverty but are not in any way intended to convey the notion that domestic violence is limited to the poor. The primary material explored demonstrates the significance of gender differentials in terms of coping strategies in dealing with poverty and its wide-ranging consequences. All of the discourses—fictional and real life—demonstrate the pain and shame of the men grappling with poverty, which they seem powerless to alleviate. Similarly, they demonstrate the women deploying more effective coping strategies in terms of dealing with the stranglehold of poverty and simultaneously bearing in their bodies the lacerations that their husbands or partners mete out as they lash out against those who are closest and most vulnerable. Faith figures prominently both as an avenue which empowers the women to function and lends them spiritual sustenance, and as an opiate which dulls their pain and facilitates their ongoing participation in the violent male-female relationships. These evocations imply that this issue is not being alleviated with time. Indeed contemporary real life enactments bear a tired resemblance to the decades old scenarios. The possibility is, as suggested by Morgan and Gopaul (1998), that the gains for women in terms of upward mobility, enhanced education, increasing resources may not have panned out in a reduced vulnerability to violent interpersonal relations. But that is the concern of another enquiry.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ This is the work of the king of the sexist double entendre who delivered this piercing lament on the fall of patriarchy when Britain the colonial motherland was governed by Margaret Thatcher, with Queen Elizabeth as ceremonial head:

In a land that used to be strong
 There's a woman wearing the crown
 And another one running de town
 London bridge is falling down
 "London Bridge is Falling Down"

ⁱⁱ The lyrics of "No Money, No Love":

Ivy pack up she clothes to leave
 Because John was down and out
 All alone he was left to grieve
 She had a next man in South
 She said openly
 I really love you Johnny
 But you ain't have no money
 So what will my future be
 Even though you love me?

We cyar love without money
 We cyar make love on hungry belly
 Juhnny you'll be the only one I'm dreaming of
 You're my turtle dove
 But no money no love

If you hear how he plead with she to get she to understand
 Listen, mister, she tell Johnny
 Leggo me blasted hand
 And make up your mind
 We got to break up this lime
 She said poverty is a crime
 You got no money
 Still you tanglin' me all the blinkin' time

Gentleman let me tell you plain
 She say I don't want to make a scene
 But if you only touch me again
 The police will intervene
 You ain't got a cent
 I couldn't even pay me rent
 I had to give up me apartment

You give me nothing to eat
Now you want me to sleep on the pavement

Johnny nearly killed she with blows
Poor Ivy bawl like a cow
Rip up she wig and he tear down she clothes
The South man ain't want she now
Oh, Lord, what a fight
They roll until broad daylight
Charlotte street was hot that night
She get some good lick but she let go kick and some bite

ⁱⁱⁱ Excerpts from the lyrics of “The Equalizer”:

Man get so callous man get so cold
no remorse no humanity
they moving brassface they moving bold
imagine they light in UWI
this little black gyul listen to Gypsy
she went up dey to study she get rape instead
that dread!
She thought she woulda find de key
but is a Pandora box of misery
some might even say she better off dead
....
but when they hold that son of a Satan
don't tell me bout no Constitution
with me he don't have a prayer
hang him high in Woodford Square
tie he drawers around he neck
leave it for corbeaux to peck
all who find that harsh them too civilize
ah come out to equalize
me ent had no time to philosophize
ah come out to equalize
send he brain to doctor to analyze – not me!
The equalizer, the equalizer
Equal rights equal pain
that is my franchise
Ah come out to equalize
(Singing Sandra 1998)
.....
All dem faddas who like to rape
dem dog – committin incest
from my wrath there is no escape
you just raise the hornet's nest

when you stoop so low to molest
 your daughter no amount a holy water
 could ever save you now —
 no how is more than just flesh you bust
 you destroy that young girl's trust
 ah go stamp 666 on your brow
 all ah dem abusing they daughter
 put them with a horny gorilla
 they can't control they appetite?
 More than the lion go roar tonight
 they won't stop their bacchanal
 let King Kong roam their root canal
 them who like to threaten and terrorize
 them wolf in sheep clothing in disguise
 whether we castrate or desensitize
 ah come out to equalize

(Singing Sandra 1998)

^{iv} Poem echoes Carter's indictment of the Burnham regime under which he suffered and witnessed severe atrocities. Carter deems this regime as assassins of the voice.

^v This would have appeared spurious as a coping strategy had not the same skills saved the indigenous tribes in the disastrous 2007 Asian Tsunami

^{vi} Ira David Sankey (1840 - 1908), author, evangelist, and songwriter teamed up with Dwight L. Moody, in 1871, to become a world famous evangelistic team. Mr. Sankey is the author of one of the most popular hymn and time books in the English language, entitled *Sacred Songs and Solos*, published in England, which together with the celebrated *Gospel Hymns*, of which he is one of the authors, had had the largest circulation perhaps of any evangelical hymn books ever published.



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When Bad is Cool: Violence and Crime as Rites of Passage to Manhood

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Abstract

Modern society has brought greater opportunities for peer groups to play relatively greater and increasingly unsupervised roles in the lives of young men as they grow up. At the same time social and economic circumstances have created pressures for adults, who previously played a central role in guiding and mentoring young people, to become less important in their lives. The increased influence of peer groups has a strong impact upon the codes of masculinity that many boys aspire to and plays a central role in policing which masculinities are considered “acceptable”. A potent combination of obligations for boys to act like “real men” and of pressures to eschew roles that have become discredited as soft, gay or feminine seems to be driving young men towards dangerous, risk-taking hyper-masculinities. The net outcome of these processes is for violence and crime to be increasingly seen as premiere ways of proving one’s manhood in front of those who matter most to boys: their peers.

Key words: gender, masculinity, violence, crime, peer groups, youth culture; rolling peer pressure, Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction

This paper examines the “incitements” to violence and crime that are coded into contemporary Caribbean cultures. In particular, the focus is on gender, namely what developmental trajectories young males in Trinidad and Tobago encounter during the critical transitional years, often called the school years. These years constitute a modern-day “rites of passage”—the physical and cultural site where boys undergo the complex transition from childhood to young adult: the social settings where men are made.

Methodology

In Trinidad and Tobago the frequency of antisocial and criminal behaviour among male youth (often in groups) is an acute cause of concern. Our response is to offer an analysis that helps to make these trends more readily understood.

To do this, two sources of data are examined. First, there is the data reported by other Caribbean researchers which we will report and revisit throughout this paper. We have chosen this approach to provide an opportunity for both a literature review and further analysis of prior studies. Second, we report our own ongoing qualitative research into Caribbean masculinities; we relate it to the work of other researchers; and we draw together an explanatory framework for the gendered patterns of violence and crime in the Caribbean region.

The aim of this dual approach is to decode changing patterns of masculinity in relation to the patterns of violence and crime that have recently become more prominent in Trinidad and Tobago.

A qualitative approach is ideally suited to the tasks of exploring poorly understood phenomena and interpreting quantitative data. Unearthing explanations, clues and insights, enables the development of more useful theories for informing possible interventions.

Our own data consists of 54 detailed interviews conducted in Trinidad and Tobago between 2005 and 2008 with men drawn from diverse backgrounds aged from 18 to 38 years. Respondents were chosen from a wide cross-section of Trinidad and Tobago society. Purposive sampling achieved a mosaic comprising variables relating to race (in Trinidad principally African and East Indian descendants), socio-economic background (low, lower middle, middle and upper middle), geographic location (North and South Trinidad; rural and urban; the islands of Trinidad and Tobago), religion (Catholic, Protestant, Hindu and Moslem) and academic background (school completers and early school leavers).

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore and map the trajectories of developing masculine identity and performance (Alasuutari 1995, 3). This approach allowed us to engage in a flexible interview dialectic that is well suited for discovering developmental patterns, for identifying explanations and for theory building (Layder 1993, 41). The respondents were asked about growing up in Trinidad particularly with respect to peer groups, gender roles, family, community and school. Purposive sampling was undertaken

to identify participants who were well placed to shed light on the existing data. Theoretical sampling was used to deliberately seek out cases for further variation in the themes that emerged, including possible negative cases. This approach resulted in an interaction between data gathering and the evolving theory which moved between emerging concepts and new material. The resulting data was enriched and became more complex as cases were added and the resulting explanatory framework became correspondingly more complex and provided more adequate explanations of the processes involved. (Charmaz 2000, 519)

In addition to providing accounts of their own experiences, participants also acted as field observers of complex social systems. In this way, the data was able to capture observations of many additional participants and social systems (including villages, communities, schools and peer groups). A number of manoeuvres were undertaken to ensure that the explanatory framework that emerged was adequate, meaningful and had applicability to society more generally. These included the following: adding cases until saturation occurred; including diverse, variant and negative cases using theoretical sampling (Bryman 2004, 305); and relating our findings to those of other researchers.

The causes of crime are complicated and multifactorial, and this paper does not set out to explore them all. Instead our focus is particularly on the social-developmental stories that underpin patterns of violence and crime involving young males, especially when these are patterned and repetitive and relate to shared codes. Understanding of these phenomena will be greatly advanced by the insights from our qualitative research, as we seek to explain how young men make sense of the world around them and how crime and violence might come to be positioned as an obligation of honour for young men rather than as a shameful transgression. To date our interview findings along with cumulative evidence from other researchers build a compelling case that the incitement to violence and crime is deeply encoded in existing hegemonic masculine constructs that hold substantial sway in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere in the Caribbean and beyond.

Results

Sowing the seeds

All societies attach paramount importance to ensuring that their young people develop a coherent gender identity as they mature. Gender identity formation starts from birth, often when the parent's first words are "is it a boy or a girl?" From that time forward, the child's development is deeply inflected with gender conventions that govern appearance, disposition, style of speech, deportment, bodily function and so on. Of particular note is the finding of Bailey and colleagues, confirmed in our own investigations, that boys learn from an early age that they should be risk-takers (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 17).

While some latitude is allowed for younger children to "transgress" gender norms, the older the child and the closer he is to being an adult, the more stringent is the pressure to conform to gender expectations. This is certainly true of Caribbean boys. Bailey and colleagues found that by ten years of age male children realise that features of "traditional" masculinity—including toughness, physical strength and sexual

dominance—are expected of them (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart 1998, 53). One respondent gives a local example of such a construct as he perceived it in the rural community in which he grew up:

Guys were supposed to be this rough neck, tough, hard person who always getting in trouble and not obeying anyone...and that was more or less what influenced me because even in growing up with my stepfather...that is what I saw from him and the guys in the area same thing so I thought that that is how the guys supposed to carry about themselves... (LS, aged 26; chef)

As fundamental as they are, these gender expectations are not explicitly taught through formal schooling. Social life is saturated with gender conventions that are deeply embedded in the social fabric. These conventions are so normalised that they easily pass by unnoticed—until of course they are transgressed when they are glaringly, sometimes painfully, obvious.

Here are the words of one gay youth who describes his experience of growing up and feeling “different” and the attendant difficulties of transgressing gender norms.

I first realized my sexuality when I was seven years old but I never really paid any mind to it. But as you get older you realize people have less tolerance for people who were “confused” with their sexuality...that is when I started experiencing it as a bad thing, when other people had a problem with it...I went to a breaking point where I just did not know who I was. (NKO, aged 26; self-employed)

NKO ended up seeking psychiatric treatment for his resulting depression and in an attempt to resolve his dissonance.

That is not to say that gender conventions are set in concrete, nor are they innate—gender identity and enactment are an accomplishment of growing up. Masculinity varies enormously across cultures and down time. Moreover, no man performs masculinity in quite the same way as his peers. To capture this variability and diversity the plural term “masculinities” was coined. However, gender theorists also acknowledged that there seems to be a dominant set of standards against which other masculinities are evaluated but which no male conforms to absolutely. This set of standards is known as “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1995).

It seems likely that these shared hegemonic standards are variable across cultures and time. Indeed, within different social settings, varying idealised forms of masculinity will dominate. Willis (1971) discerns in his research on British working class boys that conceptions of masculinity take on class dimensions: the culture of the factory floor having parallels with what is termed “counter school culture”. Willis argues that the inherent “masculine chauvinism” of the latter results in a loss of opportunity by destining its adherents to lower paying and lower prestige jobs (52). In his analysis, the irony is not

lost on him as he pinpoints that there is “an element of self damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western Capitalism...this damnation is experienced paradoxically as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance.” (3)

While socio-economic position is one factor, masculine constructs differ by age as well. The expectations of men by society at large almost certainly differ from the prevailing expectations of what a “real man” should be by an adolescent male peer group.

The danger with many peer group constructs is they often valorise narrow, physical, hard versions of masculinity. As a result, academic pursuit—traditionally regarded as an important element of masculine excellence—is nowadays often the first to be sacrificed. In contemporary Caribbean Anglophone societies, not unlike elsewhere, masculinity entails a fear of being seen as “sissyish”, and anything considered to be effeminate comes under pressure to be rejected: this includes education which is widely seen by boys to be both effeminate and “nerdish” (Bailey, Branche and Henry-Lee 2002, 8).

As a result different masculinities arise in parallel and are said to compete. In light of this, the influence of the dominant masculinities, the tensions between competing masculinities, and the ways in which gender performance is policed, are all key elements of the present analysis.

The school years: Obligations, taboos and the rites of passage of manhood

While the first few years of life are spent largely in the home environment, the time soon comes when the child is mandated to enter school and responsibility for the child’s formal education is taken over by the state. The school system brings young people together *en masse* and streams them into groups of similar ages. This period is a critical time: young people enter the school system as young children; they transition in the company of their peers; and they emerge as young adults some 10 or 12 years later.

This developmental process (which is largely encapsulated in the school years) bears a close relationship to the traditional “rites of passage” originally described by Van Gennep in 1909 (Van Gennep 1960, ix, 67). Classic rites of passage theory provides a framework for understanding how young people “come of age” in traditional societies. The process is divided into three phases: separation, transition (also called liminality) and incorporation. While there is a tendency not to think of modern developed societies as having such “rites”, the school years do indeed follow this pattern: separation from the original status as a toddler in the family; transition in the company of peers during the liminal school years; and reincorporation into society some years later with a new status of young adult.

The outcomes are similar for both traditional rites of passage and for the developmental process that the modern institution of the school manages, and which we might consider the centrepiece of the modern passage to adulthood. In both cases the task that is achieved is a change of status from child to adult and both ensure that gender identity is indelibly imprinted on the participants. However, the passage provided by modern schooling differs in a fundamental way from the traditional rites of passage. The

traditional rituals of “coming of age” generally entail a much more compact liminal phase in the company of adult mentors, whereas modern schooling involves a liminal phase that extends over many years from kindergarten to matriculation in the purview of the peer group.

For most boys, the transitional school years are the period when they consolidate and craft their masculine identity. The process reaches a climax around puberty when physical maturation peaks. The gender identity that emerges reflects social conventions, personal agency and group identification. All along the way, boys’ options are shaped by an extensive system of social obligations and taboos which channel their emerging identity along socially acceptable lines:

Yeah, that is one of the biggest influence in school, out ah school. I feel peer group is the whole problem...peer group has play a big influence, according to like whey yuh friends saying yuh might want be hip...remember yuh doh want nobody watch yuh different. (DJ, aged 21; road worker)

The *gender obligations* that come into play will relate in some general way to the prevailing standards of hegemonic masculinity but they will also largely reflect the sorts of masculinity that dominate in the boy’s personal world (these are best thought of as “localised” hegemonic masculinities). These obligations dictate how masculinity should be performed in order to satisfy the intense social scrutiny that young males are subjected to in their own social network.

In the following quote DJ talks about the pressures any son of his would have to undergo as he grows up:

...if I have a son now dey de problem go arise too, 'cause when he growing they go be telling, like people around him, and people in de neighbourhood and who older, if he like acting different nah, what I mean, like he not really on violence, well like liming on de block like them kinda...they go say “How you moving so? You really not like your father, way! How you so boy” Same peer pressure again like pressuring yuh nah so like eventually he might like start ah liking, might drift to that...(DJ, aged 21; road worker)

Similarly, the *gender taboos* that young men are constrained by have an inverse relationship with hegemonic standards in that they demarcate what boys should *not* be like and what they should *not* do. Once again, these taboos are influenced by personal agency and the everyday social milieu of the boys’ lives, but in general they relate to taboos about being emasculated, feminised, infantilised and marginalised. Almost always they speak to the deepest modern masculine taboos of all: homophobia and femininity.

This model leads to an important point concerning the genesis of extreme, anti-social masculinities. The combination of the status-enhancing obligation to perform in

masculine ways and the pressure to publicly eschew characteristics that are subject to gender taboos—both of these factors exert pressure on young men to act out more extreme masculinities. Through this dual system of obligation and taboo, hypermasculinities are positioned as the ultimate expression of manhood and are seen by boys as a sure way of earning status. By enacting them, boys can prove their masculinity publicly (and that is what counts) while simultaneously disavowing any links with femininity or homosexuality.

Policing manhood

We have argued that the social fabric is deeply impregnated with gender conventions. These conventions are so omnipresent that they are taken for granted and often only become obvious when transgressed. It was also argued that boys start being indoctrinated for their gender role from birth. The implication is that instead of being innate, gender roles are socially constructed, that they need to be learned and that elaborate social systems exist to ensure conformity. The observation that a gendered identity is a social accomplishment is confirmed by research that demonstrates that gender conventions vary radically across time, in different cultures and at any one time within a culture. According to Gilmore (1990, 25), “Boys have to be encouraged, sometimes actually forced, by social sanctions to undertake efforts toward a culturally defined manhood, which by themselves they might not do.”

To this end, there is a general yardstick against which masculine performance is measured. This yardstick is *hegemonic masculinity*. Hegemonic masculinity is no more than a normative ideal or a symbolic construct. While its influence is everywhere, no one man embodies all hegemonic standards fully. And as a symbolic construct, its influence is only as great as the social importance attached to it. For the social code of masculinity to be as influential as it is, it must be valorised, embraced, policed and enforced. The existence of such a system of gender role monitoring was alluded to above when we noted how gender conventions become starkly obvious when transgressed. In fact when transgression does occur people become acutely aware and indeed anxious.

There is probably no time in life when policing and enforcement are more intense than for young males during the school years, especially around the time of physical maturation. This is the time when the social conventions of gender are not only being internalised but they are also being “tried on for size”. GK gives a good example of gender policing as he recalls an event at secondary school.

One day ah guy came with a Simpson's T-Shirt, well we give him real hell, “Is Simpson's? Man, that is so old, yuh hadda pick up a Stone Cold T-shirt”. (GK, aged 22; library assistant)

Getting it wrong can result in severe loss of face and heavy social sanction. But this invites further questions: Who polices and enforces gender codes for young boys during the school years? Whose standards are boys judged against?

While we know that gender conventions are omnipresent, our research indicates that the most immediate and influential mechanism for policing young men's gender performance

during adolescence is the peer group. There is also evidence that peers are intensely interested in the gender performance of their compatriots: peers continually “swap notes” and interrogate each other about their exploits and the exact penalties from those they judge as not measuring up in the quest for manhood. Penalties can range from shaming, humiliation and exclusion through to violence.

In policing each other’s gender performance, the attendant issues of norm and measurement of transgression arises. What standards do boys use when making their judgment? Certainly, the criteria they adopt do bear some relationship to the hegemonic standards that dominate in society at large. However, as indicated above, the masculinity performed by young men differs markedly from the gender performance of older, more senior males in the community:

...it different 'cause like what is acceptable to a person like your age wouldn't be acceptable to my age too, check? (DJ, aged 21; road worker)

We conclude that the explanation to the question of what yardstick is being used lies in understanding how peer groups and youth culture work.

Young people are not mere cultural sponges that simply mimic what they see in the wider culture or what older men do. On the contrary, our evidence (which resonates with that of other Caribbean researchers quoted here) reveals youth culture to be a dynamic fully fledged culture that is quite capable of operating semi-autonomously from society at large and often in opposition to it. Barry Chevannes (1999, 24) argues that peer groups exert an influence over boys that frequently exceeds and contradicts the influence of the boys’ families. Similarly, JL relates the adverse influence of the peer group in the following quote:

Most of my friends, they was up to trouble, I was up to trouble, I was that kind of type... I shame to say it now but... I used to actually get a kind of high off of it nah. (JL, aged 22; office assistant)

The implications of these observations are far-reaching. Instead of youth culture being a hapless pawn of capitalism or a Frankenstein invention of the American mass media, it turns out to be the creative lifeblood of both of these. Clothing styles, musical genres, figures of speech, popular trends are just as much inventions of “the street” as they are the products of big corporations. After all, for clothing, music and other trends to sell, they need to strike a chord with the young people who buy them. More often than not the marketing resonates with the gender standards that young men revere and aspire to—the real commodity being sold is masculinity. In the words of Bailey, Branche, McGarrity and Stuart (1998, 55):

Street influences were particularly telling in that transition period to adulthood...Many of the styles on the street were accentuated as the

basis for securing what was imagined to be an adult masculine identity.
The street was trouble, yet it was where a man was made.

But the remaining task is to pinpoint where youth culture itself emanates from. The observation that youth culture can operate semi-autonomously from wider society implies creativity and agency among youth cultures: in effect, that youth culture comes from within itself. According to our evidence this occurs through a phenomenon called “rolling peer pressure” (Plummer, 1999). We found strong evidence that cultural codes and traditions are passed down the chain from older boys to younger boys. (In this model, peers do not necessarily share the same age, but instead are age stratified and the defining characteristic is that they share an affinity with youth culture). CM paints a vivid picture of rolling peer pressure in the socialisation of his peers during the transition from primary to secondary school:

A boy coming from primary school he feel like he is a weak boy...he would be for a little while like the primary school children. He wouldn't know what to do. He would have to adapt to the school environment. So by a next three weeks you might see him adapting, getting to know children, getting to see how children behave and how they does dress and the new style like how children bore [pierce] their ears like how I bore mine. To see how to attract the girls, right, to see how to be popular. (CM, aged 18; student)

A sanitised version of this phenomenon can be seen in the way rhymes and jokes are passed down through generations of children virtually unchanged. Likewise, we found evidence that vulgarities and harsh practices are also handed down the chain from one school grade to the next, especially when adults are out of earshot, at lunch time, in the school ground during recess, and when going to and from school.

That peer group culture is particularly active at times and in spaces where adult influence is minimal was a striking finding of our data. Indeed what we generally found was that wherever there is a supervisory “power vacuum”, peer groups readily intervene and assert their power. In the modern world, there are a number of new factors that appear to contribute to prolonging the opportunities for peer groups to assert their influence over young people’s lives (see Table 1). The net effect of all of these factors is to increase the opportunity for peer groups to orchestrate young people’s lives at the expense of adult guidance, mentoring and role modelling.

Table 1: Factors that increase the influence of peers over young people and reduce the role of adults

- the protracted liminal school phase between dependent childhood and working adulthood extends a boy's exposure to and membership of peer groups;
- shift schooling where students attend school in the morning and have the afternoon free (or vice versa) provides more time for "hanging on the block" or in the malls with peers;
- larger classes where teachers have less time to devote to individual students;
- less supervision in critical "free time" periods especially lunch, recess and in transit to and from school;
- the presence of zones that are not frequented by supervising adults such as change rooms, the middle of the school ground and playing field, the streets and lanes in the vicinity, shopping malls, on public transport;
- greater economic pressures on parents to work longer hours away from home;
- exposure to "virtual" peer role models through the media and the Internet;
- poorer socio-economic settings in which young people have less private space (away from the street) where they might otherwise escape the domination of the peer group. Inevitably their study time is also compromised.

Violence, crime and peer group masculinities

The considerable influence of male peer groups and youth culture on young men as they mature is a key finding of our work. Avoiding being targeted by a group, on the one hand, and being accepted by peers, belonging to a peer group, and gaining the protection of a group, on the other, are important issues for boys as they develop. In this vein, FD confesses to feeling pressured to do what he knew to be wrong:

The peer pressure caused me to want to be involved in that because when you seeing friends you want to be part of the group and you don't fit in if you not doing what they doing. So I was pressured to go along that line. (FD, aged 21; university student)

JD and HJ speak for many boys as they recount how they had to struggle not to become victims of peer dynamics but instead to assert themselves in the secondary school context. In the following quote, we see how boys learn to negotiate the "hot house" pecking order of the peer group, which includes the use of violence:

Petty little fights, we were just trying to impress or it was a "ranking thing" because you now come in and you trying to show you is not a

softie nah! I can't remember what they were about but I remember I used to fight a lot. Probably if someone call me a name I mighta cuffed them up. I used to fight to gain respect. (JD, aged 24; secondary school teacher)

Likewise, in the following case, violence is a key element in how boys negotiate peer group politics in the school ground:

...this is junior sec [junior secondary school] and you can't take nothing from nobody cause once they see you ent doing anything they just like continue pushing you around. So is like you have to let them know where you stand. So I does be like "I not taking nothing from nobody at all" ...I might just tell them something and they might get vex and then it go end up in a fight, some major fight in junior sec. (HJ, aged 19; manager's assistant)

In contemporary settings, where the traditional rites of "coming of age" are lost and where adults increasingly move into the background during adolescence, the peer group will fill the vacuum. Both vertical and horizontal relationships as well as changing features therein constitute significant influences on a young man's life (DuBois and Karcher 2005, 83). In effect, the balance between "vertical" mentoring by older role models shifts to favour "horizontal" mentoring by peers. Especially in cases of serious dysfunction in family relationships the peer group provides affirmation and responds to the need to belong, which, in turn, reinforces the influence of the peer group. In many cases, a boy's universe is defined by the peer group, and the group offers extensive support and role modelling. Members of the group can become the most significant people in a boy's life and they offer a reference point for approval and disapproval. In Chevannes' (1999, 30) words the peer group during adolescence virtually replaces parents as the "controlling agents" or at least provides a powerful "countervailing force" to them.

This influence can be amplified for boys in the absence of a significant adult male presence in the school or home as testified to in the words of LS:

... growing up I never had a father figure and I never had a brother or anything like that to play with and I thought that these guys at school (well more high school than primary school) we like "Aye that's how guys supposed to carry about themselves". So I will just fall in with them. (LS, aged 26; chef)

LS goes on to recount how susceptible he was to the influence of the peer group and how his learning reflected what we earlier described as "rolling peer pressure":

It was very easy for me to be manipulated by them, by their actions rather, because to me that is the way to go, that's the way guys should carry about themselves because I never had anyone to sit me down and

tell me “well look you have to do this and as a fella yuh supposed to be doing this” and...to show me the right thing...And the guys were like my bigger brothers because it is more or less the bigger fellas I used to lime [socialise] with until I reach form three and everybody started following me yuh know and eventually I just became the leader of the pack. (LS, aged 26; chef)

When primary responsibility for managing the “rites of passage” to manhood falls to the peer group, then the prevailing masculine codes and expectations that emerge will closely reflect those of the group. Groups buy into youth culture—they develop a culture of their own—so that a “pecking order” and interactions can become highly codified. We found that peer groups are vigilant about the gender performance of their members and can enforce severe sanctions against transgressors whether belonging to their own group or another. SM paints a vivid picture of this finding:

Well, if a next one take a next one girl, back in secondary school, dey would bring up dey gang after school beat him up or if dis one geh a little licks [beating] today, tomorrow yuh stay home in the afternoon waiting by the gate of the school he and his group will wait dey patiently; when yuh turn up licks for yuh. (SM, aged 21; office assistant)

Peer groups can develop problematic relationships with the wider society depending on what standards are valorised. We found that groups often held hard, risky, rebellious, sexually dominant masculinities to be the pinnacle of modern manhood and therefore something to aspire to. Under these circumstances, rather than being seen as an antisocial threat, crime and violence can instead be seen as manhood fulfilled and the glue that keeps the peer group intact. Here is Wesley Crichlow’s account:

In an attempt to temporarily secure my masculinity or hyper-masculinity and hegemonic heterosexuality, I participated in events such as stealing... breaking bottles with slingshots or stones on the street, engaging in physical fights, and “hanging on the block” with boys until late at night. (Crichlow 2004, 200)

In the following case JL describes how crime can involve performance where the peer group (in this case a gang) is the primary audience. JL had been kidnapped by a group of thugs. Here he recounts how it was important for one of his abductors to earn his “stripes”, (to secure his rank in the gang):

... the man had the gun by my head and his hand actually sweating, sweating on me, so like this man he is probably doing this just to prove a point to the whole gang nah, just to show he is capable...(JL, aged 22; office assistant)

There is often a very thin line that distinguishes a peer group from a gang. When asked about this difference, the young men in our study were hard pressed to distinguish

between them, apart from being a matter of degree: gangs are peer groups that have become more codified, more powerful and whose activities spill onto the streets.

Conclusions

Young people are “primed” for their gender roles from a very young age. However, in terms of gender development, there can be scarcely a more critical time than the school years. This is the period when boys undertake the difficult journey from being a toddler to being a young man. In effect, the school years frame the modern day “rites of passage” when young people “come of age”.

Changing social and economic circumstances have produced conditions that have tended to reduce the role of adults in young people’s development and hand considerable influence over to peers. Peer groups play a particularly significant role in young people’s lives in situations where adults are increasingly absent. The net effect of the decline in traditional community life, of mounting pressures on adults to work long hours away from home, and of assigning responsibility for children’s education and upbringing to the state means that peer groups play an increasingly important role in “coming of age”. At the extreme, the role that members of the older generation play in (vertical) mentoring is largely absent during critical periods of young people’s development, and this leaves the way open for peer groups to fill the vacuum and for members of the same generation to assume a dominant role in each other’s lives (horizontal mentoring): kids raising kids.

While peer groups can be a powerful force for good, they can also be an extremely bad influence. Peer groups provide support, protection, a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to swap notes as young people confront difficult developmental challenges. Peer groups can also demand conformity to group codes as they actively police gender performance and they can administer harsh sanctions for transgressions. While general guidance is provided by dominant masculinities in society at large (so-called hegemonic masculinity), youth culture endorses its own variations of acceptable masculinity which are actively policed by peer groups. We found evidence of uncompromising gender expectations and enforcement by young males; we also found the rejection of gentle, intellectual and caring masculinities which were labelled as feminine or gay and therefore taboo, and the valorisation of hard, risky, dangerous and sexually dominant masculinities which represent the ultimate in manhood. This combination of deep taboos being used to discredit “soft” masculinities and pressures to prove one’s manhood by acting out “hard” masculinities act in concert to promote hyper-masculinities. However, given that masculinity transcends class and race, what do we make of class and race differences when it comes to gender, violence and crime? We believe that in addition to factors such as culture and role models (Lewis 2008) a key difference relates to space. Young men in poorer circumstances who live in crowded conditions spend more time on the streets in the company of peers. Young men from more affluent settings have greater opportunities to escape the tight control of peer groups.

In effect many of the social “problems” that contemporary society confronts represent a fulfilment of the gender expectations that are coded into the social fabric which young people are primed for. If young men are indoctrinated with the belief that “real men” are

tough, risk-taking and dominant, then we should not be surprised when they act out those expectations. As Barry Chevannes (1999) wrote in reference to the roles that young men play in contemporary society: “we reap what we sow”. Far from being seen as antisocial aberrations, violence and crime are positioned in youth culture as being among the ultimate ways for youths to fulfil their social obligations and to be real men (Messerschmidt 1994). Of course, not all boys go down this path and this is where the role of personal agency and alternative role modelling comes in. What seems to have changed in recent years is a shift in the relative importance of “vertical mentoring” from the generation above in favour of greater “horizontal mentoring” from peers.

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Representations of Homophobic Violenceⁱ in Anglophone Caribbean Literature

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Abstract

Diasporic writers in England, Canada and the United States who have explored the theme of alternative sexuality, realistically portray how homophobic violence in the Caribbean region arises from heterocentric and heterosexist attitudes that are ingrained in institutionalized discourses of Church, home and school. Representations in the literary discourse show how these agents of socialization bear culpability for the ways in which they influence society's silences, adherence to doctrine, masculinist views, patriarchal hegemonies and peer pressure that contribute to the persecution of the male homosexual. The paper mainly explores depictions in prose fiction of the homosexual *youth* being the victim of effeminophobia and homophobia, and the dire consequences that ensue. *Aelred's Sin* authored by Trinidad and Tobago's Lawrence Scott is a focal text under analysis, along with his short story "Chameleon". Works by his compatriot, Shani Mootoo, and also by H. Nigel Thomas and Patricia Powell—writers originally from St. Vincent and Jamaica, respectively—give support to how gender-based violence occurs against *non-heterosexuals* in the Anglophone Caribbean, an aspect that is usually overlooked in discourses on domestic abuse, for example. Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and "Lemon Scent"; Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark*; Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones* and *The Pagoda* are explored in the paper, along with a short story "Baby" by another writer originating from Jamaica, Makeda Silvera, who portrays Caribbean-born characters in a foreign setting. Vraisemblance and irony regarding the topic of homophobic violence are seen to be evident in these selected novels and short stories.

Key words: hegemonies, effeminophobia, homophobia, vraisemblance, irony

Introduction

Homophobic attitudes and practices in the Anglophone Caribbean stem from underlying and ingrained heterocentrism and heterosexism. Heteronormative discourses of Church, State, home and school are the underpinnings of the society's prejudicial and discriminatory views and actions against non-heterosexuals. Violence—whether in the domestic or public sphere—is at times a direct consequence, taking the form of verbal and/or physical abuse. Literary discourse from the diaspora written and published in England, the United States and Canada has employed realism to poignantly portray this plight of sexual minorities.

Homophobia, the fear and hatred of homosexuals, is a term that was coined during the modern gay liberation movement that burgeoned in 1969 with the Stonewall Riots in New York. Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons and Kathleen Lennon in their discussion of gay men as subordinated masculinities observe that homophobia is interrelated with hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002, 146). The heterosexual male is considered to be the “real man” (147) and the homosexual is deemed to be feminine because he is perceived to be “lacking in masculinity” because, they note, “masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity” (143).

Stephen M. Whitehead cites Carl Jung's essentialist and archetypal theories on gender in which effeminate men and “mannish” women typify a psychical and gender imbalance (Whitehead 2002, 26–29). Jung was a disciple of Sigmund Freud, and Freud theorized that the young boy in the pre-Oedipal stage of sexual development views the world through the eyes of his mother, but when having to identify with the father “has to come to terms with having seen his father through his mother's eyes and therefore as an object of desire. Desire for the father and therefore men generally is seen as feminine desire and therefore has to be quelled” (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 145). Hence, the suggestion is that the homosexual transgresses gender, sexual and social taboos. Additionally, society views homosexuality as antithetical to the institution of the family and the perpetuation of human civilization. Predating the influence of psychoanalytic and sociological studies on homophobic beliefs and the coining of the word “homophobia”, however, would be scriptural texts in both Christian and non-Christian traditions that vilify homosexuality and which for most persons proscribe the condition as sinful and immoral.

Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon cite Sylvia Walby's multi-causal model of patriarchy in which six determinant structures underpin patriarchal relations: “paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state” (73). Relevant to this paper are particularly sexuality and violence—or the threat thereof—as they pertain to male aggression against lesbians, or suspected lesbians. Consequently, the construction of femininity is neither more secure nor less policed than the construction of masculinity; for example, as Judith Halberstam says, tomboyishness in adolescent and adult females is not acceptable and, as Gill Clarke suggests about the fate of some women who partake in male-dominated sports, homophobia also plays a part in the construction of femininity (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, 163).

Therefore, there are gay men and lesbians who are forced into lives of compulsory heterosexuality, closetedness and duplicity to avoid persecution. Yet, in demanding heteronormativity and in producing homophobia, heterosexual hegemonies ironically betray a fragile control that is challenged and subverted, as evidenced by the defiance of the codes of marriage and an ideal masculinity that is unattainable and feels threatened by homosexuality, transvestism and lesbianism, for instance.

Secular laws, in tandem with religious ones, legislate against non-heterosexuals in the Anglophone Caribbean. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago—as in Jamaica—homosexuality is illegal. Sodomy—whether consensual or not, whether it occurs between homosexuals or heterosexuals—is unlawful under the Sexual Offences Act.ⁱⁱ Attorney Dana Seetahal has noted that the Equal Opportunities Act “protects persons from discrimination by reason of status”; but “while ‘status’ includes things such as sex, race, origin, religion, and disability, it does not include sexual orientation.”ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, she cites Section 8 of the Immigration Act, which excludes certain classes of persons who are non-residents and non-citizens from entering the country, such as homosexuals, criminals, drug addicts, beggars, those who may commit a treasonous act, the disabled, and those suffering from a contagious disease. Therefore, Seetahal observes how “disabled persons and homosexuals are equated with criminals and traitors.” Heather Smyth identifies M. Jacqui Alexander’s analysis of how certain Caribbean states, through legislation, get involved in sexual politics. Alexander brings together “Caribbean nationalism and sexuality” and shows how the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago “naturalize heterosexuality by criminalizing lesbian and gay sex, thereby revising the terms of citizenship to exclude lesbians and gays” (Smyth 1999, 145).

Linden Lewis observes how, as regards homophobia, “tolerance levels vary, with places such as St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Barbados [being] at the higher end of the continuum of tolerance, while Jamaica, St. Vincent and St. Lucia occupy the lower levels” (Lewis 2003, 109). He recounts various, and some well-known, homophobic incidents in Jamaica and Barbados, and draws reference to the homophobic sentiments and lyrics of some reggae and dancehall artistes. One related reason for this, Tara Atluri explains, is that black Caribbean males, having already faced an emasculating subordination under colonial rule, generally harbour resentment and intolerance towards homosexuals who most times are considered to be less than men.

Although this paper devotes more space to the gay male, as outlined above both male *and* female homosexuals are victims of homophobia—the latter especially so because they literally or symbolically eschew the desires of men and defy androcratic and patriarchal control. An analysis of prose fiction—by Lawrence Scott and Shani Mootoo from Trinidad and Tobago; H. Nigel Thomas from St. Vincent; Makeda Silvera and Patricia Powell from Jamaica—reveals how vraisemblance and irony are used to convey fictional representations of gendered violence against male homosexuals. They are victims of crime and punishment because they fail to conform to societal constraints of compulsory heterosexuality and ideal masculinity.

The paper begins with a brief discussion and analysis of lesbophobic and spousal reactions, which include threats of violence, towards women who are suspected of being lesbians, with the novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda* and the short stories “Baby” and “Lemon Scent” used as illustrations. In the latter examples, the trope of irony and—in one story—the author’s skilful manipulation of paralipsis and psychological perspective serve to both foreground and undermine the heterosexual male’s disgust and fear of the female homosexual.

The paper then segues into its major focus of the violent threats and/or acts towards male homosexuals in the novels *A Small Gathering of Bones*, *Spirits in the Dark*, *Aelred’s Sin* and the short story “Chameleon”. In the first book, it is the author’s use of spatial perspective and the metaphorization of names and a park to convey the homosexual’s private intimacies in a public place that is explored. In the second, attention is given primarily to the language used to denigrate the homosexual and the homosexual act; how communal violence is used to silence the homosexual; and how institutionalized religion fuels homophobia. Finally, analysis of the latter two discourses highlights, as a whole, how other societal institutions—the school and the family—are also culpable in conveying as punishable and deserving of persecution those behaviours of adolescent males that betray signs of homosexuality, effeminacy and cross-dressing.

***Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda*: Stigma and Threat by Suspicion**

In Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), violence is a marked theme, whether in the form of Mala Ramchandin’s form of self-directed violence on each anniversary of her mother’s elopement with another woman or Chandin’s physical and sexual rage against her, his own daughter, as an act of vengeance for his wife’s action. Throughout her adulthood, Mala carries the stigma of “a woman whose father had obviously mistaken her for his wife, and whose mother had obviously mistaken another woman for her husband” (109). The homosexual narrator-protagonist and Mala’s caregiver, Tyler, faces “malice” and “hostility” (15) from the female nurses with whom he works and is shown “disdain” and pelted with “verbal rocks” (10) by Toby the handyman. Although she is heterosexual, Mala in her youth is doled out a similar treatment by her peers and the townsfolk in a collective reaction to the incest, adultery and lesbianism that are associated with her parents. She becomes guilty by association and is accused by her schoolmates of being a lesbian as well: “You giving Boyie or you like girls?...Ey. Look here, if we catch you near any girl we go cut ass!” (87).

Thus, merely the *suspicion* of an alternative sexual orientation can make an individual, male or female, vulnerable to homophobic violence. Like the Ramchandin house, too, the home that Lowe and Miss Sylvie share in Powell’s *The Pagoda* is viewed by some in the community as a nasty and ungodly place (Powell 1998, 15). This is based on the suspicion that Lowe and Cecil are in a homosexual relationship. Lowe, whom they think is a man, is ironically a woman *masquerading* as a man to conceal her identity as an illegal immigrant from China, and Cecil is her benefactor and the father of her daughter. These examples emphasize how sexuality, which is perceived to be deviant, is linked

with evil and biblical condemnations. In an act of wilful violence, Lowe's shop is subsequently burned to the ground by the overseer who is filled with spite and greed, and Cecil is killed within.

“Baby” and “Lemon Scent”: Harmful Ironies

Mootoo's short story, “Lemon Scent” (1993), is used here to further demonstrate that lesbians can also be potential victims of violence, particularly by men who feel that lesbianism threaten their masculinity and patriarchy. It can be compared alongside fellow Caribbean-Canadian Makeda Silvera's “Baby”. Although set in Canada, this latter story deals with characters who are Caribbean immigrants. Thematically, it is not just about the belief that homosexuality is against God's will and is of the Devil and that it is a way of life associated with foreign, White culture; but, it is also about lesbians needing to be set straight by men forcibly having sex with them and the way in which some men feel hatred toward lesbians. It is a short story that is rich in dramatic irony, for while the two female protagonists are together arguing and making love and conversation, unbeknownst to them a male intruder is outside their bedroom door with murderous intentions. There is further irony in the fact that he needs to be sexually aroused in order to commit the intended physical violence; and although he despises them, the lesbian lovers are his source of arousal. He has snuck into their apartment to carry out a hate crime, yet the reason for the hate induces sexual excitation within him. He is unable to execute the crime when this excitation wanes.

His moral indignation is therefore satirized, and a reductionist effect is made of his masculinist views and of the chauvinism that surrounds male sexual desire in relation to lesbian eroticism. It is implied he harbours the belief that homosexuality is an indulgence of white people and of the metropole, and is a sin not to be associated with blacks and Caribbean people. For him, blackness and gayness are incompatible bedfellows, and when blacks do indulge in same-sex desire they are stooping below their nature. Like Frantz Fanon, he seems to think that homosexuality does not exist in the Caribbean,^{iv} and he yearns to return home to escape the immorality of Canadian urban life or at least to find a space there that is akin to a Caribbean environment with which he is familiar.

At the beginning of “Lemon Scent”, the gender identity of the first-person narrator is not revealed and is left to conjecture. There is a shift in perspective to third-person narration in the two remaining sections of the story. Thus, it is only in the first section that the reader hears the “I” voice of who later turns out to be Anita, the lesbian lover of the married Kamini who is also not named in the opening section. Here, the sensuous play and flirting between the two, at what is obviously a cocktail reception at the married couple's home, could easily have been mistaken to be between a man and a married woman in the presence of her husband who is visible in another room. Thus, the use of the cataphoric “I” with its resultant gender indeterminacy is a subversive technique that is full of irony and somewhat of a leveller because it indicates that opposite-sex and same-sex erotic desire may not be easy to differentiate if the sex of the parties involved is not known.

The notion of irony is also furthered in the story when in the third section we see Anita's reaction to Kamini's news that her husband is suspicious of their relationship and has threatened to kill them both if he finds out that they have been sexually involved. The tension-filled second section of the story focuses on his fear and anger as his suspicions grow regarding the nature of the relationship between Anita and his wife. It is symbolic that he remains unnamed, a reductive technique that mocks his position as husband and emphasizes Anita's as cuckold.

Anita is unappealing to men (27)—which brings to mind the theorist Monique Wittig's view that a lesbian is not a woman^v—and adopts a domineering, butch role in the relationship. For example, she remonstrates against Kamini for having marital relations with her husband (31). The irony arises because a lesbian is the unexpected rival to a heterosexual male who hitherto was secure in his possession of his wife. Anita revels in the inversive effect that this has created (30). This situation is reminiscent of Susan Donner's explanation that "Politically, a lesbian sexual identity can be seen as a challenge to patriarchy, with its control of female sexuality" (Epstein 1987, 29).^{vi}

Hence, by the close of the story the reader understands why only the first-person perspective of a paramour with an initial anonymous gender identity is presented and then juxtaposed with the fears of a married man that he is being cuckolded by his wife with another woman. This stylistic technique reinforces the irony and further highlights the role of Anita as subverter and competitor—although her life has been threatened and even as the story ends, the reader leaves Kamini in the arms, not of her husband, but of her lesbian lover. As the lesbian feminist theorist Adrienne Rich says in her influential paper, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", regarding married women who deal "in a profoundly female emotional and passionate [sic] world": "We may faithfully or ambivalently have obeyed the institution [of marriage], but our feelings—and our sensuality—have not been tamed or contained within it" (162).

The lemon-scented cologne that Kamini wears, from which the story gets its title, arouses both the husband and Anita, but is also symbolic of the bitter dilemma she faces, trapped between her obligations as wife and fear of her potentially violent husband, and her feelings for Anita. Like the wife in Michelle Cliff's "Rubicon" she lives out a double identity—what Rich calls a "double-life" (162)—and is forced to carry on a clandestine relationship with another woman, but there is no guarantee that it will remain secret. The word, Scent, in the title also implies, by its definition, the trail of evidence that the husband has uncovered as he becomes more and more cognizant of his wife's infidelity and with whom.

A Small Gathering of Bones: Private Space / Public Threat

Whereas Mootoo's "Lemon Scent" highlights the *threat* of murder towards a married lesbian from her cuckolded husband in a domestic situation, Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones* (1994) portrays domestic violence between male homosexuals who cohabit and which takes the form of physical, verbal and emotional abuse and the destruction of personal property. The focus here in the paper, however, is on her representation of the continuous threat faced by those homosexuals who are not domestic partners, but who are strangers seeking anonymous sex in a public park named Nanny Sharpe's.^{vii} Jamaica's

legislation of homosexuality as a crime, and the subsequent withholding of rights for homosexuals to marry, force many to indulge in fleeting intimacies in public places/spaces; and this fictive account captures the resultant intricacies (codes and behaviours used for propositioning partners) and dilemmas (infection with and spread of HIV/AIDS) of the experience.

Spatial perspective is a significant factor, for it is notable that there is a clear division regarding the activities of Nanny Sharpe's—what can be called the normative activities of people walking dogs and strolling around with their babies in prams (80), and the men-having-sex-with-men activity occurring close by. For even when Dale is having sex with the first stranger, people walk by and traffic passes just yards away on the main road (114); thick foliage protects them from view. The section of the park used by the gay men is such that “[a]ll around, trees stand up tall and weeds grow plenty. A foot beaten path trails off into the thickets” (80); “the large limbs of the willow trees served as chameleons in the dark” so that the people passing “quickly back and forth on the narrow dirt road close-by [sic]” cannot see Dale and the stranger engaging in sexual intercourse (114). The park's physical attributes that protect the men from view and provide them with a meeting place—along with its feminine title—give it a kumbala-like essence. This screenable, barrier-like and chameleonic setting is one that allows for dramatic irony and is even tinged with a paradoxical element because the reader knows what the people who are so nearby do not, and the men remain hidden among companies of people.

It is as if this public park, Nanny Sharpe's, is a character all its own in the novel—and the name lends credence to this idea—albeit the park is not personified. In fact, however, Nanny Sharpe's is a combination of the names of two real Jamaican national heroes who fought against slavery and colonialism: Nanny (?–c.1734) was a Maroon who fought viciously against the English and is Jamaica's only female national hero, and Samuel Sharpe (1801–1832) was an informed, educated town slave and leader of the resistance and rebellion against slavery. Therefore, the connotations of the homosexual as a maroon figure or an outsider to mainstream society, and the liberation that the park offers him to engage with those of his own kind are striking in the author's naming of this fictional public park.

A *place* is only a naturally formed location and is a *space* when its meaning-potential is developed and when meanings are imposed upon it by human activity in its various forms and it is transformed into a landscape from its previously neutral terrain; that is, relevant to its locale it becomes a “way of seeing”; in this context *private* and *public* can become relative terms (Leap 7 and 9). In the novel, these dichotomies are evidenced in the area of the park where the men meet and which previously had a sign that cautioned: “KEEP OFF. NO ADMISSION THIS SIDE OF PARK” (80). Here, the men are able to create a private space within a public space; for, whereas the park is a public location for others who use it for relaxation and family outings, the gay men are able to conceal themselves and partake in what is considered to be a private activity in the same location, albeit in a once restricted area. However, like Dale's friend Ian Kaysen, they are always open to the threat of violent hate crimes by gay bashers (17), or of being arrested by police officers

(82). Byrne Fone in his treatise on homophobia observes that: “The increased visibility of lesbians and gay men is said to have made inroads against homophobia. But visibility can also erode tolerance: an encounter on the street—two women kissing, two men holding hands—is still disturbing...” (419). The novel’s title ultimately emphasizes the claiming of a literal and metaphorical space by this homosexual minority in a homophobic culture—a *small gathering*; and the threat posed by discrimination, death and disease—*of bones*.

Spirits in the Dark: Societal Condemnation and Communal Violence

In the discourse of Thomas’s *Spirits in the Dark* (1993), lexical items and literary tropes depict a collective disapproval of homosexuality on the fictitious island of Isabella. Isabellan society’s view of homosexuality is conveyed by vulgar expressions of ridicule and contempt. Colloquialisms, idioms, metaphors, metonyms, and personification of the male organ are used to describe homosexual desire and activity. Because a homosexual is not considered a real man, Jerome’s mother’s first cousin who is also gay is referred to as “Boy-boy”, and the narrator notes that this relative “was a constant point of reference for what the society would not accept” (94). Those seen in his company are confronted with generic sentences like “You not no man, you is like Boy-boy”, or with the idiomatic question: “Yo’ turning weird?” (94). A homosexual is called a “buller” (117), and Pastor Oberon, who is suspected by the Compton villagers of being one also is called “Pastor O’Bum”. When Jerome joins the Militants someone calls him “Miss O’Bum” (117). The lexical item “bum” denotes not only the American term for a worthless person, but is also a British word for the buttocks or anus—hence the sexual innuendo.

Deborah Tannen suggests that gay men *referring to each other* as “she” or “Miss” is—much like when they use women’s intonational and syntactic patterns—an example of one gender indexing another gender (218–219). However, the villagers bestowing, or rather *imposing*, the title of “Miss” on Jerome has the negative effects of feminizing him—a passive role in the homosexual act is implied—and emasculating him, thereof serving a similar function as the name “Boy-boy” given to his relative; and can be deemed as the villagers’ way of pronouncing their knowledge of his homosexuality that he tries so hard to conceal.

Other offensive expressions used in the novel to describe homoeroticism, homosexual coition, and a male organ that is engaged in such activity include “It gwine raise it head if yo’ promise fo’ let it in by the back door” (94) and references to faecal matter which are meant literally and reinforce the perceived dirtiness of the act (94 and 199).

Intolerance for gay men is not only expressed verbally, but can also take the form of physical violence. Battery and an assault with a weapon—a beer bottle—used as a penile device in a buggery attack (199) demonstrate the disdain and aggression levelled at the homosexual. As a teenager, Boy-boy arranges a canefield rendezvous with another young man only to find that “When he got there, there were ten of them. They took turns bugging him; one even used a beer bottle; then they beat him into unconsciousness and left him there” (199). It is noteworthy that Boy-boy’s attackers brag of the incident without mentioning the sexual assault, and he refuses to identify who they are. The ten

young men are aware of the stigmatization of gay sex and therefore avoid the opportunity for assumptions to be made about their own sexuality, and Boy-boy knows that as a homosexual he will get no justice. This crime occurs when Jerome is eight years old.

Society's social injustice and lack of sympathy for the homosexual are further evident when years later at Jerome's workplace in the civil service one worker slaps another because the latter, who is suspected of being gay, dares to give a retort to the former's vulgar accusation. Jerome's co-workers who are witness to the slapping incident prefer to lie about seeing anything, downplay the slapping to a "misunderstanding", are angry at Jerome for telling the truth and getting the aggressor dismissed, and ostracize the victim. The victim's sexual orientation was formerly a matter of speculation as evidenced by the discourse modes of hearsay and rumour: "They said he was 'so'" (199). The idiomatic term "so" is used adjectivally in Creole dialect to indicate gayness.

In free indirect discourse, Jerome notes as follows: "When they knew you were that way, everyone took liberties with your feelings" (199). Here, Jerome uses evasive language by not calling this sexual orientation by its name—a sign of his own unease with his homosexuality. The demonstrative adjective "that" is an example of distal spatial deixis which shows how homosexuality is considered to be anomalous and antithetical to heterosexuality; hence the implication of distance, disapproval and ostracism in its use by heterosexuals. A similar sense of distanciation and differentiation is conveyed in Jerome's use of the distal deictic pronoun "they" in reference to heterosexuals.

Jerome equates the persecution of homosexuals to the stoning of sinners; an exophoric reference^{viii} is made to Toni Morrison's comment about Blacks not stoning sinners, to which Jerome feels the opposite situation occurs on his island. This reference to the stoning of homosexuals in *Isabella* is only an analogy, but is at the same time an intertextual reference to a form of punishment seen meted out to sinners in the Bible. With specific regard to homosexuals, however, Leviticus 20: 13 declares that "they must die, their blood shall be on their own heads", but does not say exactly *how* the homosexual should be put to death.

Isabellans would also be aware of the attitude to homosexuals and the perceived notoriety of some of their actions abroad. This could only serve to further fuel their own intolerance and put them on the *qui vive* for such behaviour on their island:

Some of them would have read in The Isabellan where a preacher heard all across America and around the world said that God struck California with an earthquake to punish it for not taking action against the homosexuals in San Francisco. "No God-fearing city would permit the International Gay Games. No God-fearing city would let the demons of Sodom in their gates to practise their abominations." (italics in original, 167)

The preacher's strong, unmodalized, categorical assertions that make reference to fearing God and to the biblical text most commonly associated with the condemnation of homosexuals would no doubt be highly provocative and persuasive. The quotation is also reminiscent of the idea of divine judgement and punishment meted out to a whole community because of the perceived wrongdoing of one or a few individuals (Sontag 41).

***Aelred's Sin* and "Chameleon": Peer Persecution and Parental Punishment**

Growing-up stories have long been a staple in Anglophone Caribbean literature, but emphasis was heretofore given to non-homosexual characters. The portrayal of gay adolescent masculinities as represented particularly in Scott's *Aelred's Sin* (1998) and "Chameleon" (1994) and in Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* show that the gay youth faces extreme pressure to adhere to a compulsory masculinity in preparation for manhood. Jean Marc and Ted in *Aelred's Sin* and Jerome in *Spirits in the Dark* face emotional, psychological and public pressure to conform to male, heterosexual standards. Jean Marc and Ted, adolescent lovers, endure public ridicule at school; and Jerome, who has wet dreams about his classmates Errol and Peter, overhears his friends joking about his lack of interest in girls and what they perceive to be his homosexual nature. Foucault observes that sexuality was regulated in eighteenth-century secondary schools.^{ix} In *Aelred's Sin* one sees, too, how the secondary school, albeit in the twentieth century and on a fictitious Caribbean island, Les Deux Isles, regulates adolescent sexuality—particularly male heterosexuality—in private spaces like the toilets and in public ones like the playing field, study hall and refectory. Also, Fitzsimons and Lennon note what can easily be applied to Jerome's situation in *Spirits in the Dark* when they identify being perceived as a swot—an informal, derogatory term for someone who is felt by others to be too studious—as one of the ways boys may be thought to flout rules of masculinity, and as therefore one of the reasons why they are subjected to homophobic taunts (144).

What they further have to say about how boys in the school environment exhibit homophobia in verbal and physical ways can, however, be applied to what occurs in *Aelred's Sin*. They refer to Nayak and Kehily's study of the "performative, ritualistic nature of homophobia" with respect to routine homophobic behaviour among young schoolboys, which include "[h]omophobic humour, language and insults, and exaggerated actions" displayed by the boys to convince themselves and others of their heterosexual masculinity (145).^x Wesley Crichlow also deals with his first-hand experience of such behaviour among Trinidadian schoolboys (183–222). He wilfully claims and appropriates the derogatory Trinidadian terms "bulla man" and "bullers", and recounts the homophobia, heteronormativity and heterosexism he encountered as a youth in his home, school, church and community and how he dissimulated—not always successfully—by engaging in performances of hypermasculinity, compulsory masculinity and heterosexuality.

In the novel, Robert de la Borde painfully remembers Ted Salter's death and how he and others at the school were all culpable. Ted, a captain of the college's football and cricket teams and a head boy, is affected by the "scandal" (126), "jeering, taunting" (385), and "the writings and drawings" (127) associated with his homosexual relationship with Jean

Marc. The boys rebel against him on the playing field and express their knowledge of his sexuality on the lavatory walls.

As a high-profile student at an all-male school, Ted, more so than Jean Marc, faces greater scrutiny and a more severe obloquy because of his homosexuality. His “authority was threatened and challenged everywhere” (127); he becomes bulimic, and in order to once again be “everyone’s hero” (126) he dives off a cliff while being taunted and dared by the other boys, and is killed in the pool below. Robert, in his early teens when the incident occurred, sums it up in part: “...denial, punishment, death. Suicide? Self-killing? Murder?” (388). He admits that the “Headmaster, dean of discipline, house captains, parents, everyone was involved. But they let it run. No one said a word. No one dampened the stamping feet in the study hall. No one put a stop to the hissing in the refectory...I saw and heard all that and I said nothing” (127). Robert was at the time ashamed of and confused by his brother’s involvement with Ted, having also actually spied them engaging in a sexual act. And so, quite likely in an attempt to preserve his own image and reputation, he also participated in the boys’ harassment of and rebellion against Ted.

Whitehead explains in his discussion of masculinity and the body that there is with the male subject “a preparedness to put one’s body at risk in order to achieve expectations. The male/boy/man is *expected* to transcend space, or to place his body in aggressive motion within it, in so doing posturing to self and others the assuredness of his masculinity” (original emphasis, 189). This is certainly the case with Ted and his fatal plunge off the cliff. Ted feels compelled to convince the other boys of his masculinity, thereby partaking in the codes of a compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity.

Thus, in the face of peer pressure, homophobia and adult complicity, Ted sacrifices his life in a show of masculine bravado so that he could regain the respect of his schoolmates who now call him “*buller* ... the word we boys used for sodomites, the double-backed beast” (127). This obvious Shakespearean allusion—an example of an intertextual reference—to Iago’s phrase “making the beast with two backs” in *Othello* highlights the boys’ perception of the homosexual act as an abominable unnaturalness, akin to what Iago thought of interracial marriage and lovemaking. Ultimately, one may say that Ted experiences what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a “homosexual panic”, defined as “a flight from full individuality (because it might at certain points embrace the reprobated patterns of homosexuality) for the safety of traditional roles that do not threaten the enabling fictions of gender distinction.”^{xi}

Michelle Cliff’s title story in her short story collection *The Store of a Million Items: Stories* (1998) touches upon effeminophobia and the feminization of the young male. Since the main character displays sensibilities and pursuits that are considered feminine rather than masculine, his father has concluded that he is a pansy—a derogatory term. Also, Fitzsimons and Lennon cite Michael Kimmel’s use of Freudian child development theory to link “the repudiation of the feminine directly with homophobia” (144).^{xii} The implicature arises in the story that it is only when Gerald shows the ability to verbally and

physically challenge a rapist and to rescue and comfort the ravaged female that his father recognizes masculine traits within him. Scott's "Chameleon", in his short story collection *Ballad for the New World* (1994), addresses similar issues of ideal and compulsory masculinity that arise in *Aelred's Sin* and "The Store of a Million Items". Whereas in his "I Want to Follow My Friend", Scott shows how peer pressure within the school environment places sanctions on homoeroticism, in "Chameleon" a young boy's effeminate and transvestite tendencies are policed by paternal expectations through physical punishment.

In "Chameleon", irony exists on the levels of characterization and the outcome or dénouement of the story. A deferred military dream is the reason for the lead character, Monty, being named by his father after General Bernard Law Montgomery, a famous British field marshal and a commander of the Allied Forces during World War II. Monty grows up as a sickly and weak child—an image completely opposite to his namesake, much to his father's chagrin and disappointment. General Montgomery, however, was known for being particular about his clothing and appearance, which is a characteristic shared by the fictional Monty—but with an ironic and bizarre twist.

Monty belongs to the Monagas family, one that we meet again—at least they carry the same surname—in Scott's novel *Witchbroom*, and in which there are family members who also indulge in transvestism. It is through the focalization of the autodiegetic narrator,^{xiii} whom the reader infers to be a psychiatrist or psychologist, that one becomes aware at the close of the story that Monty harbours an innate interest in female clothing rather than in the female body. That is, the reader and the narrator are the last to know, and find out together, that Monty was physically punished by his father years earlier, not because of his voyeuristic tendency—that he had the indecency to spy on the nude body of his unsuspecting neighbour while she took her habitual, open-air afternoon bath—but because his father knew his real interest was in the dress she would put on afterward. This is conveyed via implicature when the adult Monty says to the unnamed narrator as he reveals to him/her the "lingerie, satin scarves, lace handkerchiefs and a white mantilla" that are his "treasure" and "solace" (39): "He whipped me, but he cannot take *them* away from me" (original emphasis, 39).

Thus, unlike the more common incidence of dramatic irony entailing the reader knowing more than a character in a story or play, in this instance two characters, the father and son, know more than the reader and another character does at first—the latter being the "I" or mediating voice, since s/he is the one to whom Monty relates his story.

The significance of the story's title thus becomes apparent because young Monty is indeed like a chameleon, fooling the reader and the narrator into believing that he is just a voyeur or simply an adolescent boy smitten by the body of an adolescent girl, when indeed his preoccupation borders on transvestism. The irony becomes even more palpable when one considers that Scott is quite apparently undercutting or mocking the perceived heterocentric perspective of the reader and the narrator who would have taken for granted that Monty was looking upon Bernadetta with a (hetero)sexual gaze.

In the interview with this researcher, Scott describes “Chameleon” as a “dark story about different kinds of maleness”. The reader can identify these as the military commander, the priest (Monty’s mother had wanted to name him “Jesus”) and the cross-dresser, which represents a diminishing order of virility and toughness associated with masculinity. Scott notes that Monty is interested in Bernadetta’s femininity rather than in her body and in later life he still holds on to the items that embody “the sense of the feminine which he has not been allowed to enter.” Scott expresses his interest in how restrictions are placed on gender crossing, how genders are policed—that is, a man must walk, dress, etcetera, in a certain way—and how men are “not allowed to enter the feminine world”.

Conclusion

Heterosexual and gay masculinities are shaped by gender scripting and male socialization; and the effects of defying masculine codes include homophobia that may entail physical punishment, taunting and labelling. Gendered violence or the potential threat thereof toward females and males of an alternative sexual orientation can therefore be both verbal and physical and can be equally devastating. It can result in strained or damaged relationships among parents and their children, married couples, schoolmates, and colleagues; internalized homophobia; closetedness in order to avoid the discovery of one’s true sexual orientation; and risky behaviour such as anonymous, public sex that increases the spread of HIV/AIDS and, ironically, further opportunities for random violence by strangers, to name a few. Ultimately, the fictive representations of homophobia effect an unsilencing of the problem of a culture of violence against non-heterosexuals in the Anglophone Caribbean.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ This entire paper is adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation "A Discourse of Alternative Sexuality in Anglophone Caribbean Literature" (2007).

ⁱⁱ Currently, there is a debate and the voicing of objection in religious quarters to the Draft National Gender Policy, which some feel by its wording seeks to re-define gender and have same-sex unions and the adoption of children by same-sex couples legalized. The document proposes in part that the special needs of those with alternative sexualities be catered for by the government; that same-sex unions be included in the Rape and Sexual Offences Act; and that the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all persons irrespective of their sexual preference or orientation be promoted and protected. The authors of the draft document—staff at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies—note the confusion that still prevails regarding the term "gender", and also express their concern that the Equal Opportunities Act excludes, and in so doing discriminates against, the gay and lesbian community. Julien Neaves, "Gender policy draft under fire", *Trinidad Express* September 18, 2005. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_news>

ⁱⁱⁱ Dana Seetahal, "Homosexual Conduct and the Right to Privacy", *The Trinidad Guardian Online Edition* June 29, 2003. July 1, 2003
<<http://www.guardian.co.tt/dana.html>>

^{iv} See Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). Nagel cites Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 84, in which he made "the

psychoanalytically based conclusion ... that homosexuality was ‘an attribute of the white race,’ and did not exist in the Caribbean because blacks there don’t experience the oedipal tendencies that putatively give rise to same-sex desire” (123–124). She also makes reference to Eldridge Cleaver, the former Black Panther Minister of Information, who “attacked black author James Baldwin’s homosexuality as ‘somehow un-black.’ In doing so Cleaver equated black homosexuality with white forced miscegeny and charged gay blacks with participating in a kind of racial suicide” (122).

^v See Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (New York: Beacon, 1992).

^{vi} Donner cites S. Epstein, “Gay politics, ethnic identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism”, *Socialist Review* (93/94): 9–54.

^{vii} Sections of this analysis regarding the depiction of public sex in Patricia Powell’s novel are adapted not only from the thesis, but from a paper entitled “Realism and a Discourse of Alternative Sexuality in *A Small Gathering of Bones*”, presented at the Society for Caribbean Studies Conference at Warwick University, UK, in 2002 and found on the website <<http://www.sbsonline.freemove.co.uk/carib.htm>>

^{viii} As opposed to an endophoric or textual reference, an exophoric reference refers to contextual or situational reference; these terms were popularized in *Cohesion in English* (1976) by M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan (Wales, 141).

^{ix} Foucault (1978) notes:

On the whole, one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance at the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders considered it explicitly. The organizers took it permanently into account. All who held a measure of authority were placed in a state of perpetual alert, which the fixtures, the precautions taken, the interplay of punishments and responsibilities, never ceased to reiterate. The space for classes, the shape of the tables, the planning of the recreation lessons, the distribution of the

dormitories (with or without partitions, with or without curtains), the rules for monitoring bedtime and sleep periods—all this referred, in the most prolix manner, to the sexuality of children. (27–28)

^x See A. Nayak and M.J. Kehily, “Playing it Straight: Masculinities, Homophobias and Schooling”, *Journal of Gender Studies* 2 (1996): 211–230.

^{xi} Nigel Wood, introductory note, “Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: The Beast in the Closet” in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. David Lodge, 448 (Essex: Longman, 2000).

^{xii} They refer to Kimmel’s “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. H. Brod and M. Kaufman, 119-141 (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1994).

^{xiii} An autodiegetic narrator is the narrator-protagonist of a first-person narrative (Prince, 9).

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Commentary: Everyday Violence Against Children

Merle Hodge

When we speak of violence as a “culture”, we cannot, surely, be focusing mainly on the current statistics of violent crime. Despite the high visibility of acts of murder, and despite our understandable preoccupation with this danger, it is a fact that people who shoot and stab and chop up other humans beings make up a very small percentage of the population.

We could, perhaps, choose to see those people as belonging to a *sub*-culture, and that would neatly separate them from the rest of us, the righteous citizenry. But the culture of violence includes all of us, whether or not we have ever shot or chopped up anybody.

Moreover, the high incidence of violent crime, or violence clearly recognized as criminal, is a recent phenomenon; but the culture of violence was there all the time. The fact that it was always part of us might help to explain how it was so easy for an element of the population to jump up, seemingly out of nowhere, and start dispensing the kind of unthinking, remorseless violence that we are witnessing today.

These manifestations cannot be separated from something more deep-seated that inhabits the whole society. The culture of violence cannot be defined only by outrageous acts of violence committed in the public sphere. I would like to locate that culture in a more

intimate space, and to identify it as a long-standing acceptance of violence as a normal, even necessary part of everyday human interaction.

The culture of violence in the context of the Caribbean may have something to do with unprocessed historical experience. I would like to quote a few lines from an article of mine published 35 years ago, “The Shadow of the Whip”¹, in a collection edited by Orde Coombs: *Is Massa Day Dead*. The central concern of this article is “the legacy of violence and disruption with which our society has never adequately come to terms” (111).

Caribbean society was born out of brutality, destructiveness, rape: the destruction of the Amerindian peoples, the assault on Africa, the forced uprooting and enslavement of the African; the gun, the whip, the authority of force. Yet the Caribbean today is not particularly noted for any large-scale, organized violence...But the violence of our history has not evaporated. It is still there. It is there in the relations between adult and child, between black and white, between man and woman. It has been internalized: it has seeped down into our personal lives. (111)

For me, the most important manifestation of this internalized violence is our profound commitment to the use of physical and verbal violence in the socialization of children. I focus on this feature of our social reality because it is so pervasive. The majority of our people believe in the efficacy of corporal punishment for the successful upbringing of children. It is part of the national ideology, whereas the majority of us dissociate ourselves from other forms of violence against the person; that is to say that we frown on the phenomenon of men beating women (for that is domestic violence), or adults beating up adults (for that is assault and battery); but adult men and women beating children is all right, for that is discipline.

In 1999 the group Women Working for Social Progress (Workingwomen) intensified its advocacy for the removal of corporal punishment, mounting a campaign, in the first instance, against its use in the schools. As part of that campaign, we lobbied the Ministry of Education and met with the then incumbent Minister of Education Ms. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to recommend, among other things, changes to the Education Act and the Children Act.

The latter document gives written permission to adults to do whatever they want with children in their care, in the name of punishment. At the end of a section of the Children

¹ Hodge, Merle, “The Shadow of the Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean.” in *Is Massa Day Dead?* ed. Orde Coombs. (New York: Doubleday, 1974).

Act, headed PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS, there is a clause which reassures the population as follows:

Nothing in this Part shall be construed to take away or affect the right of any parent, teacher, or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child or young person to administer reasonable punishment to such child or young person.²

Ms Kamla Persad-Bissessar took the extremely bold step of having this section amended by the following insertion:

Reasonable punishment referred to in sub-section (1), in relation to a teacher, does not include corporal punishment.³

Other amendments were made to the Children Act to bring our treatment of children closer to what is required by international conventions.

Both Ms Persad-Bissessar, and her successor, Ms Hazel Manning, are to be commended for having the courage of their convictions with regard to the use of corporal punishment, in the face of retrograde opinions to the contrary—people calling for the Ministry to “bring back the strap” (as if it ever went anywhere).

Very instructive was the response of many teachers to the outlawing of corporal punishment. It was a response of extreme dismay—as though the ground had been cut from under them. It became clear that there were teachers who saw their relationship with children as based almost entirely on the teacher’s power to dispense violence. With no whip hanging overhead, how was a teacher now to operate?

In this matter there are few who are qualified to cast the first stone, and I am certainly not intending to be judgemental or self-righteous here. When I was a student I went to work in a children’s home in Denmark. It was a home for children who, because of experiences in their early childhood, presented marked behavioural difficulties. These children were a real challenge—they did everything in the book of “bad behaviour”. To my consternation, however, nobody was beating them! NO LICKS! I argued with the people running the home: why don’t you beat these children when they misbehave? I thought these people had to be crazy. Who ever heard of bringing up children without beating them?

² *Laws of Trinidad and Tobago*, Chapter 46:01, Clause 22.

³ *Act No. 68 of 2000: An Act to amend the Children Act, Chapter 46:01*. Clause 10A.

This was more than 40 years ago, just to debunk one of the common arguments flying about in the corporal punishment debate. There are people who argue that the movement against corporal punishment is just a case of people trying to copy new-fangled psychological theories from America.

There is also a tendency to put down a firm, bold line between child-beating and child abuse, so that we can express outrage at, for example, newspaper reports of toddlers being beaten to death. There have been all too many cases in recent years that have come to public attention—babies, one-year-olds or two-year-olds beaten to death by their caregivers for doing things that are characteristic of children in their age-group, such as wetting their beds or crying when they are hungry.

When these things happen, there is an outpouring of righteous anger from people who have no problem at all with the child being hit—“but you don’t have to hit it so hard”. That is like George Bush condemning the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by the occupation forces, as though all the other violence they were doing to the people’s country was not abuse. Who can guarantee that approved violence will not move from one level to another?

Then there is the proud boast “But we get licks and we okay”. Or, “I get plenty licks when I was small, and I thank my schoolteachers for that, because look at where I am today. Look at how well I have done.”

Indeed, the Minister of Education who preceded Ms Persad-Bissessar, responded with a statement like that when he was asked for a comment on something that had taken place in a primary school. A little boy had been severely beaten and injured by a teacher who accused the child of scratching his car. When asked by a television reporter for a comment on the incident, that Minister of Education replied with words to the effect that he himself had been beaten in school, and that it had made him the achiever that he was.

We were beaten but we are okay? To reveal that physical pain was inflicted upon you regularly over a period of several years, and that it was a *good* thing, is the first sign that you are not “okay”.

We may not recognize how it has affected each of us individually, but there is one phenomenon in our country that I think is a result of our having been socialized by violence. Consider the immense popularity of the most abusive talk-show hosts in our country. People lap up the abuse. Radio stations feed off it; management is unable to make the moral decision not to indulge the collective masochism. When they try to pull the abusers off the air, there is an outcry. And, significantly, these on-the-air abusers

often boast about how much they were beaten as children. If that whole syndrome is not mental illness, then I do not know what is.

Child-beating is not only the major symptom of the culture of violence. It is also the method of its transmission from generation to generation. I believe that because our earliest experiences in life include violence directed at us by the people who are closest to us and who love us, our caregivers, there are to be found among us some behaviours and attitudes that are not particularly healthy, and which are part of the culture of violence.

Think of how readily a person may resort to violence against another person in response to the mildest aggravation or perceived affront. An automatic response is a slap, and in modern times the slap too often leads to murder. Over the past few years, simple disagreements over a card game, a hat, a drink, a few dollars, have moved swiftly from argument to physical assault, followed by shooting, or stabbing, or chopping to death.

Look at three simple incidents that took place in the first five months of 2004: there was a police officer alleged to have slapped a young man who may have bumped into him at a party; there was a security guard alleged to have slapped a young woman suspected of shoplifting in a store; and there was a young man alleged to have slapped a security guard who warned him about smoking marijuana in a mall. Each of these three incidents graduated to a more extreme act of violence, and in two of the three cases, death.

Such incidents only become public knowledge when they develop into murder or wounding, but the starting-point is an everyday occurrence: a grown person dispensing instant physical punishment to another, because that is how we are conditioned by our early caregivers to respond to irritation or frustration. Not only did our caregivers slap us when we made them *damn vex*. They also strongly exhorted us *not to take no lash* from another child, and to hit back without delay.

Most of us, of course, have sufficient restraint not to actually lash out physically when other adults upset us, and the alternative, verbal abuse, is a fine art in our culture. The point is that as individuals we are ill equipped by our upbringing to settle conflict or deal with anger by peaceful, rational means; and that as a nation we can think of no other approach to solving the problem of violence than the punitive approach—retaliation. When you catch them, beat them, hang them. The remedy popularly advocated for juvenile crime is to give young offenders more of the violent punishment that predisposed them to violence in the first place.

Yes, previous generations were beaten left, right and centre (or “back, belly and side” as my grandmother used to say) and they did not grow up to be gun-men; but what was the

environment when they were growing up? For one thing, the guns were not so readily available for use in settling scores.

There are factors in the environment today that have made it more likely for our latent culture of violence to explode into public violence. Things like the forms of entertainment that are packed with gratuitous images of violence; the undermining of community and family networking that robs the individual person of material and emotional support in times of economic hardship; the cutting back of our social services that took place in the era of IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment; and the cultivation of consumerist tastes that must be satisfied by any means necessary.

In such an environment we cannot continue to support violence in the home and in the school. We have to make a strong commitment to creating a climate of peace. This will require, among other things, that we change our treatment of offenders, especially young offenders, and that we spread education on how to bring up children without violence. We will not be rid of the culture of violence until the people who have responsibility for the socialization of children can be persuaded, and equipped, to work at fostering self-discipline in them rather than beating them into submission.



The University of
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Before I Dead

Rhoda Bharath

This morning I had a gun because they get me vex. Usually I does have a knife on me; it have something about the way it does feel: solid and safe like when you swimming in the river or the sea and even though the water high or rough, once you stretch out your foot you go feel the seabed underneath you and know you safe. It have real fellas in my school that does tote gun, but I never really feel that is for me. Gun like it have it own mind, like once it in your hand you can't control it. Where I living in Arouca I see real men dead from own-way gun. The gun just reach in men hands and next thing you know it shoot off and is dead a man dead on the ground and the fella with the gun aint even sure how he kill the man and if is really he that kill the man. I have plenty chance to get gun. You just have to stand up on the junction long enough and think about a gun and a man go walk up to you and offer you one. You could even rent one if you can't afford to buy it. Real fellas does rent gun and bring it in school to show off. All recess and lunch time they in a corner in the classroom pulling it out, stroking it, pointing it. Whenever they point it fellas does scatter, they ain't stupid. And is to see them with this gun in they hand. They does have this kinda half smile, that is not really a smile, is really a "what if" expression, like, "What if I pull this trigger boy?" or, "What if I ride shots for that fella in Arima who disrespect me and my girl by the Velodrome the other night. I go show him. I go show him..."

And other fellas does want to hold the gun but they don't really let them unless is a good good partner, because they could never really tell if a fella holding a secret grudge against them and waiting to fire off the gun at them. And most times is only one bullet in the gun because to buy bullets expensive so they does buy one for protection, but really the protection is having the gun in they hand and pretending that the chamber might be full,

although fellas know is bluff they bluffing but, since they ain't know which chamber have the bullet they will go along with the bluff and respect the gun.

With a knife now, is you they does respect because knife is skill. You could stab a man and make as little damage as a scratch or you could kill him. It depend on if you know how to use it. With a knife you could feel yourself slicing through flesh; you can't feel that with a bullet. Guns good to kill fellas you aint really know or care about; but a knife is for more personal things. If a fella take your girl, you have to get him with a knife. Wait for a fete or something and get your partners and them and ride for him and in the thick of the bacchanal stick him with the knife, twist it in he guts, feel he flesh moving aside to make way for the metal and watch him in he eye so he know who doing it and why you doing it. If he have a gun though it really ain't matter how much skill you have.

Is really one of the security guard on the compound that get me vex. Ah mean, I don't trouble nobody and I was going about my business cool, cool. It have plenty thing people could say about me, eh. They could say I does smoke weed and they could say I does cuss stink when I vex. But they can't say I does trouble people. Since I is a little fella I prefer to keep myself to myself and leave people alone. Everybody know that.

So when just so one of them security walk up to me and say, "I hear you was interfering with a girl," I get vex. One thing I don't like is for people to say I do thing I never do. I, Saleem Mustapha, is one man who go never put Allah out of he thoughts and harass a girl just so. And is the kind of girl too! Shelly Ann? It ain't have nothing special about Shelly Ann! She force-ripe like all them other Compre girls. Same powder on she neck, same fancy hairdo although she aint going nowhere, same loud voice and cussing people if they watch she too hard. The fellas does call she Clothes Clip Shelly Ann. Squeeze she head and she foot open. So how this guard could think that Shelly Ann could be special enough for me to trouble she?

And was the guard attitude too! They does move like everybody is prisoner in this place. They does walk up to you and get on as if them own you, as if them and the law is the same thing. So they grab you by your shirt and drag you in a corner, embarrassing you in front of all your friend and them, asking you all kind of question fast fast so you can't answer and then although they pull you in a corner they talking hard hard for everybody to hear.

"You name Saleem, right?"

Mostly people does call me by my nickname, Taj, so when I hear Saleem I know is office business. One minute I strolling down the courtyard good, good, next minute I jam up in a corner next to the janitor room. Everybody on the corridor watching and I seeing people slowing down to take in the scenes just in case it have any action.

"Is you name Saleem, right?" they ask me again. I nod. And I sizing them up, because me ain't really fraid none of them. Them ain't no law, them ain't no police. Them is just security and I will tell them they ain't have no jurisdiction over me. If they want to

question me they have to carry me by Mr Pollard office. But they could try all the scare tactics they want they ain't getting me to talk about nothing. I done tell them who I is. Now is up to them to do something.

“What you want to know my name for?” I ask him straight to he face. And the jackass security guard hold my shirt collar tighter, like he feel that go frighten me. Man, I watch him right in he eye and steups. I have time; we could stand up in the corridor whole day for all I care.

By this time big crowd and thing looking on. And I only getting more vex because one thing I don't like is embarrassment. Fellas want to know what happening and the girls and them only giggling and pointing at me. I feeling the comfort of the knife strap on to my leg and I feel better even though I know I can't use it. I see my partner Tush in front of the crowd.

“Don't dig nothing, Taj, boy,” he shout out and I know he do that just to vex them, “I have your back my boy. Dem MTS can't do nothing outta the way, boy.” I give him a nod. Tush like to harass men but he and me real tight. I know he have my back and he go check on me to see what going down. Them MTS security does be liming round the Block in twos all the time waiting to catch one of we with weed or cigarette or girl. The two that hold me, De Freitas and Singh, like to harass the students. If you come in the schoolyard with your little half-pack of Benson and Hedges to sell they taking it away and whole week they searching you to see what they find and if they in a bad mood they sending you to the office and telling the principal they smell weed on you.

De Freitas is a red fella from Grande who feel because he big and strapping he is a big sawatee but me ain't fraid he. Is the Indian one, Singh, who is the trouble man. Singh does wear black gloves on he hand and he ain't have no problem with a little violence. “Is for a worthy cause,” I hear him say once. He does move up easy, easy on men as if he just going to ask them a question and then he does squeeze they balls hard hard so they can't answer because the pain too much. It have fellas say he does tote a piece, because he is a precepted officer. I never see the gun but other fellas say they see him with it under he clothes. I ain't putting it past him.

Anyway, since Singh and them can't use gun on the school compound, they does make the plastic baton in their waist substitute. Is to see them drawing this baton when they catch one of we. Singh have a way he does wring up your shirt so you almost standing up on your toes and then he does put the baton between your legs sometimes and ram it up hard and crush your balls. I see real men cry when he do that. The first time he catch me for some stupidity he ask me my name and I, playing smart, tell him, “Assalaam alaikum.” Since then he does always mock me although he find out my real name. “Sallymally koom is your name, boy?” he go ask me. Or he go tell he partner “Eh eh, look Sallymally Koom passing.”

He does mainly target the niggers on the compound. Sometimes, dry, dry so in the corridor he go call a boy and he go start to search him. It had one time Tush and me was

walking down the corridor in Block C and he call out, “Aye, nigger boy, drift and come over here.” Boy, Tush ain’t miss a beat. One time he answer back, “Yes, Daddy, I comin now.” Tush get he balls squeeze that day but he ain’t cry. We laugh we belly full because Singh done dark he dark and when Tush give him that answer he face turn black like coals.

So anyway, yesterday one minute they questioning me in the corridor, next minute is walk they walking me to the office, Singh hand still tight on my arm. I see Shelly Ann sitting down on a chair waiting and I watch she hard. I want to ask Shelly Ann what going on but I cool myself. Singh and he partner waiting, I waiting too. After a while, Mr Pollard come out of the principal office and call we. Shelly Ann get up and Singh let me go and I follow she and both of we sit down in the office. But the Principal ain’t sit down; he sorting papers and adjusting he glasses. That is one thing does get me vex about Mr Pollard, he and this damn glasses. He done short and softy softy-looking and then on top of that he insist on wearing these glasses with thick thick lens and he always playing with them.

“So, Saleem, I hear you’re in trouble again?” That is the first thing he hit me with.

“Sir, I don’t know nothing about no trouble, sir.” And I leave it there. Let he come out and tell me what they have me here for. All this time Shelly Ann sit down cool cool, she ain’t say a word. I watching she out of the corner of my eye, trying to figure she out. But she watching straight ahead so I feel I have to wait for Mr Pollard to clear things up.

“Miss Williams says you interfered with her. Is that so?” I know I was looking confuse. I coulda almost see how I was looking, sit down there mouth open and close, open and close like a fish in a net.

“Interfere with Shelly Ann?” I ask it more for me than for he, because I hoping somehow it start to make sense when it come out of my mouth with my voice powering it. Pollard have to be joking! Shelly Ann? Clothes Clip Shelly Ann? The same Shelly Ann who get parry when she was in Junior Sec? The same Shelly Ann who does be taking man down by the Agri-Science building every week? The same Shelly Ann who sitting down there and can’t watch me in my eye? Me interfere with she? Everybody interfere with she. But never me! I aint have time for rat!

Well, I get blue vex. Is this shit they pull me down in the office for? Because Shelly Ann say I interfere with she? Since when anybody does believe anything she say? They have to come better than that! I know Mr Pollard expecting me to protest and say, “No, sir, not me, sir.” But I smarter than he. More in that mortar than this Shelly Ann pestle.

“All yuh have a witness, Sir?” I ask Mr Pollard.

“Yes,” he say and the word come out like a sigh because same time he say it he breathe out.

“Who is the witness?”

Mr Pollard watch me like if he sorry for me. He take a long tired breath. “Jason Callender said he saw you pulling at Miss Williams’ clothes in Room 40.”

Oh-ho, so that is it. From the time I hear Jason Callender I done cipher out what going on. No maths in that. I know real fellas who is imps, but Callender have to be the biggest imps I know. You know the joke about how when you born the doctor slap your head and not your bottom? Well, with Jason that really happen. He is one of them that can’t really afford to buy cigarette and Tush shit him up one day and say he does only smoke zut like he father. From that time the fella only out to jumbie me and Tush. But things take a turn for the worse two weeks now. Me and Jason had a blowout and I cut he ass sound sound.

Since that, I change my movements. I doing everything different for the last two weeks. I coming to school late and leaving early—lunch time, sixth period, third period. He couldn’t chart me at all. If he want to ketch me it have to be in school. And he know he can’t handle me in a handfight. So this kind of soft man thing to get me in trouble with the principal is he revenge? It make sense.

“Sir, whoever was in the room with Shelly Ann, wasn’t me, sir.” I know he ain’t believe me, I not expecting him to believe me. But I know he ain’t believe Shelly Ann neither because everybody in the school know that she does lie through she teeth. And too besides even if me and she was in the room, she does take man for money, Pollard know that, everybody know that. So he have to decide if to believe Callender. And Pollard smarter than that. He aint going and punish nobody on Callender evidence, I sure about that.

Pollard ask Shelly Ann to excuse we and if you see she, she zesting up sheself, pushing out she chest and watching me hard like if cut-eye could do me something. To tell you the truth, I feeling sorry for she. I don’t know what Tush and them fellas see in she. She is only sixteen but she does look like if she done live a lifetime already. Shelly Ann does boast and tell everybody how she does run things home because since she was in Junior Sec she have boyfriend and now she mother can’t tell she what to do. Tush went Junior Sec with she and he say that she get break out from real young. He tell me how she does charge fellas ten dollars at a time to arrange brush for them with a cousin she have who is twelve years old and in Standard Five.

Anyway, Shelly Ann leave and me and Pollard alone in the office.

“Look, Saleem...,” he begin but I stop him.

“Not meaning to cut you, sir, but we wasting time here. I really ain’t do nothing.”

“I’m not suspending you. It’s her word against yours. What I want you to do for me is keep a low profile for the next few days please.”

“That’s it?”

“Yes, that’s it. The talk on the compound is that you and Callender had some sort of altercation and he is looking to get back at you. So be on your guard”

When I reach out the office, Singh and De Freitas stand up watching me and grinning. Singh elbow de Freitas and say loud enough for me to hear, “That is the kind of slackness them on. Is only black people children you catching in them foolishness so.” And De Freitas still smiling with him like he ain’t realize somehow, somewhere he and all black and getting shit up from Singh.

I brush past him and head down the corridor to find Tush and give him the scores and in my mind I done planning how the two of we have to deal with Callender. Tush is a man go hit Callender with level talk and Callender does can’t take that and then he go look to fight and that is precisely where I go come in, because once he rush in on Tush is a given I go have to swing for my partner. I done seeing in my head how Callender getting he next beat down when I realize them two imps actually following me down the corridor and throwing talk for me. Singh singing the same tune as usual: nigger people this, nigger people that. And De Freitas like he ain’t know better so he only there echoing Singh. Then Singh make the mistake and get personal. He start up on my mother. Saying how she have to be real worthless and how fruit don’t fall far from tree that is how I come out worthless so too. One thing I don’t walk away from is mother talk. Once you start up on my mother your cut ass book. I turn around and I watch Singh. I not like Tush, I ain’t good at giving talk. The most I could do is cuss and is not cuss alone I want to cuss Singh. I want to cut him down, make him feel small. Make him know what it is to have people around watching you while you wishing the ground could open up and take you. I want him to know how it does be when you feeling small. My mother worthless? My mother worthless? I watch the fucker hard and proper and decide before I dead I go do for the bitch.

So when I reach this morning, one time is look I looking for Tush to show him the gun and tell him my plan. But I can’t find him at all. Nobody ain’t see him in Block C. I went down in the Agri building and spot Marlon.

“Aye boy, you see Tush.”

“Last time I see him was by the science labs.”

That ain’t sound right but I ain’t have no reason to disbelieve so I make a tack back. No Tush. I went by the café and lime.

“Yeah m’boy, I see Tush this morning. By the taxi stand. I ain’t know if he come to school yet.”

“Who’s that? Tush? Yeah man, Tush come. I mean he reach.” And a whole set of fellas start to laugh at that. Anything to do with sex, them find it funny.

“Where you see him?”

“Block C.”

And then the fella stop taking me on because a girl that he like walk up.

It didn’t make no sense to go Block C again, so I figure I go just wait for first period when we have Maths. Bell ring and I hear them fellas saying we have general assembly this morning. One time I decide I passing on that.

“Where we going?”

“Tech Voc Block boy, it have plenty place to hide.”

So about six of we head down there, passing behind Block E so the deans and them wouldn’t see we. When we reach down we settle on a concrete bench in the back of the building and put a fella name Taylor to lookout for anybody. One time a next fella name Jeremy start to roll a joint. Fellas start to grin. Even me, because was almost a whole day since the last time I roll one.

“Boy this is the real shit you know. I thief it from my brother. Grade A. I take a drag. One drag last night and ketch it. I ain’t lying.” He lick the paper, twist the ends and light up. The smell was sweet. He pass it and rock back. The fella he pass it to take a drag and start to cough.

“Boy this thing real fucking strong.” He take a next pull and pass the joint. By the time all of we take two pull we was flying. Jeremy was right, it was Grade A for truth, it wasn’t no press weed. Taylor get so high he stop looking out and start to make up stories about the last time he get high and the rest of them fellas join in everybody making up stories about all kind of madness. How they climb lamppost and tree and start to bark like dog and shit. All of them like they in a competition to see who does catch the worse head when they smoke. Me I just sit down mellow, feeling the weed pass through me, feeling light and easy, so light I forget about how heavy the gun is. My mind run on Tush. Tush should of been here. I like to get high round Tush, he does talk real shit. If he was here I woulda show him the gun and tell him what I planning to do and we woulda laugh like hell because he woulda see the humour in it. He woulda see how important it was to me. And while I sit down flying, the shout went up.

“Deans! Fellas, Hillman and them coming.”

Hillman is a dread Dean. He and the security and them is real partners and if the security and them like prisons’ officers, Hillman is the warden. Give Hillman a chance and he tell you is he and not Pollard running the school. Men start to scatter. We went round the

corner looking for classroom to hide in. The best place to hide is in the technical vocational rooms. All them classroom full of equipment for welding and plumbing and carpentry and thing. Jeremy and two fellas run into the joinery room. I head straight for the welding room because I know it have compressor to hide behind. I duck down behind one and wait. I hearing Hillman and them coming their footsteps stop and start, stop and start and I know is search they searching the rooms and them. I hear two fellas cry out and I know they get catch. I ain't worried, them fellas will take blows rather than sell out men because they know if they sell any of we out is real horrors. So I waiting, crouch up behind the compressor.

I hear them coming in and trying hard to breathe quiet and come back to earth because the weed still in my system. I hearing their foot coming closer and closer. They checking the welding booths. Anytime now they will reach the compressors. I crouch down more and then I hear a voice, De Freitas, say, "Look I seeing a school shirt across in the carpentry room. Let we check that out." I wait until they footsteps die down and I step out from behind the compressors grinning to myself because I real lucky. Same time I hear a noise and look to duck down again but it wasn't a guard it was Jason Callender. He coming out from behind a compressor and Shelly Ann right with him. I pull myself square one time. Thing like coincidence I don't really believe in. Jason watching me aggressive but at the same time I know he know the guards and them still close by.

"This welding room smelling real stink boy." I know is me Shelly Ann throwing that talk for, but I stay quiet.

"Somebody must be have their mother dirty hijab in they bag."

"Why you aint hush yuh cunt." It slip out. I was thinking it but I didn't plan to say it. I know they was just trying to get me vex. One time, because she man around Shelly Ann try to rush me. But if the two of them feel I was going and stand up and let the two of them beat me they lie. I have a gun and a knife. I breaks Shelly Ann cuff and let go a slap on she. She boy, Callender, rush me and both of we fall down on the floor. I trying to get him off me and reach for the knife that strap around my leg but Shelly Ann trying to get me in a headlock too, so is both of them I contending with. In all this confusion chair and table falling over and banging up and next thing you know De Freitas and Singh on top the three of we and pulling we off each other. De Freitas holding me and Shelly Ann and Callender grappling with Singh. He break away from Singh and rush back at me and I reach for my knife one time. He jump back. Singh bawl, "But ay ay! Look how them nigger quick to kill each other nah! Is girl the two of you fighting over? But Shelly Ann you have real thing girl!" Even I could of see how Singh could think is Shelly Ann have we fighting. De Freitas let go Shelly Ann and tighten he grip on me. Singh tell him, "Leave that one with me and take these two by the principal. Is straight suspension for them and I feel this one might get expel." De Freitas shove me over to Singh and he grab the knife from my hand, spin me around so my back to him and he twist my arm behind my back. One time I feel the baton between my legs and tears start to full up my eye.

“All you niggers is real hell you know.” He breath was hot, hot by my ears. “You smelling of weed boy. So you smoking and you have weapon on you? Boy today you out of school boy. Is only all yuh niggers you catching in this kind of slackness yes.” And he carrying on with he nigger talk and squeezing my balls and I trying to get away. Because I know is a suspension I heading for and I know when Mammy hear this she go cry, because I is the last boy. The only one who look like he might finish school and I know once I get suspended she ain’t sending me back. So I figure I go run, jump the fence and lie low for a few days and then come back in school. By that time them guards done forget about me.

But this Singh fella like he out for me because he still have the baton between my legs and my hands behind my back and talking.

“We go have to call in police for this one boy. Weapon involve. Possession with intent. It must be all you nigger children eh? How much like you your mother make eh? About six, seven? One after the other? Every year like a bitch in heat? All you have the same father? You even know who your father is?”

But he make a mistake. All the time he talking he bending me forward and I reach down with my free hand and pull the gun. When I turn round on him I know I catch him because the nigger talk stop and he eye open big. He stretch out a hand and the talk change now because the power change. I in charge. Gun is a thing like that, it does change situations real easy. It could put you in charge, make you giddy with power. All of a sudden Singh ain’t bad no more, I is the big sawatee and he blinking and looking stupid. He wondering what really going on and I stand up quiet quiet, looking at him. Weighing my options, deciding what to do. How long to make him sweat for before I make to dive off the compound. Because I know after this gun thing I can’t come back to school. The principal go be on my case and Singh go kill me before he allow that. But I enjoying myself watching the coolie bitch sweat. Looking nervous, nervous and trying to talk me out of doing anything foolish.

“But ay ay,” I tell him, “is only foolishness a stupid nigger like me capable of.” I know he regretting all the nigger talk now.

But the gun fool me. I focus on it so much I lose track of everything. I didn’t even notice when Singh attitude start to change and he stop talking fast, fast. And the look in he eye went from frighten, to mean. He start to look like the normal Singh again. Like he ain’t fraid me or the gun. Something tell me look behind me and I realise de Freitas stand up there ready to swing a baton on my head and I duck and looking to run, but he grab me and I swing my hand and point the gun at him. Just like how I did point it at Singh, to frighten him and get the upper hand, because it ain’t have no bullet in it. I can’t afford one. De Freitas look to breaks and that is when I feel it, a sharp pain in my back!

A bullet not exactly like a knife eh, but it does cut still. Your flesh does have to move and make way for it and it have a kind of cold heat about it. It chilling you and burning you at

the same time. My head hit the floor hard. My whole body really. But things happening so fast and I feeling so hot and cold I not sure what going on. I touch my stomach, because that is where I feeling hot and cold the most. But is when I feel the stickiness it hit me. Where Tush boy? I try to push myself up to see if I see Tush. I have to tell him something.

As I struggling to get up I see Singh watching me and I seeing something in he face because he watching me hard hard. He eyes digging me but he ain't saying nothing. The words was right there in he eyes though. I coulda almost hear he voice saying, *Is I do this to you, nigger boy.*

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‘Ketch Dis’: Envisioning Alternatives to Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein

Abstract

The construction and policing of difference, including gender difference, is itself a form of violence. This kind of power relation also lays a basis for systemic expressions of violence, including the denial of human rights, androcentrism, the sexual division of labour and homophobia. Ultimately, learning to live with multiple ways of being is key to challenging a dualistic and hierarchical organization of social relations, and creating greater gender justice. The spoken word music video, discussed in this essay, uses poetry and images from Trinidad to spark discussion about difference, othering and exclusion. The video can be used to facilitate discussion about the lines we draw between each other and the consequences for those marginalized by social norms. This essay provides some background to the video’s approach and some questions for those using it to facilitate dialogue, questioning and greater openness about, among other things, diverse gender and sexual identities in the Caribbean.

Key words: violence, gender identities, Other, difference, spoken word, music video.

The postcolonial Caribbean has been forged through violent encounters, and patriarchal relationships are an integral part of how human relations have been defined in this historical context (Benito Rojo 1988). Within this, the policing of masculinity and femininity has, among other things, helped to uphold and justify various types of violence. Further, the construction and regulation of what are often considered immutable gender identities can themselves be seen as a form of violence. Idealizations of hegemonic manhood, for example, are grounded in the repudiation of femininities and subordinate masculinities. Establishing what constitutes gender often reduces men and women to partial selves by imposing a dualistic frame on human selfhood (Kaufman 1993).

If we understand violence not simply as acts of physical force, but also as the “assaults on personhood, dignity and self worth and value” and their tangible effects (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), then perceiving the multi-layered qualities and many instances of violence in our midst becomes possible. It is then that one can begin to trace the multiple paths of violence and make visible their embodied, structural, and political implications.

Androcentrism, the universalisation of those qualities stereotypically associated with masculinity and a language that both subsumes and invisibilizes women, is a form of violence. The greater valuing of those qualities associated with dominant masculinities in both public and private spheres has differential and unequal impacts on women while also negatively affecting men. It creates power hierarchies between women and men as well as amongst groups of women and groups of men. These hierarchies are further complicated by women’s and men’s ethnic, class, sexual and other identities. Notions of difference and the boundaries that we establish between groups or categories of people can both be and lay the basis for forms of violence. As Foucault (2003) illustrates, categorizing groups of people more easily facilitates violence being done to some groups in order to protect and maintain the lives of others. Rigid lines of separation must be guarded and there are always high costs for this.

Additionally, the manner in which we ascribe meaning to difference (whether positive or negative) is not ahistorical, “natural” or biologically “right”. As Bourdieu (2004, 339) argues, “structures of domination are *the product of an incessant (and therefore historical) labour of reproduction*, to which singular agents (including men, with weapons such as physical violence and symbolic violence) and institutions—families, the church, the educational systems, the state—contribute”¹. In essence, violence is not just physical, cultural, private or individualistic. Rather, as feminist scholars point out, violence is a political issue linked to structural and systematic differences and inequalities (Clarke 1995). The overall lesson is that difference can become a basis for inequity and unequal value, denial of human rights and silencing. We have to learn to live with multiple ways of being.

With this message in mind, “Ketch Dis” uses spoken work, music and visual images to

¹ Italics in the original.

describe an awareness of how rights, choices, selfhood and belonging may be denied. It also refers to consciousness that there are alternatives to an unjust social order. It examines gender, patriarchy and violence, and their interconnections as well as implications, and asks how understandings of each other and ourselves can be transformed.

This video was first conceived while I was teaching a gender course at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. I was discussing gender and sexuality as a continuum in human behaviour, and the negative effects on individuals and groups which ensue when we draw a binary line between women and men. This gender divide is seen as a line that must not be crossed. It is at the heart of the sexual division of labour, sexual harassment, sexism, heterosexism, hypermasculinity and gender-based violence.

For some students, critically examining gender ideologies was startling and scary. Some wondered if there were any boundaries to what could be challenged, any terrain of intimate, social and political life that could be left unquestioned. Some wondered aloud, "Doesn't a line have to be drawn somewhere?" One young man in the class asked, "But Miss, doesn't someone have to draw the line?" Three years later, a young woman in another class asked me the same thing. "Who gets to draw the line? Who gets to decide?" I asked them, "Where can this line be drawn legitimately? What happens to those left on the other side? What kinds of access are denied by the lines we draw between each other?"

In this context, the video encourages students to examine their positioning(s) as dominant and marginalized and to question the divisions that create exclusions. It puts theory about silencing and invisibility into everyday language and facilitates dialogue on these issues in relation to our everyday negotiations.

Since 2007, I have shown this video in class in the first few weeks when I am outlining both feminist theory of patriarchy and its negative implications for women and men, as well as critiques to this view based on literature or Caribbean and students' personal examples. After showing the video, I facilitate a discussion about power, hierarchies and stereotyping, and possibilities for change to forms of gender injustice founded on these relations. Using metaphors of Caribbean games and landscape, the video seeks to raise consciousness about the anxiety, alienation, fears and violence that stereotypes provoke. Towards this end, I ask some introductory questions useful for facilitating discussion:

1. What images stood out most to you and why?
2. What are some of the ways we draw lines between each other, and what are the consequences?
3. How are the lines maintained?
4. What are the benefits and what are the sanctions?
5. Are the ways we organize our societies inevitable?
6. How can we enable rather than deny access to human rights, autonomous choice over one's lives, and belonging?

7. Do you agree with the video's message? What critiques do you have of this message? How would you express it instead?

The video was made in 2006 while I was at the Caribbean Contemporary Arts 7 Big River retreat for performance artists from around the world. While exploring the Aripo hills and waterfalls in Trinidad, I reflected on how our socially created lines maintained sharp divisions. In contrast, nature showed fluidity, overlap, blurring and sharing. This is not to argue that our lives must be biologically determined, that nature is "pure" and benevolent or that human life must be fitted to what seems to be animals' evolutionary behaviour. Rather, this music video attempts to express the emotion and hope I felt that if we look around us, we will see so many ways that we can live without marking our differences in terms of exclusions. Moving from feelings of denial to hopes for understanding and rights, the message is one feminist activists often invoke.

For this reason, the piece uses images and words to trigger emotions and reflection about who draws lines and, because of that, who has to "ketch" or survive in a world that is disproportionately difficult for them. "Ketch" is also used in the sense of grasping or becoming conscious of a political vision where genders and sexualities are not hierarchically ordered, because this is one of the first points of social and political violence. Caring for each other, respecting our identities and choices, and learning to share our spaces is key to creating greater social and political inclusion, promoting non-violence and envisioning progressive alternatives to masculinist relations between the sexes. With this message in mind, Trinidadian Composer Coreysan created the soundtrack while the lyrics are my own.

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Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse—A Review

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Barbara Lalla

Writing Rage undertakes to formulate, on the basis of meticulous analysis, some means of combating the escalating problem of family violence, especially in the Caribbean. The study traces the interrelationship of domestic violence with other forms of social violence, beginning with an intellectual enquiry into different disciplinary approaches to the problem (linguistic and literary), then integrating these disciplinary approaches in a collaborative attempt to gain a better understanding of the issues involved. Against a historical awareness of violence woven into the Caribbean background, the authors correlate the issue of domestic violence with theories of male marginalization, with the implications of cultural norms and gender constructs, and with poverty. A predisposition to acts of violence in many Caribbean families and societies is linked with socio-historical realities such as disempowerment of the black male. Sociological findings are thus complemented by psychological implications as discourse is analysed to uncover the Caribbean psyche.

The study develops from a wide and clearly connected set of enquiries into familial, institutional, and geopolitical frameworks and other dimensions of violence, through which the writers track familial or male/female violence at the core. Texts analysed include personal testimonies, interviews, media reports, court summaries as well as major

works of Caribbean fiction. The writers set their textual analyses and interpretation within the parameters of feminist, postcolonial, trauma and shame theory, and they apply methods of both Critical Discourse Analysis and literary criticism, as they explore discourse as a form of social practice.

Principles of Forensic Linguistics are applied to court records for analysing power relationships within the court that reflect wider patterns of power distribution in society. For example, the study explores press coverage of a murder trial, analysing the depiction of a woman accused of killing her husband—an accusation set within a context of widespread unease regarding the threat posed by women’s encroachment on traditional male spheres of action. This analysis addresses the issue of culpability as determined in relation to discourse that relays information selectively in accordance with entrenched prejudices. For instance, the woman is categorized as a *husband killer*, long before the husband is revealed as a wife-beater and in a context in which other husbands on trial for murder of their wives are never referred to as *wife-killers*.

But the study is also developmental. The headlines and introductory paragraphs regarding this and later trials demonstrate adjustments in perspective over the years. So the study’s analysis notes, in the 1995 opening statement in the media, the use of the passive to demonstrate the daughter as criminally acted on by the mother. The report does not mention years of abuse by the husband (choking, cutting, raping, beating until senseless), or the battering of the children, or the mother being dragged from child to child with a gun to her head as the father asks the children whether he should kill her. The media report simply states:

The daughter of a woman accused of murdering her husband was asked by her mother to soak up the blood in the bedroom and not tell anyone.

This in 1995.

The opening in a 1999 statement is less prejudicial, but questions a medical term by placing it in quotation marks:

Court to consider “battered wife syndrome”

and a later 1999 headline swings attention to the wife’s experience:

Tortured for 11 Years

Analysis of the media coverage is followed by equally sensitive analysis of equally insensitive summing up by the Judge.

Another chapter examines an oral narrative of a policeman’s wife, through conversation analysis, and traces the effects of familial violence on the development of the male child in the abusive home. The analysis also focuses on ways in which masculinity constructed in such a home is conveyed in the discourse.

In ranging through the socio-historical and geopolitical dimensions of the problem and analysing institutional and communal violence, the writers confirm that the core of the problem is familial and especially male/female relationships; the study demonstrates the nature of the problem itself, familial violence, as self-perpetuating—a trap. In tracing the development of toxic versions of masculinity, the study notes patriarchal interpretations of belief systems (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) that reinforce female subjugation and male overlordship. The discourse conveys the abused woman's numbed victimhood, disablement from action and entrapment in self-contempt and the males' fixation with machismo resulting in reduced values in relation to positive goals such as educational performance. This unhealthy state of affairs prompts the writers' call for a reshaping of the concepts of maleness and femaleness.

However, the interrelatedness of familial and other forms of violence and the relentless cyclical nature of the problem is clearly demonstrated in the series of analyses that the study incorporates. Discourse is demonstrated to be a form of social practice that is constituted by and that constitutes socio-political relations in the world, relations between people, and (on the individual level) construction of personal and social identity.

Similar conclusions are borne out by the literary analyses, such as that which explores the nightmarish family relations of Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*, in which is traced the parallelism between upheavals of human nature and environmental disturbance contextualized by a situation of bonded labour to support Western capitalism. The terrible ironies of social, and at its heart, familial violation emerge in text after text, where abuse is often sexual and rape constitutes a transgression of body boundaries that parodies the human craving for intimacy.

A crucial issue in the literary as well as the non-literary texts is that of articulating the unspeakable. A community's silent toleration of the incestuous relationship in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and of the consequent carceral control of the daughter and prolonged brutality against her is shattered by that daughter's eventual murderous response, which evokes hysteria in the very same community. The authors' analysis of how shame is conveyed in abusive relationships in *Cereus Blooms at Night* traces the progress from a retreat into silence through prelinguistic noises, then fragments of signifying sounds, and eventually snatches of language combining into actual discourse with growing empowerment. Several texts demonstrate this link between social and familial violence and the gendered racialized power relationships so pivotal to the colonial encounter, with George Lamming's *Water With Berries* demonstrating that power of this sort is a curse. A common finding, however, is the link between expression and healing.

Despite its strong theoretical grounding and solid core of data, *Writing Rage* is extremely readable, accessible to any educated reader—and essential reading, in my view, for any reader with an interest in current social crises. Its stylistic variety itself is appealing, alternating as it does between the more clinical linguistic analysis and the more passionate literary critique. Interdisciplinarity, accompanied by an easy and quite compatible interchange of the styles associated with both disciplines produces a lively,

swift-paced text. Accessible as it is, however, *Writing Rage* constitutes cutting edge scholarship that is directly relevant to feminist and postcolonial theory, as well as to the fields of discourse analysis, literary criticism and psychology. It directly addresses both academics and practitioners in its practical attempt to unite these groups in seeking solutions to a culture of violence.

In analysing this range of discourse types, from media accounts through legal records to literary texts, *Writing Rage* investigates what the authors identify as “the interplay between the unrelenting, oppressive history of state violence and the impact on the material condition of women’s lives.” This condition includes, for example, the selling of children (mainly girls) into domestic service and horrible abuse. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis to ideological confrontation between the empowered and the disempowered, the study teases out the discourse mechanisms drawn on for coping with private and public violence. One such mechanism is the interactive discourse associated with female solidarity.

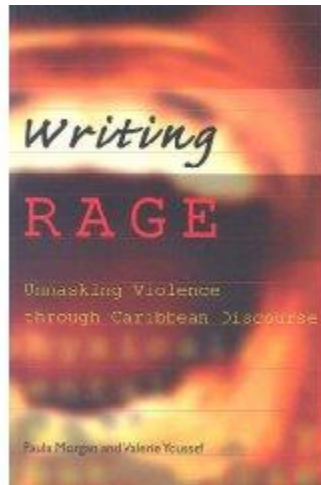
Another is sheer refusal to be silenced. Persistence in making oneself heard is demonstrated, for example, through parallel structures: “If I didn’t have a radio to speak in, I’d stand under the tree. If I didn’t have a microphone to speak into, I’d stand up in the middle of the street...” The methodology of discourse analysis is singularly appropriate because so much of the resistance to violence is through discourse itself. In one text the speaker pronounces, “I’ll die with the words on my lips.” Thus the study points, for example, to “the imperative of unsilencing rape if therapeutic intervention is to be made.”

Indeed, the two approaches, of literary and discourse analyses, point to narrative as an empowering act.

Literary analysis of Danticat’s narrative reveals how violence affects the material conditions of women’s lives, poignantly reflected in the recurrent symbols of dead or disfigured babies. Through such reference Danticat evokes nightmarish torture as a way of life for the Haitian women, but this makes even more miraculous the resilience achieved in her accounts. The authors trace the story-telling devices through which trauma is articulated and ordered in narrative, and the coming together of voices in mutual support to produce coherence, to achieve survival and join in affirmation of life.

The authors acknowledge those measures that are generally recognized as possible responses, but they go on to demonstrate that these measures are not adequate to containing the violence: legislation is insufficient; increased standards of education and access to financial resources and mobility assist in some ways and in others exacerbate the problem. On the other hand, the writers note the support of religious faith and link this with strength in the collective capacity to overcome horrific circumstances through mutual support. Integrated literary and discourse analyses trace, in combination with this collective power, the healing that comes through expression—the reconstructive experience of narrative as a therapeutic intervention. The analyses confirm that violence is rooted in competition and fear of difference and otherness, and examine the ways in which narrative provides a mutually constructive system for healing.

Altogether this is a thoroughly stimulating work that is socially sensitive, solution oriented and gripping.





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Washing Dishes With A Crab in the Sink

A stool brought her waist-
high with the sink.
Just right for dishwashing
on market day
when the bound crab
lay among the dishes
flat on its back
drowning in soapsuds
gundies strapped with vine
their power harnessed
but alive
down to the twitching claws
of the legs
that practiced running
though tied

then, staying focused
wasn't easy: soiled
cups and plates
and those cautious
pop-up eyes
becoming every minute
warring clubs
raised before her
small life
like a challenge.

Dishwashing day
with the crab in the sink
held a lesson
she needed most to master:
how to fight free
from being held under.



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The Secret of Fruit-Bearing Trees (for Malcolm)

“It’s a secret my daddy teach me,” he said,
sounding like a boy of ten.
I saw him back then
swallowed up in his daddy’s tall tops,
sitting flat on the ground,
his belly full, committing
saplings to fertile holes.

“They bear fast that way –
fruit big so weigh the branches down.”
My daddy teach me.” The repeat,
lingered, quivering
in the shade of something unnamed.

We both looked at his hands:
continents of strength, empty-
promises of plenty. He laughed
and tucked them away – that day.

I had only half believed his tale.

So when the story came, too late,
of the axe that chased his bride
until her heart withered and died
from the terror he had planted there,
I went out among the trees and sang
lullabies to each trembling leaf.

Now I reap sweetness every season,
still half-believing, still wondering
what was her harvest that he so feared
he could not bear.



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There Will Be Time Enough For Laughter

There will be time enough for laughter
when this long night is over
and daylight is forever.

There will be time to be the child
you never were, when play is for fields –
not always concealed.

Believe me: there will come a time
your screams will be pure pleasure –
a bounty flowing over.

There will be rest with magical dreams,
not terror, and you will walk,
as you imagined, on sunbeams.

Yes, I believe, there will come a time
for rejoicing, for you with the sad eyes
and tongue always tied.

There is a day you will stand next
to a stranger and point out yourself
circa nineteen whatever and say,

“I wasn’t bright, but I was so happy
as a child.” And both will smile
and shout, “Yippy.”

Believe me: Akiel, Sean, Amy
(of names too many), there are those
who survive and remember only

to learn to speak,
no matter how imperfectly,
of your dream and theirs

to be first mere children.

For now, we, the unbright, mourn
for the dawn of right.



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A Tribute to Estella Scott-Roberts: Advocate, Victim, National Icon

Marilyn N. Conolly
on behalf of the **Estella Scott-Roberts Foundation**
www.esrfoundation.org.ky

Estella Scott-Roberts was a woman small in stature yet giant in heart, whose infectious, hearty laugh, determined chin and tremendous personal strength added character to her physical beauty. What she has come to symbolise to the people of the Cayman Islands, however, is a woman of principle, truth and courage who was a tireless and passionate advocate for the vulnerable. Fiery, strong-willed and with no patience for hypocrisy, she was an often controversial community figure. Some labelled her as a troublemaker because she voiced the awful facts about gender-based violence and sexual abuse in a society where such things are not discussed in public, but rather whispered about in hushed tones behind closed doors. She bluntly aired our community's dirty laundry, which forced us to acknowledge the ills in our society so that we might begin to address these issues.



Estella Scott-Roberts

Her passion was in the protection of victims of gender-based violence but especially in exposing the issue of child sexual abuse. As a resolute 26-year-old, she had taken on the role of Executive Director of the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre (CICC) for five years. She oversaw the conceptualization, development and initial operations of the Centre and led her team to firmly establish the CICC as a legitimate and necessary agency within the community. On-call 24 hours a day, she often responded to late night emergencies and regularly received death threats. Her dedication to the Centre and its clients was further manifested when she cleared out sewerage and debris from the Centre after the devastation of Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

Estella was often in the public eye, whether on radio, television, or in video clips highlighting the needs of vulnerable women and children in the community. Many in the community who were incensed that she would bring such ugly issues to the forefront were concerned about tourists' perception of our islands should these issues remain on the front pages of local newspapers and be discussed on the radio talk shows. She tirelessly spoke out, nevertheless, to the press, government ministers, and the corporate world, all of whom respected her as a passionate, if somewhat controversial, advocate. She regularly spoke to schoolchildren across the Cayman Islands about issues of personal safety and child sexual abuse. However, the very nature of this society's denial was unfortunately emphasised when she was asked not to return to a particular school to discuss these issues. She publicly acknowledged this response by noting that the denial of this problem would inevitably harm our children.

Estella Scott-Roberts' greatest impact on the perception of gender-based violence in the Cayman Islands ironically occurred when she became the most famous victim of this crime. On the night of October 10, 2008, after celebrating her 33rd birthday, she was attacked at her vehicle, abducted after a struggle, raped, killed and her body burnt so that it took several days to officially identify her remains. The horrific nature of this crime and the prominence of its victim sent shock waves throughout the community. The jolt of recognition that Cayman was no different from 'those other places' where women were attacked was deeply shocking to both men and women alike. Several days later, on October 18, unprecedented thousands turned out for the Silent Witness March to express their outrage in their silent walk through the capital of George Town as tribute to the victims of gender-based violence.

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "It is better to light the candle than to curse the darkness." Estella's husband, Rayle Roberts, described Estella's life as a light that shone brilliantly, highlighting the many dark recesses of our society. Hers was a light that expired too quickly and rather than curse the darkness that was upon him with the tragic death of his wife, he decided to light a candle in her memory and so the Estella Scott-Roberts Foundation was born on October 31, 2008.

The mission of the Estella Scott-Roberts Foundation is "Gender Equality and A Life Free of Violence For All". The Foundation's objectives are to:



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- a) advocate for a life free of violence;
- b) carry out activities to facilitate the empowerment of women and girls;
- c) advocate for and support equity and equality for women and girls in all areas of life;
- d) support policies and research projects that further the aim of gender equality;
- e) do all other acts or things necessary, advisable or desirable for the advancement of women's issues.

During Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April 2009, the Foundation co-sponsored a "Breakfast with Candidates" event discussing sexual assault with political candidates prior to the national elections and promoted its message through radio public service announcements. The Foundation is determined to make a positive impact on the issue of gender-based violence and has decided to highlight the role men play in achieving gender equality.

On October 10, 2009, which would have been Estella's 34th birthday, the Foundation marked the one-year anniversary of her death by launching a public education and awareness campaign entitled "Be the Change", which highlights the importance of men and women working together to achieve gender equality and a life free of violence. Justice for Estella remains elusive as her accused killers still await trial. Estella's vibrancy will remain in the memories of those who loved her; her passionate work will be carried on through the Foundation, the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre and other organisations; and her advocacy and voice will continue to echo in the community. May her soul rest in peace.