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Cathexis, Catharsis and the Challenge to Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Theorizing

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GUEST EDITORIAL

ESSAYS

GENDER DIALOGUES (from the Archives)

This paper forms part of the Working Paper Series produced by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (now Institute of Gender and Development Studies) from 1997–2002. The IGDS has elected to preserve the papers in electronic form by publishing them as part of our Archives collection.

SHORT STORY

BOOK REVIEW

POEMS

The University of
the West Indies
Institute of Gender and
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CRGS
CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
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Cathexis, Catharsis, and the Challenge to Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Theorizing

Jeanne Roach-Baptiste

For decades, Caribbean feminist and gender scholars have been dissatisfied with unequal North-South discursive exchanges, an osmotic process Eudine Barriteau defines as "imported theoretical constructs that did not stimulate critiques of epistemologies, methodologies and practices, and [sic] therefore reinforced and maintained exclusions and invisibility around key dimensions of women's lives" (Barriteau 2003, 3). Conversely, Patricia Mohammed seeks to subvert "the artists and architects of colonisation [who] attempted to achieve opacity [of Caribbean self-imaging] by overlays of the same tone in order to obliterate cultures" (373).

Almost a decade after *Confronting Power*,[1] Barriteau opines that there is "no contemporary in feminist theory but a recurring, repeating, refracting past." [2] In her review of Patricia Mohammed's *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*

[1] Eudine Barriteau, ed., Introduction to *Confronting Power Theorizing Gender. Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2003).

[2] Eudine Bariteau, "Protecting Feminist Futures in the Caribbean's Contemporary" in *Contemporary Issues in Caribbean Research on Gender and Feminism.* IGDS Biennial Symposium. (Cavehill, Barbados. February 24- 25, 2011.)

(2011), Jane Bryce highlights Mohammed's challenge to extant and emerging scholarship to find "new categories of analysis…other than the *tired* old ones of class, race and gender" (Mohammed 2011, 16. My Italics.). This epistemological and affective shift from an enthusiasm with the "emergence of an embryonic Caribbean feminist epistemology" (Barriteau 2003, 3) to, arguably, a seeming fatigue with overdetermined discourses begs the questions, "Is there categorical cathexis within contemporary feminist and gender theorizing in Caribbean, and how can we translate cathexis to catharsis using the new geographies of knowledge emerging out of discursive and semiotic translations Barriteau and Mohammed are themselves crafting?"

This nexus in Caribbean gender discourse is reminiscent of a contentious theoretical moment in second-wave feminism when in response to the call by black, Chicana and Third World feminists to theorize *difference*, hegemonic feminism chose instead to engage in a post-identity rhetoric. But the proposed epistemological shift here in the Caribbean is more productive, choosing instead of a politics of erasure, a politics of spatial reclamation and renarrativizing, what Chela Sandoval, Shahnaz Khan, Obioma Nnaemeka, Frantz Fanon, Leila Ahmed, and Belinda Edmondson imagine discursively and semiotically as third or intermediary spaces and perspectives.[3]

This fifth issue of *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* is a valid site upon which to reopen and navigate these productive tensions among the possibilities of new theories, new categories, new methodologies, new ways of seeing and/or just new frames of reference in the Caribbean. How can we use this categorical imploding to make more salient meaning of the UN's declaration of 2011 as International Year for People of African Descent and the production of *CRGS'*s next issue based on Indo-Caribbean Feminisms.

Like *Imaging the Caribbean*, this general issue is an eclectic mix of themes and subject matters, a variety of methods of analysis from the discursive to the visual to the tangible. The essays, book reviews and fictional pieces point to a determination of Caribbean

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[3] Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness" in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg, 108-126 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990). Belinda Edmondson, "Race, Gender, and the Caribbean Narrative of Revolution" in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, ed. Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose, 63-78. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).
Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 2000.) Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey* (Penguin: London, 2000.) Shahnaz Khan, *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2002.) Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," adapted version of "Introduction: Reading the Rainbow" from *Sisterhood Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, 31-40. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005.)

people to delve into, excavate, reconstruct and retell their collective and individual histories; express their unique and varied realities and subjectivities as seen from their own geographic, cultural, and gendered locations; and negotiate the politics and power of aesthetics, erotics, iconography, and agency.

Can a politics of the visual and tangible and its resultant affect serve as a new platform from which to theorize the Caribbean? Lawrence Waldron and Patricia Mohammed through analyses of iconography and aesthetics provoke the disruption of extant epistemological and ontological constructions of Caribbean peoples: their histories, their social organizations, their cultural practices, and their spiritualities.

Lawrence Waldron's "By Unseen Hands: Regarding the Gender of Saladoid Potters" takes us as far back as pre-Columbian times to the peoples of the Lesser Antilles, whose iconographic and symbolic pottery has led to speculation on not only the gender of these fine artisans but also the meaning of gender in their zoomorphic and anthropomorphic worldview. Representations of the turtle and the frog abound in the artifacts as well as the craftsmanship of the homes of these indigenous peoples and their descendants, the Tainos. That the animals from which human life sprang are amphibious speaks to the spatial movements of the people as they negotiated among spiritual, terrestrial and aquatic realms.

Patricia Mohammed's *Imaging the Caribbean* uses a different approach in dealing with the right of Caribbean people to portray ourselves in terms different from the Other, as Western scholars and artists have long positioned the region's inhabitants. In this book's review by Jane Bryce, we learn that Mohammed's research spans a period of 500 years. Bryce observes that the book "In taking the *visual* as the primary medium for reading Caribbean culture… contests not only the primacy of writing as a way of organising knowledge, but also the conventional wisdom that the primary mode of Caribbean expression is orality." She quotes Mohammed who states, "I privileged visual culture, because I believe that human sense perception has survived over long periods because of visual production".

Paula Morgan and Denise Bacchus validate fiction as a salient pedagogical tool as well as a canvas from which to draw alternative frames of reference. Paula Morgan's "Like Bush Fire in My Arms: Interrogating the World of Caribbean Romance" was first published as part of the Working Paper series produced by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS), now the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS). The essay is reproduced here as part of the IGDS project to preserve the Working Paper series collection.

Morgan foregrounds her paper on the emerging genre of Caribbean romance fiction by discussing the history and social reception of the romance novel. She then goes on to discuss the genre, using examples from the seminal Caribbean Caresses Series, focusing mainly on this series' success or lack thereof in challenging stereotypes and establishing a truly distinctive Caribbean branch of this genre.

Commenting on one of the formulaic prescriptions for heroines of the romance genre, Morgan observes, "In the traditional romance peopled by Caucasians, the blush is particularly useful to betray the body's involuntary response which invariably runs counter to verbal assertions. As if to compensate for having 'mahogany-brown' skin, [Deidre] D'Allan's protagonist blushes with amazing regularity, at the slightest provocation… 'Are you blushing, then?' he said, laughing softly. 'Or is it just the light from the fire that's giving you that glow? And do you know that some people believe that dark-skinned people don't blush' (D'Allan 12)."

Morgan also expresses her concern regarding the context in which these novels portray sexual violence. Though sexual violence is common in Caribbean diasporic literature, the portrayal of this serious subject matter in a context that romanticizes it raises some concerns, bearing in mind that many of the Caribbean romantic novels' readers are impressionable teenage girls.

A more activist approach to using fiction in fostering students' critical literacy is actualized in one of Denise Bacchus's Santa Barbara City College classrooms. Her essay "The Novel as a Bridge to Understanding Violence and Oppression" describes how Bacchus uses Danticat's text *Breath, Eyes, Memory* along with Paolo's Friere's concept of critical pedagogy as well as the conditions within Haiti to engage twenty-five college students of varying ethnicities and nationalities—whose literacy levels were below the required standard—in a project that would serve to build their academic as well as social consciousness.

Bacchus' methodology of multiple pedagogical tools—student surveys, journals, rewriting the novel's end—stimulates students' creativity and serves as testament to the interactive nature of student-centred learning. Bacchus' goal is to get students to understand that borders are fluid and permeable and that students bear a social responsibility beyond their anatomical and collegial boundaries. Bacchus' essay is also a timely reminder, given the dire state of affairs in the Caribbean with reference to high incidences of crime and violence, that a critical pedagogy is desperately needed to teach young people the individual, collective and liberatory power of education; so they themselves can become transformative social agents. Additionally, Haiti as both literal and symbolic representation of human suffering, human resilience, and human in/justice speaks to the concepts of, race, class and gender as still necessary analytics of power. Instead of precipitating a post-identity era then, should we seek instead to complicate the categories differently, ask different questions like feminist science did, rather than construct completely new categories and face the same nagging concerns?

Whereas the academic essays form the nucleus of each journal's issue, the *CRGS* continues to present the works by Caribbean artists, poets and writers within it. Hence, in this issue, we have two poems by Dahlia James-Williams and a short story by Kavita Vidya Ganness that assert a [Caribbean] woman different from that of quiescent spouse and dutiful wife. In "Joe Grind", James-Williams inverts the accepted Caribbean persona of the male adulterer and applies it to the unfaithful wife instead. In "A Gun at Mi Head", James-Williams portrays a woman, one of thousands in the Caribbean, who routinely

experiences violent abuse by her mate. But in this case, the wife will not continue to accept such abuse and has made plans to put a stop once and for all to it.

Similarly framed within a poetics of eroticism, "Hooked…" is a provocative short story about a narrator mired in the nexus between fantasy and reality, love and obsession. By Kavita Vidya Ganness choosing not to reveal the narrrator's gender, she immediately calls heteronormativity and heterosexuality into question. The story's line, "My live-in girlfriend, Tenisha, had returned to me a changed woman", almost automatically compels the reader to gender the speaker as male, especially given the numerous sexual innuendos and overtures scaffolding the text. We are still unable to deal with genderless subjects; for interpersonal, sexual, and social relationships remain more legible and comprehensible when bodies are inscribed with gender and other analytics.

Although this particular narrative appears to be about Tenisha's trip to Abu Dubai; her return with the narcotic Shisha and a Hookah, the pipe with which to smoke it; the sensuousness and vivid landscape of the East from which the narcotic derives; and ultimately the narrator's addiction to this new drug and obsession with the Middle Eastern experience, it becomes increasingly clear "Hooked" is more about the narrator being *hooked* on Tenisha than on Shisha, and that Tenisha is the narcotic that keeps the narrator suspended and powerless between the fantasy of eroticism and the reality of loneliness and loss of identity. "Shisha, such a sweet word like the name Tenisha," the narrator muses.

Tenisha, it seems, wields a power over the narrator of which even the narrator is unaware or to which the narrator has surrendered. Yet, one wonders if Tenisha's travels are not moments of escape for her as well, and the drugs are the means through which she can manage her lover's suffocating obsession as well as her own dependencies. The narrator is hooked; but Tenisha, too, may also be trapped. Why does she return? So "Hooked" begs interrogation of an erotics of power and the multiple dimensions of social engagements as the hooked, the hooker, and the Hookah become irreducibly entangled. The same questions apply to Joe Grind's lover as we wonder if the subject-object dialectic is really inverted or reestablished. Is agency possible only through another [hetero]sexual relationship? What is agency then, and are our existing frames of reference adequate tools of analysis, or are we mired in a "tired" binary of self/other, agentic/complicit?

Ganness seems to rescue us from this Cartesian dichotomy though by provoking the reader even further to complicate constructions of masculinity and femininity and tensions within sexuality. Her narrative opens "My mouth closed around it hesitantly. It was warm and smooth against my lips." We realize by the second paragraph it is a genderless narrator and not Tenisha who is speaking. Throughout the text though, the narrator's gender seems to be shaping as masculine as the narrator engages in incessant prescriptive and normative descriptions and compliments of the female object of adoration, referring to her at one point as a "Shisha queen." Yet, in another moment of slippage the narrator pipes, "Hookah—twelve captivating inches of pure delight." Is the

narrator a "jellyfish" or a "dragon"? Both or neither? Gender, it seems, remains a pertinent and revealing category of analysis.

Heather Russell's and Mel Cooke's reviews of Christine Craig's compelling *All Things Bright* embody many of the epistemological and methodological questions of voice, space, place, longing, belonging and vantage point raised in this editorial Both reviewers agree that Craig holds a unique representational position as both outsider—poet— and insider—"daughter of the Jamaican dust" (Russell, 1). Craig is thus able to speak from intermediary spaces, in fact transitional places. Russell writes of Craig's poetry: "the painful reality of exilic existence is given full expression and nuanced articulation as nostalgia quickly gives over to the wonderment of standing at the U.S.'s Southernmost point—the Florida Keys—the poet contemplating if this is 'the end of America,' or 'her beginning." Russell then argues that migrations can be productive movements encompassing beginnings, "painful legacies," "possibility and promise."

Cooke interprets one of Craig's poems, "Portland Morning" as Craig making "a statement about the transitory nature of life in a country which, for all practical purposes, marks its beginnings with the conquerors' arrival and, it seems, people are always coming and going." So even within indigenous borders there are third spaces. One does not always have to leave to be able to see differently. Cooke continues, "And, at the same time, there is that contrast in voice as Craig writes:

Islands are every shape, every

colour of goodbye.

Walk good. See you next year

if life spare.

That this fifth issue of *CRGS* is the shortest to date in no way indicates a compromising of the intellectual rigor which has become a litmus test of *CRGS*. The question of the state and direction of contemporary Caribbean feminist and gender scholarship remains provocative; and for epistemological and methodological output to remain productive in the Foucauldian sense, this looking in on ourselves from unstable intersections must be perpetual, so that we do not become mired in categorical cathexis. The challenge to create new theories, new categories, new [semiotic, poetic] frames of reference is already being led by the very scholars who push us all to bring to crisis[4] tired epistemologies, tired categories, tired representations, so we can indeed reimage *our* Caribbean.[5]

CRGS copy editor Jewel Fraser contributed to this editorial.

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[4] See Gayatri Spivak's *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.,1990)

[5] This phrase is a consolidating of Patricia Mohammed's *Imaging* (2011) and Thomas Glave's *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

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The Novel as a Bridge to Understanding Violence and Oppression

Denise Bacchus

Abstract

"The Novel as a Bridge to Understanding Violence and Oppression" is the academic path described in this paper. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat was the novel used as that bridge in a city college critical reading class. The question—How does one engage the student and facilitate the development of sustained critical thinking?—drove the research. The instructor used a critical pedagogy inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The paper sheds light on the importance of relationships and methods used to facilitate the development of critical literacy. Various media were woven together to sustain intellectual engagement. Over a three-month period, the classroom community explored and confronted issues of gender, race, sexuality, family, and class. The students broadened their understanding of social justice. Their experiences produced a number of outcomes. Students examined the kinds of violence produced in society and designed presentations that exhibited their understandings; they wrote extensions to the novel which reflected their empathy with the female characters; they produced Venn diagrams as they explored historical and current events. In the end, there were implications that the hegemonic impact of globalization called for the need for a paradigm shift in education.

Key words: **critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, gender, violence, hegemonic globalization**

Introduction

At the city college, an instructor teaching developmental reading classes is faced with the challenge of stimulating students' interest in reading and writing. Students entering these classes present with assessment measurements that indicate they are not reading and writing at the standard required to manage higher-level study activities. They are also often negative about their abilities and have no particular interest in reading. This attitude is combined with a lack of awareness about national and global issues. Even though the classroom population is diverse, this reality is pervasive. How, then, does one engage the student and facilitate the development of sustained critical thinking?

Student surveys, personal response journals, and classroom discussions reveal that, on the whole, these students have not been exposed to a pedagogy that examines critical issues and, consequently, they do not see themselves as participants or change agents in the larger society. In a constantly changing world where borders are being crossed and societies, at home and abroad, are experiencing globalization's impact, knowledge of how nations affect other nations and how the individual and the group play a role in outcomes is crucial. (Chua 2003; Chomsky 1991, 1999). If education is to contribute to social justice students need this awareness.

In the light of these phenomena, "we must press for an educational environment in which youth can develop the capacity and commitment collectively to control their lives and regulate their social interactions with a sense of equality, reciprocity, and community" (Bowles & Gentis 1976, 14). To that end, educators have a challenge and a responsibility to find bridges between the worlds of students and the worlds across borders in order to develop critical thinking skills and facilitate critical literacy. The novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, was chosen as one of those bridges in a city college classroom. This paper describes and explains the environment and the projects that were created in order to hone in the students a sustained interest in global issues as they explored *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat 1994) as a bridge to the global community.

Background information

The city college population that participated in this class was made up of approximately 25 students. These students came from many countries; spoke many languages; were of various races and classes; represented many cultures. It was a classroom well suited to border crossings. Ideas of hope (Freire 1997) and change influenced the classroom procedures. One example of an activity as a form of critical pedagogy was the project Rebuilding Haiti. It was aimed at extending and expanding the students' understanding of "violence" in order to make the possibility of change transparent. The pedagogy was designed and organized in a manner that allowed the elements of critical literacy to take root and blossom.[1]

[1] According to Freire "the capable and serious progressive educator must…challenge the learner to critically think through the social, political, and historic reality within which he or she is a presence…" (Freire 2004, 19). "Socialist teachers must not only demand control over their activities; we must also extend this control to students and to the broader community" (Bowles and Gentis 1976, 287). "To teach in a manner that

The critical thinking environment included opportunities for students to build a community that bonded student to student and teacher to student. In this space, there were occasions for students to use dialogue; they were given many opportunities to gather information through research; they worked in small and large groups; they responded to surveys, they conducted interviews; they designed critical thinking questionnaires and questions for written examination assessment. They produced reading logs and presented information. Their input was sought out in all aspects of the process and their contributions were validated. The instructor made her pedagogical choices transparent by explaining her choice of reading material and her methods for facilitating the learning process (Freire 1998; hooks 1994).

Included in the theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy was the knowledge gained from Gardner's multiple intelligences. According to the tenets of Howard Gardner's "multiple intelligences" theory (1993), people acquire knowledge in multiple ways. Therefore, in the learning environment, it was crucial to introduce and utilize approaches that incorporated visual-spatial charts and maps, bodily-kinesthetic hands-on projects like skits, musical performances, interpersonal group activities, intrapersonal reading logs, linguistic opportunities, logical activities such as creating provocative and interrogative questions, and dialogic opportunities for students to access learning.

The desired outcome of critical pedagogy is a well-informed citizen who has become aware of his or her ability to question society and the circumstances that make up human existence (Kozol 1981; Mayo 1999). The learner eventually makes informed decisions independently and sees herself as a part of a community and an agent of change. In the words of Paulo Freire, "Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing … Education makes sense because in order to be, women and men must keep on being" (2004, 15)

Critical literacy

The idea of critical literacy grew out of the historical search for equality as peoples were mired in social structures of patriarchy. Emancipation did not give blacks equality; public education did not make an equal society; a holistic curriculum did not create a classless society. People are still pawns of the system.

Literacy has to give the people a voice. It has to give them access to their own power. They have to see and believe in their possibilities in order for them to contribute to change. Therefore, literacy development has to encompass the critical aspect of examination. Hence, this is the function of critical literacy.

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respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (hooks 1994, 13). "In sum, the relationship between educators and learners is complex, fundamental, and difficult; it is a relationship about which we should think constantly. How nice it would be, nevertheless, if we tried to create the habit of evaluating it or of evaluating ourselves in it while we were educators and learners also" (Freire 1998, 60).

Paulo Freire (1921–1997), the well-known Brazilian educator, has been one of the major proponents of Critical Literacy as it is understood and practiced today. Freire understood that as people became literate their minds were being shaped. Therefore, pedagogy had to recognize the mind in this process of construction as well as understand the need to counteract oppressive forces.

Critical literacy unveils the actions of larger powers; it makes links between these powers and the lived situations of the masses; it unifies the people as it magnifies the yin and yang of human life; it opens channels of communication. The act of being involved is empowerment. Educators such as bell hooks (1994) and Paulo Freire (1992, 1997, 2004) have championed this call for decades.

Why critical literacy is needed

Critical literacy is a fight for freedom. In the context of life today, liberation has become a pressing need. Systems of education are caught in continuous tugs-of-war over funding, curriculum, and the ability to attract well-trained faculty. There is constant turmoil over concrete results and the need to go "back to basics." Information is delivered, but not questioned. This leaves very little room for dynamic and progressive pedagogy. Consequently, many are deprived of a well-rounded education (Bowles & Gentis 1976).

The lack of knowledge leaves vast numbers of people vulnerable to possible exploitation and other forms of domination. Ignorance means that within borders many are left unaware of the voices of their neighbors as they fight for freedom. Education can bring with it the kind of unity necessary to fight the forces of globalization.

> The world over, nonviolent resistance movements are being crushed and broken. If we do not respect and honor them, by default we privilege those who turn to violent means… Unfortunately, if peaceful change is not given a chance, then violent change becomes inevitable… In the twenty-first century the connection between religious fundamentalism, nuclear nationalism and the pauperization of whole populations because of corporate globalization is becoming impossible to ignore.
>
> (Roy 2003, 13–14)

If it is as Arundhati Roy, an Indian novelist and social critic, states, that our nonviolent protests are not gaining ground and, at the same time, the mechanics of power are rushing to victory, we need to be creative about our action; and we need to fortify already proven methods with new energy and determination. Further, it behooves us to shout it loud and clear that "being poor is not the same as being weak. The strength of the poor is not indoors in office buildings and courtrooms. It is outdoors, in the fields, the mountains, the river valleys, the city streets, and university campuses … That's where negotiations must be held. That's where the battle must be waged" (Roy 2009, 64). Therefore, when we approach this crisis of violence, we must understand that we are a part of a large community of voices. Already stories are being told; it is into that chain of experiences that we transcend borders and join hands. In order to make this unity possible, it is

important to hear these stories and understand the conditions of people around the world. One way of sharing and hearing these stories is through education: education is a form of liberation and without it change is slow.

In, *Education for All a Distant Goal*, it was reported that "Of the world's 101 million children out of school, between 50 and 70 per cent are from minorities or indigenous peoples." It was also stated that "the costs of failing to provide education for all are massive: holding back economic growth and sowing the seeds for inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict" (Minority Rights 2009). These are the disturbing realities that we are witnessing today.

Consequently, pedagogy must recognize that large majorities of the people exist in marginalized communities away from formal avenues of education. Under such conditions, education must find its way to the people wherever they are: schools, community centers, churches, living rooms, the workplace, and libraries. Liberation cannot afford to wait for people who are not in the formal educational system to find their way to schools. Like Freire, we must meet the people where they are now. And they must be met with love and respect, and any material used in this process of empowerment must be relevant to their lives.

Freire, in *Pedagogy of Indignation*, emphasizes the importance of this collective vision. As an educator he understood that "Awareness of the world and awareness of myself make me not only a being in the world, but one *with* the world and *with* others. It makes me a being capable of intervening in the world and not only of adapting to it" (2004, 15). Awareness of self and the link of self to others is the powerful knowledge that one does not stand alone. In unity, action and change become real possibilities. Freire understood that education had to be for the people and about the people. This understanding led him to design a program that included the knowledge of the learning participants. He then used the material for literacy development. Freire did not see learners as empty vessels to be filled by others. He saw the need to create a student-centered environment that welcomed learners and gave their existence voice and value.

Critical pedagogy

A certain kind of pedagogy is necessary in the fight for freedom. There is an approach that will give students the determination and the confidence to become change agents. That pedagogy is a critical pedagogy; it is not a new idea. But in today's atmosphere of increasing violence, it needs momentum, strength, and dedication.

Critical pedagogy recognizes that reading is a developmental process, so there are phases to the construction of knowledge. First, and most importantly, the positions of teacher and student must be understood and recognized as a shared relationship. The instructor, as facilitator, contributes her experiences. Included in those experiences is her training. Then, the students bring with them many experiences. There is push and pull and at times leadership roles are exchanged. The facilitator recognizes that the population (multicultural, multiethnic, multileveled, multi-gendered) arrives with a pool of information that must be validated and incorporated; in this position she is a student. She must gather this information to expand her knowledge and weave that knowledge into her

pedagogy. The instructor's responsibility is to learn from the population, to understand the process of extending and expanding information, to make prior knowledge transparent and to create opportunities for the students to make bridges between what they know and what they must learn (Freire 1997, 1998; hooks 1994).

The novel as a bridge

In the critical thinking classroom, the choice of novel is a deliberate one made by the instructor for various reasons. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is a narrative based on real-life issues and events. There are many opportunities to ask questions and participate in research as the story moves from Haiti[2] to New York.

Danticat makes it possible for the facilitator of critical literacy to deal with a variety of issues that are familial, local, and global: ancestry, family love and loyalty, sisterhood, sexism, patriarchy, slavery, resistance, traditions, poverty, and violence.
In New York, Sophie's life is turned upside down as she encounters the alienation of an unforgiving American culture. It bites into her as she experiences the rejection of her skin color, her language, and her native origins. Juxtaposed against these alienating forces is a young woman who is determined to survive and who must create and maintain meaningful and healthy relationships. As Sophie morphs into a multidimensional woman, her journey invites a critical reading of life in Haiti and the United States.

The two settings of this novel, Haiti and New York, beg the questions of power in the historical sense as well as in its present manifestations. Who benefits and who serves? And, how do forms of oppression play roles in maintaining these divisions?

Thus, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* becomes the foundation for the development of critical skills by providing the material for questioning society and opening doors for the activism that creates change. It raises the voices of the oppressed. It calls for equality; it calls for change. It calls for critical literacy.

Creating the environment

According to Vygotsky (1978, 84–91), making connections to students' prior knowledge and scaffolding information for students are the methods that shrink the "zone of proximal development." This zone, the gap between what is known and knowledge that is to come must be a comfortable stretch for the learner. All senses are involved in this growth. The activities in the classroom were designed to build bridges of connection as the participants formed a community.

In order to build a community, the instructor sent a letter of welcome to the students. In the letter she shared details about family, educational background, hobbies, travels, and

[2]In 1804, Haiti became the first black slave revolution to succeed and win the slaves independence. Dominant Western powers committed to the slave trade made it pay a price for its stupendous valiance; whereas today, after years of despotic rule and desperate poverty, it struggles in the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake of January 2010. In New York, oppression in the forms of economic, gender, and cultural violence is revealed as the narrative unfolds.

teaching philosophy. The teaching pedagogy was described. Students learned what was expected of them and what they could expect from the instructor. At the end of the letter they were requested to use the welcome letter as an example and they were asked to reply. Along with the personal information, they were encouraged to include positive and negative school experiences and describe the kind of learning environment that they preferred.

The beginning of the bonding process was immediate. The letters arrived with the students and the smiles on their faces reflected the beginning of comfort. The letters themselves confirmed the students' willingness to share their private selves.

> "Been through many difficulties that somehow I survived…" (female)
> "I can clearly remember having the sense that my English teacher did not enjoy my presence within her classroom." (female)
> "It seems to me that we will be having fun with you in class and at the same time learning… I don't like to feel tense and pressured…(male)
> "Like in the book that I enjoyed reading last semester, *The Alchemist* by Paul Coelho, I am looking for my personal legend." (male)
> "I am a very hands-on learner. I like to touch the fire to learn that it is hot." (female)
> "Compared to other high school students, I was never the best within the classroom, or had the highest grade, but I was the one to always walk into class with a smile and a willing to learn personality." (male)

The many honest responses indicated that the door was opened for purposeful dialogue, the possibility of open minds, and, therefore, visions of new futures.

The first sessions of the class were spent building a bridge from student to student and student to teacher. These activities formed relationships that Freire (1997) acknowledges are the glue that will take learners through and beyond oppression. Students learned how to express themselves orally; they learned to have an informed opinion and take a stand; they learned the importance of using their voices in a collective manner; they learned the meaning of critical literacy; they learned how to use the word to read the world. On a concrete level they saw their writing output increase and improve.

Partner interviews were the first venture because they allowed the students to move slowly. As a class, they decided on the appropriate questions for the audience and they sat with their partners; the chatter, smiles, and laughter confirmed that the process of building community continued. After the interviews, the students sat in a circle allowing for face-to-face contact and they introduced their partners. Inevitably the styles varied and laughter was always a by-product. After the interview, the instructor and the students gathered in a large circle (this became routine) and they were asked to express their opinions about the interviews and share their experiences. Many people noted that familiarities were found between partners; they recalled laughter and the recognition that "it broke the ice." To seal the connections of the first steps, a name game was introduced to the members.

The game we played was a memory game and it was a lively and engaging activity. It was the final step of the introduction. At the end of this game, the students and the instructor had memorized all the names and in the process laughter and relaxation were manifested. Friendships were formed. And, as Middendorf pointed out in *Learning Student Names,* it was obvious that after the names were learned "a sense of community among the students begins to grow, fostering learning both inside and outside the classroom" (1996). Overheard after our name game were the exchange of numbers and plans for the future. The groundwork was laid and the connections became the foundation for cooperation between the members of the class.

Classroom process and projects

The novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, was introduced as a vehicle to conscious response. The plot of the novel was reviewed in the large group and the instructor made the expectations clear. The students learned that they were expected to produce a reading journal every week and use it to develop their thinking and their writing. The structure of the journal was described and the foci broken down. The journal sections, a list of main points, a short summary, and the personal response, were explained. In the personal response section, the students gave their opinions of all aspects of the reading; they connected themselves through experience and observations; they made comparisons between cultures, families, societies, and between eras. They found evidence to support their thinking; created critical thinking questions for small group discussions, and learned to lead large group discussions.

Danticat is Haitian; the narrator of her story was born in Haiti and there her story started, but my students knew nothing of Haiti. This lack of awareness was revealed when a survey was used as a tool to expose gaps in their knowledge. The survey revealed that they were almost completely ignorant and what they did know was reason for concern. For example, "I know about Haiti—it is an island next to Cuba where **poverty** runs high" was one student's response; another "It was an island where people lived." "**Not too many wealthy people**," was another. Similar content summed up the responses of the 25 students. They were also unaware of Haiti's importance in history.

The students had very little prior knowledge of Haiti for scaffolding, but they had a lot of human experience to use as a bridge. Information about Haiti had to be provided. The students were asked to research and provide information on Haiti's history; they were asked to find the island on a map. Then, with this knowledge, we entered the novel.

Edwidge Danticat is the creator of the story in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and the students met her through technology. Her lecture at the University of California at Santa Barbara was taped and available on Youtube. Students were able to see her face and hear her purpose in writing. She became real to them. They were asked to note her reasons for writing: to raise the voices of those who had little power. As a follow-up, the students did research to find out about her life and her accomplishments. She became someone to admire. This was made obvious because the combined knowledge gained from hearing her words and learning her biography elicited comments of wonder regarding her accomplishments at a young age and her achievements as a woman.

Breath, Eyes, Memory is a novel of love, of family, of survival and resistance; it is one of power, politics, and multiple forms of violence. The stories of violence lunge at the reader from between the pages: a child is born in poverty, she is torn from love; a woman is brutally raped, her psyche is torn; suicide traumatizes; women are tested on many levels. But through it all, women keep standing; they fall and rise again; their spirits of grave determination born of family and support keep them steadfast and loyal. This dramatization of human life held the attention of the students.

As this journey of women held the students fast, a journey of a different sort, but also one of violence was happening in the real world. The January 2010 earthquake had devastated Haiti. The Haitian population was caught in the aftermath of this destruction. It was in the midst of this tragedy that the project "Rebuilding Haiti" was born.

Armed with a plan to develop an understanding of the human condition, highlight the everyday plight of women, and facilitate a consciousness of violence, the instructor and the students brainstormed their understanding of the word "violent." For the majority of students "violence" meant physical abuse. The instructor shared the dictionary definition of the word in order to move beyond ordinary meaning.

Violence - the definition

> **1 a :** exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse **b :** an instance of violent treatment **2 :** injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation
> **3 a :** intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force **b :** vehement feeling or expression *also* **:** an instance of such action or feeling **c :** a clashing or jarring quality
> **4 :** undue alteration

In conjunction with the above definitions of violence, and the reading of the novel, the instructor exposed the students to The Real News Network documentary, *Haiti: The Politics of Rebuilding*, that gave voice to the Haitian people and connected directly to current events. In this documentary, the students learned from the voices of the Haitian people information about the sweatshops, their pay struggles, the challenges of poverty, and the effects on family; they learned about the island's resources and the reasons behind the destruction of its economy. As they analyzed this growing information, they were asked to reevaluate their understanding of the word "violence." Over time, as the students created questions and discussed their journeys through fiction and non-fiction, their definition of this word "violence" expanded.

Words and visuals embodied the work. The students worked collaboratively to create maps, Venn diagrams, and charts that helped them to better understand the connections between people. They learned what it meant to be overpowered, to have voices silenced, and to be the recipients of multiple forms of violence.

The instructor continued to introduce material at appropriate moments so that the global connections became "real." As the students continued to encounter the challenges of female characters in the novel, they were faced with the human characters of the world. In the journals, they practiced designing questions and this developed a meta-awareness of the importance of questions. These questions became the engine that drove the process of discovery. Various materials were used to stimulate the thinking behind the questions and these materials aided the students in the crossing of borders.

Crossing borders in the classroom

Running alongside the novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and the research on **Haiti**, the students were also using the word to cross borders; they were also using the word to find the voiceless people Danticat mentioned. They read about Chief Seattle, the Native American leader who lost his people and his land in the **United States**. In his speech delivered in 1854, Seattle addresses the power of the invaders of his land, he recognizes the genocidal intentions, and he acknowledges his inability to stop the violence.

Students were given an assignment to gather information on the 19th century boarding schools built to Americanize Native American children. They learned of a system of schooling that was designed to attack the substance of many indigenous cultures. "Kill the Indian, and save the man." This was the goal. In these schools the students were forbidden to speak their native languages and they were forced to adapt to European American ways of being (Mintz 2007).

Together the students made the connections across borders and across time. As they expanded their understanding of violence, they asked questions. As they read the novel, they engaged in dialogue that brought these connections to light and again they asked questions.

The movie *Rabbit Proof Fence* is a story based on the lives of Aboriginal sisters in **Australia** who suffered under the Australian policy that legalized the kidnapping of children. The policy directed its attack on biracial children born to Aboriginal women. The children were torn from their families and communities and placed in schools designed to alienate them from their histories and indoctrinate them with another. Again the plan was genocide. The students learned of violence against women, children, land, and culture.

As they viewed the movie *Amazing Grace* their emotions were again aroused as they witnessed (saw and heard) the struggle against the institution of slavery. The story, based in **England**, covered the life of William Wilberforce (the Haitians and the Haitian revolution are mentioned) who contributed to the fight against murder and oppression on the slave plantations built and maintained on the lands stolen by the British.

Sankofa, the movie, was shared. The main character of this story is taken back into her past to experience the trials and tribulations of her ancestors. The movie depicts the brutality of slavery in the **Caribbean**. Students are made to witness the horrors of rape

and murder on a sugar plantation and they are asked to contemplate the reasons behind the decisions made by characters.

The research went along with the readings and discussions. For example, students were asked to find information on the Haitian slave rebellion, Ton Ton Macoutes, and virginity testing, and return to class with the written summaries. The instructor made it clear to the students that the research was needed to bring life to the novel and to contribute information to their questions; it was also needed for them to view the world.

Research helped to build bridges as the class dealt with the issue of gender in the novel. We attempted to answer the questions: Who has power? How did they gain that power? How do they keep it? What are the consequences for others? What is the effect on women? How do the women (in the novel and in real life) go about finding their power and making change? In order to handle these questions, we watched *The Shape of Water* made by Kum Kum Bhavnini (Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara). The documentary was inspired by student questions that motivated her to make a journey to various parts of the world to raise the voices of women who were engaging in fights for human rights. The documentary introduced women in **India** who were fighting for their land; women in **Brazil** who were fighting for their forest; in **Senegal** who were fighting against the mutilation of their bodies; and in **Israel** who were fighting for the right to live in peace.

As the examination of gender continued, students did some research and found information on female circumcision and identified other practices of mutilating the female body. Forms of virginity testing were discussed, and other forms of gender violence highlighted. They also used the information as a lens to examine their own behavior. The culminating activity for the discussion on gender was provocative. The instructor introduced the idea of switching genders for an hour of the class. The activity was explained and the students asked the instructor her reasoning behind the activity. She explained that she was concerned with the ways in which men and women interacted and that understanding those relationships mattered to the success of the community. She also explained that it was necessary to find ways to walk in each other's shoes.

The activity required the men and women to split into two groups with large pieces of paper, piles of old magazines, and a bag of crayons. They were asked to make a chart of what they thought they lost and what they thought they gained when they changed their roles from male to female or from female to male in society as it is today. The results of this activity were eye openers for all involved. The male students expressed surprised realization as their common experiences constructed knowledge that proved the inequality that was a constant part of women's lives. The female students witnessed this realization and expressed a willingness to share more of their experiences. A bridge appeared between the two groups.

The subject of history entered the discussions and the students contributed their opinions on the value of history. The class discussion on pedagogy was further enhanced when the students read the printed copy of an interview *Why Students Should Study History: An*

Interview with Howard Zinn (Miner 1994), and readings about traditional education versus a more open-ended approach. This reading material was used to open discussions in which opinions and experiences were shared. In his interview, the historian and author, Howard Zinn, claimed that what was considered to be historical truth by some often left out stories. As a follow-up to these discussions, a Medgar Evers biographical movie was introduced as an example of that phenomenon in the history of the United States. Questions were raised after viewing the movie. Following which, the students came up with various reasons why particular stories are left out of major history books.

As a final project the students were asked to work in groups to present the project "Rebuilding Haiti." It was simple. They were asked to use the information they had gathered over time and create a presentation that answered these questions: What did we know about Haiti at the beginning of the class? What do we know now? What are the global connections we have made? In the light of what we now know of Haiti, what do we think are the necessary steps that the Haitians need to take to bring about change? How can the global community contribute?

All of the contributions to this reading class and project were meant to engage students in a form of border crossing that would stretch their understanding of community and common human challenges. The approach was carried out throughout the semester. It was also meant to get them thinking along fresh lines.

The outcomes

Over the three months of meeting twice a week, the students produced various products. The gender activity, where the men and the women switched roles, produced large graphs and charts; each group presented and taught what they collectively felt they had lost and gained. One of the results was that the men stepped into Martine's shoes and noted the emotional and physical trauma of rape. Women noted the anger and frustration of police profiling.

Venn diagrams were created that showed the similarities between the cultural violence perpetrated against the Native Americans and the violence against the indigenous population of Australia. For example, symbols like lips sewn together were the visuals that some students drew on their Venn diagrams as metaphors to reflect oppression.

As one of the final assignments related to the novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, students were asked to step into the author's shoes and become writers. They were asked to produce a three-page extension of the novel. In this way they used Danticat as a model. Some of the written extensions created by the male students indicated that the act of stepping into Danticat's shoes as a woman writer and into the lives of her female characters gave them bridges to the issues confronting women. Below are a few excerpts from their written extensions to the novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat 1994).

> "How are things going with you and Joseph?" Rena has a contented look on her face, as if she knows that Sophie is recovering from her issues. "Communication is easier between us. His actions toward me have

> become much more comforting, and he understands now what I've been going through. And **I still struggle with enjoying sex**, but I no longer feel any need to double."[3]
>
> "From the emotional trauma I have been through, I have nothing left. **I feel as though I am empty inside as a pumpkin that has had its pulp and seeds sucked out of it**. As I fall into deeper sleep, I all of a sudden find myself face to face with my mother."
>
> "During the time I wondered what should be my next step. **Would I be strong enough to confront him? How would I react in front of him?** These questions were haunting me every night. I tried to think about something else, but I couldn't; it was deep into me. After two weeks I couldn't stand it anymore."
>
> "I immediately asked what his name was. Atie responded her name is Ramona. 'Ramona' I said, 'what kind of guy's name is Ramona?' Atie responded, 'I said her name is Ramona. She is my girlfriend, Sophie.' This was unusual and never heard of in my culture. **Men were supposed to date women…the same sex never dated the same sex. But something in me changed**; **I decided to accept Atie's decision**."

The above quotations suggest that given the opportunity to explore the lives of women from the pages of a novel, male students are able to empathize with the plight of women as they continue to struggle for equality.

Another student-generated outcome from the novel was an interview with a family member. As they read the novel and brought their thoughts to the large group discussion, students commented that they did not know much about their own families. This comment led to the design of a questionnaire for a family member. The novel had stirred a need to understand the issues of immigrants that had affected their families. Again, some of the questions gave them insight into discrimination. For example:
How were girls and boys treated in the old country?

a) Boys had better treatment than girls in Russia when it came to education and jobs. Most girls could not go on to higher levels of schooling and were relegated to menial jobs.
b) Women traditionally took responsibility for the family. There is almost no divorce because the courts strip women of property if they leave the marriage.

[3] In the novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie "doubles" when she is having sex. Sex is a painful experience because of the trauma she experiences so she removes herself mentally. She goes to another place. The reader learns that the women in the family use "doubling" as a coping mechanism.

At the end of the three-month journey, the "Rebuilding Haiti" projects were presented. They reflected the outcomes of the students' work together. The group had the responsibility of using the project to teach the class. Here are answers to some questions that were a part of their Powerpoint presentation.

- What are our goals? Learning how to help society in need and being prepared in case a disaster occurs. Having the essential materials and knowledge to rebuild and improve what was once lost.

- What did we know of Haiti at the beginning? As a group we knew very little about Haiti.

- What do we know now? By reading *Breath, Eyes, Memory* we got a sense that traditions in other cultures are always being passed down to generations.

- Why research is important? Research is important because it provides us with educational information regarding past events. It also provides us with a better understanding and educates us on certain topics.

- What is the condition of Haiti now? The conditions are very poor; they can't provide aid for themselves. The earthquake which occurred in January for many Haitians changed their lives forever. Many lost loved ones.

- How can Haiti be made healthy and independent? Haiti can be healthy and independent by first starting to educate its people so then in the future they can share their knowledge and provide Haiti with necessities such as dealing with financial situations. Haiti can be made healthy by rebuilding their agriculture and making their economy grow. By providing health services and developing well-paying jobs, making their structures stable so they can last for a lifetime.

- Types of violence learned: Anger in people's eyes, sweatshops sent crashing by the earthquake, many loved ones lost, not giving them their freedom, rape of young kids who are taken away from their families, not having their families there to protect them.

The idea that people were being exploited, in various ways and in various places, scandalized them and the knowledge that they might benefit from sweatshop activity unsettled them. The conversations were further enhanced after they saw the DVD, *Made in L.A.* They heard the stories of garment workers (most of them immigrant women) who were protesting against discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. In response to this information and to a student suggestion, the students researched the names of a number of companies known to be involved in garment manufacturing in the developing world and wrote a letter to their headquarters communicating the students' concerns for fair treatment of workers.

It was a beginning. The responses above were promising: they promised the possibility of continued questions and concern for people across borders. The students made connections and broadened their understanding of the concept of violence. As an assessment they were also presented with a number of questions. The answers below also indicated an expansion of their thinking.

1. How has your understanding of "violence" changed over the semester?

- My understanding of violence changed over the semester because of the deeper context we went into as a class. The class discussions we've had really helped me to look more into the different kinds of violence that are out there; how not only individuals can be affected by this, but countries, races, and religions, which really paints a bigger picture than I had planned on.

- My understanding of violence has changed in a lot of ways. I realized that violence is not just physical it's any put down.

- But I have learned violence can be psychological too over this semester.

- As the semester draws to a close I realize that my knowledge on violence that occurs all over the world has increased immensely. I have a much better understanding of the torture and pain that people go through.

- Violence is not just physical, it can be psychologically damaging, and it is a shame that it exists within every single culture around the world. It baffles me to see that there is such sickening hate throughout the world. It has motivated me to make a difference in the things I say and encourage in my daily life.

- Well I have always seen violence as a horrible thing. What I have learned throughout the semester is that violence can come in different forms, from global to sexual violence. I have a better understanding of how violence can affect people's way of life.

2. Did the books connect with society today?

- What made the class interesting were the books and how they still relate to modern society. We found many links across the globe giving us a better understanding of issues such as rape, incest, body modification, terror; these are all current issues today.

- Very much so. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was one of the best books I have read in a very long time. It was so intense and I involved myself in the book and was able to comprehend more of what is going on in Haiti.

- We were able to have a lot of good discussions and connect them with things that are happening in our lives and don't seem to have gone away.

- Each book we read showed numerous aspects about life that are all around us each day but many are oblivious to what is going on and are stuck in their own daily routine.

The above student answers to these questions expressed the connections that they made during the reading journey they took in the class. The answers suggested that they were on the road to critical literacy.

Conclusion

"The future does not make us. We make ourselves in the struggle to make it." (Freire 2004, 34).

How, then, does one engage the student and facilitate the development of sustained critical thinking? This was the question posed at the beginning of this paper and it was the question that hovered as the participants in this classroom became a community and took on the challenges of critical thinking.

The novel as a bridge to understanding violence and oppression is a worthy endeavor. Observations of the students, as they journeyed with Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, suggest that over time, in a classroom where the facilitator uses a pedagogical approach based on unity and critical examination, students become more aware of themselves as community members with opinions and voices. In the midst of building bridges of solidarity and communication they learn to see themselves and others as change agents. Participants who feel appreciated and whose voices are valued are much more inclined to confront barriers that might stand in the way of self-actualization and freedom.

At the same time, change is a struggle and it is ongoing. It is important to recognize that there are challenges that must be confronted when the goal is social justice for all. An understanding of the hegemonic forces that saturate minds and, consequently, shape human behavior informs practice. Educators who see themselves as social justice workers must acknowledge the barriers that impede the development of critical consciousness. Awareness of these barriers will lead facilitators of critical literacy to question the existing education paradigm.

Today, the crossing of borders for trade and the waves of migration stimulated by this process of globalization make the exchange, collection, and use of that knowledge crucial in the interest of freedom. Students must come to understand the importance of interrogating all that they read, hear, and see.

The stories of all groups whose voices have been stifled must be found, they must be told. A future where people are respected as humans worthy of equal treatment is possible; it will take work and dedication. As Freire wrote, "Dreams are visions for which one fights. Their realizations cannot take place easily, without obstacles. It implies, on the contrary, advances, reversals, and at times, lengthy marches. It implies struggle" (2004 32).

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By Unseen Hands: Regarding the Gender of Saladoid Potters in the Ancient Lesser Antilles

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Abstract

This essay considers archaeological uncertainties about the sex and gender roles of the earliest, most widespread ceramicists in the Caribbean—members of a culture that settled the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico over two millennia ago during an era known as the Saladoid. Analysis of the sculptural and painted adornments on Saladoid ceramics suggests that the vessels embodied important Pre-Columbian Caribbean ideas about spirituality, the natural world and the cultural sphere, including gender. Employing archaeological, ethnographic and art historical research, this essay offers interpretations of key Saladoid ceramic adornments, and relates these motifs to the question of gender among the Saladoid potters.

Key words: Arawak, Caribbean, pottery, pre-Columbian, Taino

Introduction

Agrarian people first came to the Caribbean islands in the first millennium before the Common Era (CE). They entered the archipelago from northeastern South America, a region spanning Venezuela's Peninsula of Paria, the Orinoco Delta, and the northwestern Guianas. They quickly migrated through the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico by the early first millennium CE.[i] These new arrivals, probably the first Arawaks in the Caribbean,[ii] likely intermarried with and/or displaced several groups of hunter-gatherers who by then had inhabited the archipelago for millennia.

Once settled on the islands, the new people's small-scale and intensive cultivation of high yield staples such as cassava, tannia, legumes, fruits, and vegetables[iii] afforded them a certain level of sedentism, despite frequent fishing expeditions and supplementary hunting. During the natural lulls in the growing cycle, they could become involved in the time-consuming production of certain fine arts in wood, shell, bone, fiber, stone, and ceramics. While many of these art forms were portable and could be found among even the Arawaks' most itinerant hunter-gatherer neighbors and forbears in the region, pottery could be relatively fragile and bulky. Intensive production of ceramics often distinguishes agricultural peoples from nomads and full-time foragers. Hunter-gatherers are more likely to carry calabashes or baskets rather than ceramic pots on their travels.

Early Pre-Columbian Caribbean pottery is admired for its beauty and evident symbolism. This essay considers the production, iconography, and aesthetics of these earliest ceramics as potentially embodying Pre-Columbian Caribbean ideas about gender, and speculates about the gender of the potters themselves.

Morphology and aesthetics of Saladoid ceramics

While the roots of the Caribbean's earliest ceramic-making settlers probably reach deep into the Venezuelan interior of the third millennium BCE, their ceramic style is named after the Saladero site on the Lower Orinoco where archaeologists first unearthed exemplars of their fine pottery.[iv] Beginning in the early first millennium BCE, Saladero-type, or "Saladoid," ceramics took a variety of forms, including dishes, bowls, jugs, ollas, bottles, and effigy vessels. Most of these are adorned in one of four different ways: slip painted in a variety of mineral colors, most typically kaolin white and hematite red; incised with linear motifs; modeled with figural and other biomorphic features;[v] or elaborated with some combination of these three.

The characteristic Saladoid painting scheme involves white curviform or geometric motifs painted on red slip-painted or buff (unpainted) background. This technique is called "white-on-red" in the Pre-Columbian scholarship of the Caribbean. Saladoid white is painted in such a way as to produce figure-ground reversals between white and red areas (figure 1a and b). It is often difficult to guess whether the white areas on top or the red ones created by omission are the main, or "positive," motifs. This reciprocity between

painted and unpainted/white and red/top and bottom/figure and ground demonstrates a Saladoid aesthetic of complementarity, and perhaps even a notion of harmony between opposing entities. We can only guess whether this complementary aesthetic extended to other aspects of the Saladoid potters' thinking, say, regarding forces of nature (e.g., fire and water); clans or vocational associations (e.g., potters and canoe-makers); familiars and strangers; or gender categories.

Perhaps the most complex mode of Saladoid ceramic adornment is that wherein the complementary slip paint scheme is used to augment figural modeling and incised designs; this style is sometimes called the "Cedrosan Saladoid" after the site of Cedros in Trinidad where much of this kind of pottery first emerged. On Cedrosan pottery, the handles, spouts, and rims carry most of the modeled, often painted, adornments. These modeled projections are called *adornos*. Many adornos not only depict people or animals as singular subjects but also combine these figures in a variety of ways. Figures are seen stacked, one atop the other (figure 2); spliced together while sharing a common feature (figure 3); emerging out of the head of another in the manner of an alter ego or spirit guide (figure 4); or appearing only when the adorno is turned or inverted (figure 5). These varied modes of visual hybridity suggest a Saladoid interest in multiple and liminal existences, and in transformational states between corporeal, spiritual, and cultural categories.

Iconography and function of Saladoid ceramics

The museums of the Caribbean house thousands of vessel sherds and anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and hybrid adornos. They are often excavated by archaeologists from ancient rubbish heaps (middens) or found by landowners who unearth them by accident. In ancient times, when pots fell and shattered, often only the densely molded adornos remained intact. Occasionally, an entire pot is found interred with the dead in an ancient Saladoid grave,[vi] the food offerings it may have once held long since dissolved into moist Caribbean soils abounding with invertebrates (figure 6).

Saladoid vessels were evidently also part of the rituals for the living. Saladoid vessels' iconography associates them not only with symbolic, perhaps deified, animals but also with shamans and perhaps ancestors, who remain of undecipherable age or gender. Some human figures are depicted with what appear to be their zoic spirit guides emerging from their crania.[vii] Columbus and other Conquest-era commentators described the Taíno (Greater Antillean people partly descended from the Saladoid-era people) as presenting the numinous beings of their religious pantheon with "first fruits."[viii] The practice of offering fruits of the harvest to the spirits was, and remains, a common practice among the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Thus, from reports of Taíno harvest offerings and excavations of Taíno and Saladoid sites, we know that adorned ceramic vessels accompanied both the living and the dead in a variety of religious rituals.[ix]

Observation of decorated potsherds and whole, adorned vessels reveals that they were not used for cooking. The only burn marks they show are those from uneven firing at the time of their manufacture: darkened areas on vessel walls. But darkening and wear on the bottom of adorned vessels, where they would have sat on the hearth, is rare. These decorated pots seem to have been used for the presentation of, rather than the preparation of, foods, libations, unguents, medicines, and/or narcotics. Cooking was done in the more utilitarian (i.e., unadorned) pottery whose fragments are often found in Pre-Columbian middens. As a result, we do not know if male or female ritual specialists owned and handled these vessels, more often than say a female "laity" in charge of much of the food preparation.

Presentations of edibles in adorned vessels were not all necessarily of a high religious significance. Adorned vessels may have also been beloved family heirlooms, commemorating ancestors or clan leaders in a political as much as a religious way. Thus some zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, and abstract ceramic symbols could be emblems of clans, vocational associations, age-grade/gender coteries, or other initiation-based groups.

The zoomorphs most commonly represented in Saladoid adornos and effigy vessels are turtles and frogs (figures 7 to 10), creatures that leave their accustomed habitats to lay their eggs and whose offspring likewise cross back from that exogenous environment into that of their parents. In addition to their emergence from eggs, frogs also go through a series of transformations from fish-like tadpoles, which then sprout legs like lizards, before losing their tails to become frogs. Thus, ideas of metamorphosis and crossing between realms or categories were likely part of frog symbolism especially.

The turtles and frogs that appear in Amerindian arts of the Caribbean, from the Saladoid to Taíno eras, seem to have been maternal/fertility symbols. As creatures most active and noisome in the rainy season, piping frogs especially (genus *Eleutherodactylus*) were representative of agricultural fertility. Freshly planted seeds, tubers and joints of cassava began to sprout in that wet phase of the year that rang with the incessant nocturnal chorus of these frogs. But also in the increased leisure time that immediately followed planting, human families and couples would have spent more time together. The natural result would have been a marked increase in the number of pregnant women. It is also noteworthy that in traditional divisions of labor in diverse tropical lowland cultures that cultivate cassava, Amerindian women, including pregnant ones, usually tend to the agricultural plots and gather much of the edible roots, fruits, and vegetables while the men fish and hunt.[x] Agriculture can involve both genders at planting and harvest time but the daily tending of agro-plots is often taken up by women and this would likely have been the case in the ancient Antilles, when many men were away on fishing expeditions and other sea voyages. For the ancient Antilleans, the widespread frog imagery may have represented both agricultural and female fertility.

Frogs were certainly not the only female fertility symbol. By far the most common zoomorphs appearing in Saladoid adornos, painted motifs, and effigy pots were turtles.

They were maternal creatures in Conquest-era Taíno mythology (see below), which may have harked back to Saladoid times. Turtles' habitual return from the ocean depths to emerge out of the water, laboriously crawl up onto the beaches in the dark of night, and spend much of that night digging (then later covering) a hole with their flippers into which they have laid hundreds of eggs certainly made them symbols of the dutiful, prolific mother.

Turtle carapaces are reflected in the most common Saladoid vessel type: the everted bowl. In fact, many of these bowls are effigy vessels with the head, legs, and even the tail of a turtle modeled on their rim (figure 9). Scholars have also suggested that the dome-like roofs of oval Saladoid houses may have deliberately evoked a turtle's shell.[xi] There is certainly linguistic evidence of this "turtle-house" idea since the name for these dwellings in many parts of tropical South America is still "maloca," a word with a clear relation to "morocoy," commonly used to denote tortoises in the same areas.

It is unclear whether the tortoise, and by implication the maloca, carried primarily feminine symbolism but Taíno oral traditions, first written down by Father Ramón Pané in 1498 at Columbus' command, indicate that the people of the Greater Antilles considered the sea turtle their prime female ancestor. From a scaly infection on the back of the Taíno culture hero, Deminán Caracaracol, is pried a turtle that has been growing there. After delivering him from his dorsal pregnancy, Deminán's three identical brothers build a house with him for the turtle, and in Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's early sixteenth century transcription of the myth, they become her polyandrous consorts as it were. Together these five are the ancestors of the Antilleans,[xii] who are in this way "children of the turtle."

Frog and turtle symbols appear not only on pottery and perhaps in the architectural plans of Saladoid-era houses, but in a number of other arts, including trigonal and conical zemis made of conch shell or stone (figure 11) and numerous works of rock art throughout the Caribbean archipelago (figure 12). The famed Taíno ballcourt at Caguana in Puerto Rico features the mother goddess, Atabey, with flexed legs in the manner of a frog, but also in the position of a woman stooping to give birth (figure 13). The specifics of how all these works related to ritual and social roles are yet unclear.

After frogs and turtles, the most common zoomorphs are those accorded masculine symbolism in many tropical lowland cultures and perhaps in the Pre-Columbian Caribbean as well: pelicans, wading birds, owls, bats, and dogs.[xiii] The contrast between these winged creatures of the air and the "feminine" ones associated with moisture is clear but not mutually exclusive. After all, bats and night birds live in hollows and caves, which might associate them structurally with the dark, damp earth as much as with air; and pelicans, herons, frigate birds, and ibises are all linked to watery realms that structural anthropology considers as carrying feminine associations among South American peoples. Would-be masculine bird and bat motifs are common throughout the ancient Antillean arts, from cave art to sculpture (figure 14), and dog images were

accorded full icon (i.e., zemi) status by the Taíno who used images of a canine deity, Opiyel-guobirán, in their worship.[xiv] But these zoomorphs do not appear nearly as often in ceramic arts as do frogs and turtles. It would appear that Saladoid pottery is an art form dominated by feminine iconography.

Gender, vocation, and authority during the Saladoid Period

Could the preeminence of feminine zoomorphic symbolism in Saladoid ceramics indicate that the potters, or at least some of them, were women? Since the ceramics of the period are not lacking prominent masculine zoomorphic symbols, the pronounced maternal and agro-fertility emblems alone do not reliably indicate that the makers were primarily female. Given the importance of the sea in the lifestyle and migrations of Pre-Columbian Antillean peoples, and that the sea was accessed by canoes traditionally manufactured and crewed by men,[xv] it is very likely that Saladoid-era colonies were first established through male agency. But as a result of the many inter-island migrations in the early Saladoid settlement of the Caribbean islands, male explorers were probably dependent on the stability of matrilineal ancestry to establish and maintain leadership ascension, property rights, and other hereditary claims. From the Conquest era to the present, Arawak peoples such as the Taíno of the Greater Antilles and the Lokono of the Guianas have been known to trace their ancestry along the matriline.[xvi]

While agency in the avant-garde of Saladoid migration may have sat with male canoeists, it is not known whether the migrations themselves were directed by male, female, or mixed groups of political or religious leaders. Additionally, it is not known whether political leadership after settlement of the Lesser Antilles remained with the male vanguard or, say, passed to female elders brought on the canoes that arrived first (to empower/initiate colonies) or last (to seal/establish colonies). We also do not know whether religious/ritual specialists within Saladoid-era society, the likely authors of Saladoid zoomorphic iconography, were male, female, or both. The predominantly feminine zoomorphic symbolism of ceremonial ceramics might suggest that women were either an important part of Saladoid-era religious leadership or pottery-making.

If we consider the role of the artisan in understanding and teaching religious iconography to apprentices, it is easy to imagine these artisans also playing a part in developing and modifying such iconography, even if the visual prototypes were devised by ritual leaders. This would be the case especially in the loosely organized pioneering communities such as those of the Saladoid era in the early Common Era Caribbean where, interestingly, the pottery exhibited considerable skill and a rigorous program of motifs.[xvii] The fineness of their pots and the richness of their visual repertoire demonstrate that Saladoid potters were highly trained tradition bearers. Evidently, they were tradition makers as well in the new, uniquely Antillean Saladoid of the early first millennium CE. Zoomorphs such as manatees (themselves a maternal symbol as evidenced in this Arawak word, meaning "breast")[xviii] as well as most of the aforementioned aquatic birds and owls appear only on Antillean Saladoid pottery but not on the Saladoid pottery of the mainland.[xix] Saladoid

migrants also greatly diversified the preexisting frog and turtle iconography of their mainland ancestors once they arrived in the islands where those creatures became more important emblems.

The question remains as to whether the technological and iconographic tradition borne by Saladoid ceramicists was a matrilineal, patrilineal, or mixed transmission. Archaeologist Arie Boomert has suggested that since "religion is typically the domain of men" in many Amerindian cultures, the makers of Saladoid adorned pottery were probably male.[xx] In a Saladoid society such as Boomert might postulate, men may have taken over the commonly female vocation of pottery making as the art form became more closely allied with a religious establishment dominated by men or they may have exclusively made ceremonial pottery while women continued to make utilitarian ware. For instance, in the Classic Maya society of the first millennium CE, male master potters made (and signed in hieroglyphs) the elite "codex style" painted ceramics exchanged among royals,[xxi] whereas utilitarian and other decorated vessel production presumably remained predominantly in the hands of the kingdom's women. Codex style pottery often bore narrative paintings derived from Mayan scripture and lore executed in a figural and hieroglyphic style adapted from books, themselves made by predominantly male scribes.

In contrast to the royal scribes of the Maya who developed, or perhaps co-opted, the elite pottery exchanged among nobles, today's commercial considerations and ethnic pride have caused many contemporary Amerindian men to take up the traditionally female-dominated arts of weaving and ceramics in their communities. The male basket makers in Dominica's Carib Territory and the grandsons of famed Hopi-Tewa potter, Nampeyo, in Arizona are examples of male artists and artisans crossing the traditional but permeable gender divisions in the Amerindian arts. Rosemary Joyce notes that throughout the ages, Amerindian societies have been remarkably flexible in assigning tasks, rituals, implements, and regalia typically associated with one gender to another.[xxii]

Unlike Boomert, anthropologist Henry Petitjean Roget believes that, like so many potters in the tropical lowland Americas, the Saladoid potters were probably women.[xxiii] Indeed, since ceramics are made of earth, which is traditionally ascribed feminine symbolism, and take the form of a vessel, also considered functionally "female" in many Amerindian societies, they carry culturally feminine connotations.[xxiv] Since food cooked by tropical Amerindian women, fruits and vegetables collected by them, and alcoholic beverages fermented by their saliva are presented in these earthen vessels, the contents of pots also would render those pots symbolically "female."[xxv] Even if men author the iconography of such pottery's adornments, women ceramicists might partner with, or operate under the supervision of, male shamans to produce ritual pottery.

Claude Lévi-Strauss reported that women potters in tropical lowland Brazil, Colombia, and the Guianas observe solemn rituals of silence and celibacy when gathering clay and making pots under (male) shamanic supervision. They bind their hair, make sure they are not menstruating, and do not associate with their children during these activities. Not

observing these austerities is believed to cause pots to be brittle or to sicken those who eat from them.[xxvi]

These restrictions seem to be proscriptions imposed by patriarchal systems seeking to suppress women's stereotypical social operations during a ritual production. Certainly, one can imagine an opposing production model in which a menstruating ceramicist might be considered a maker of strong and youth-restoring pots. Instead, as is common in more male-dominated religious structures, menstruation seems restricted as potentially weakening or sickening ritual objects and institutions. However, considering the potters' other proscriptions on parenting, sex, speech, and hair it can be suggested that the behavioral restrictions on women potters do not so much suppress their gender as socially neuter it, placing the potters beyond gender as traditionally understood.

In any case the evident input of male shamans in the pottery making of such temporarily sequestered women or 'para-women' (i.e., "beyond-gender" persons) described above would not disqualify those women from co-maintaining and co-developing motifs and iconography with the shamans. In fact, Arawak women in the northwest Amazon (an area that may be the oldest known Arawak homeland and indeed the Saladoid homeland as well)[xxvii] are the sole ceramicists in their communities and believe that the manufacture and adornment of pottery was first taught to them by their ancient culture hero/creator, Napiruli.[xxviii] We might also consider that being a tradition bearer of ceremonial pottery makes one a kind of ritual specialist and that among some peoples, perhaps including Saladoid-era Arawaks, some religious leaders might have been women potters.

Saladoid pottery was used in both the domestic and ritual spheres; possessed overwhelmingly feminine connotations in both its material construction and function; and featured feminine animal symbolism among its chief adornments. All this plus the fact that the majority of potters in ancestral northern South America, especially among Arawaks, have been women strongly suggests that Saladoid ceramicists were typically women. Their relation to possible male ceramicist counterparts and young protégés, as well as their role in the Saladoid-era ritual and authority structure can only be guessed at just now. From their motifs, we can appreciate the ceramicists' interest in harmonization of complements, transformation, and liminal creatures/beings that straddle water, air, and earth. These interests in hybrid existence are likely to have had some fascinating manifestations in Saladoid social institutions, myths, rituals, and interpersonal relations.

Figure 1. White-on-red painted pottery adornment employing figure-ground reversals, Indian Creek, Antigua, Saladoid. Museum of Antigua and Barbuda. Photograph by author.

Figure 2. Composite adorno comprising stacked faces and features, unknown site (probably Morel), Guadeloupe, Saladoid, 12 cm. height. Musée Edgar Clerc, Guadeloupe. Photograph by author.

Figure 3. Bowl fragment with composite face comprising two eyes shared by right side up and inverted noses and mouths, Saladero, Venezuela, Barrancoid-Saladoid (Los Barrancos phase) interaction, 24 cm. diameter. Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology Department, Connecticut. Photograph by author.

Figure 4. Bottle spout depicting shaman (hands propping up chin broken off) with avian alter ego emerging from forehead, Lagon Doux, Trinidad, Cedrosan Saladoid (Palo Seco phase), 9.5 cm. height. Tobago Museum, Tobago. Photograph by author.

Figure 5. Multiple views of composite turtle head adorno that becomes armadillo when seen from above (*left*), unknown site, Barbados, Saladoid, approx. 5 cm. diameter. Barbados Museum, Barbados. Photographs by author.

Figure 6. Vessel with bat face adorno recovered from burial at Atagual, Trinidad, Saladoid, approx. 25 cm. diameter. Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust: Peter Harris Collection, Trinidad. Photograph by author.

Figure 7. Frog vessel with flexed legs (and broken head), unknown site, Montserrat, Saladoid, 15.2 cm. length. Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian: Cultural Resources Center, Maryland. Photograph by author.

Figure 8. Frog adorno from shallow dish, unknown site, Tobago, Saladoid, approx. 8.5 cm. width. Tobago Museum, Tobago. Photograph by author.

Figure 9. Turtle bowl with modelled flippers on rim (and broken head), Saladero, Venezuela, Saladoid, approx. 28 cm. wider diameter. Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology Department, Connecticut. Photograph by author.

Figure 10. Turtle effigy pot stand, Guayaguayare, Trinidad, Saladoid, approx. 20 cm. diameter. Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust: Peter Harris Collection, Trinidad. Photograph by author.

Figure 11. Trigonal/conical shell zemi with incised flexed frog motif on bottom register (hip and knee joints marked with drilled dots), unknown site, Montserrat, Saladoid, 5 cm. diameter. Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian: Cultural Resources Center, Maryland. Photograph by author.

Figure 12. Turtle pictograph (*upper right*), Mountain River Cave, Jamaica, Taíno, approx. 8 cm. Photograph by author.

Figure 13. Petroglyph of fertility deity Atabey in flexed frog pose on a monolith at Caguana *batey* (ballcourt), Puerto Rico, Taíno, approx. 1 m. height. Drawing by author.

Figure 14. Aquatic bird shell amulet, Portland, Guadeloupe, Saladoid, approximately 6.25 cm length. Musée Edgar Clerc, Guadeloupe. Photograph by author.

ENDNOTES

[i] Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 1992), 74-77.

[ii] Samuel Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64-66.

[iii] Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 96-97.

[iv] Rouse, *The Tainos*, 77-79; Irving Rouse and José M. Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 112.

[v] Modeled adornment on Saladoid pottery has roots in both the Saladoid ceramic culture of the Middle Orinoco and the Barrancoid ceramics (associated with the type-sites of Barrancas and Los Barrancos) of a related group of agricultural people on the Lower Orinoco. In this article, the modeled pottery traditions that resulted from the confluence of Barrancoid and Saladoid ceramic cultures is referred to collectively as Saladoid (a common practice in designating early Caribbean ceramics), since Saladoid ceramic-making people seem to be the ones who primarily and predominantly settled the Lesser Antilles.

[vi] Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 149.

[vii] Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 215-216, 463.

[viii] Ken S. Wild, "Investigations of a 'Caney' at Cinnamon Bay, St. John, and Social Ideology in the Virgin Islands as Reflected in Pre-Columbian Ceramics," in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (St. George, Grenada: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1999), 306.

[ix] Luis A. Chanlatte Baik, Iván F. Mendez Bonilla, and Yvonne Narganes Storde. *La Cultura Saladoide en Puerto Rico* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2002), 36; Miguel Rodríguez, "Religious Beliefs of the Saladoid People," in *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997), 83-86.

[x] David M. Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol, and Narrative in the South American Rainforest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 28-30, 33-39; Stephen Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 30; Pita Kelekna, "Farming, Feuding, and Female Status: The Achuar Case," in *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to Present: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Anna Roosevelt (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1994), 228-229. The northern South American groups mentioned in these sources represent a range of language groups with varying lifeways, from the Jivaroan-speaking Achuar in the northwestern Amazon to the Carib-speaking Yekuana in the Guianas, all of whom cultivate manioc (cassava) with the division of labor noted here.

[xi] Aad H. Versteeg, "Archaeological Records from the Southern and eastern Caribbean Area. How Different and How Similar are They?" in *Proceedings of the XVII Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (New York: Molloy College, 1997), 96-97.

[xii] Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), 16 ; Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton, New Jersey: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 125-126.

[xiii] Arie Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia," in *Proceedings of the XIX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Aruba: Archaeological Museum, 2001), 122-123; Lawrence Waldron, "Like Turtles, Islands Float Away: Emergent Distinctions in the Zoomorphic Iconography of Saladoid Ceramics of the Lesser Antilles, 250 BCE to 650 CE" (Ph.D. Dissertation, City University of New York, 2010), chap. 4.

[xiv] Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 28.

[xv] Fred Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 159; Johannes Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment: Religious Ethnography of the Warao Indians* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 41-50.

[xvi] Fernando Santos-Granero, "The Arawakan Matrix," in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language, Family and Culture Area in Amazonia*, ed. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 38-39, 46.

[xvii] Louis Allaire, "The Lesser Antilles Before Columbus," in *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, 24. Allaire asserts that Saladoid pottery followed "rigid and complex rules of symmetry that must have required a difficult apprenticeship."

[xviii] Edwin Miner Solá, *Diccionario Taíno Ilustrado* (Puerto Rico: First Book Publishing, 2002), 92.

[xix] Waldron, "Like Turtles, Islands Float Away," chap. 4, 5 and 6.

[xx] Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean/UNESCO, 2003), 154. Since the Saladoid-era people lived so long ago, the use of ethnographic analogy with living Amazonid peoples, where men are often in charge of religious ceremonies, is one of the only ways that Boomert, and we, can infer in general terms the lifeways of these ancient people. Certainly ancient people may have differed significantly from today's Amerindians (even so called "lost tribes" or un-contacted people who seem untouched by surrounding peoples now but may have been affected greatly by the Conquest), so the results of ethnographic analogy are never conclusive.

[xxi] Mary Miller and Simon Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 126.

[xxii] Rosemary A. Joyce, *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008), chap. 2 and 3.

[xxiii] Henry Petitjean Roget, "Les pétroglyphes des Petite Antilles: Médiateurs entre la sécheresse et l'inondation," *International Newsletter on Rock Art 50*, (2008), 12.

[xxiv] Peter G. Roe, "Pottery: Forms that Endure" in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 25.

[xxv] For traditional Amazonian narratives in which men "spoil" fermented beverages (*chicha*) with their male saliva, see Betty Mindlin and Indigenous Storytellers' *Barbecued Husbands and Other Stories from the Amazon* (London: Verso, 2002), 35-36, 198.

[xxvi] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, trans. Bénédicte Chorier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23-28.

[xxvii] Michael J. Heckenberger, "Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora: Hierarchy, Regionality and the Amazonian Formative," in *Comparative Arawakan Histories*, 99; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 61.

[xxviii] Ulrike Prinz, "Arawak: Nordwest Amazon Peoples Between Two Worlds," in *Orinoco-Parima: Indian Societies in Venezuela-the Cisneros Collection*, eds. Gabriele Herzog-Shröder and Ulrike Prinz (Bonn, Germany: Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, 1999), 210.

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Paula Morgan

"LIKE BUSH FIRE IN MY ARMS"

Interrogating the World of Caribbean Romance

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Working Paper Series of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies attempts to encourage scholars and activists in the field of gender and development studies in publishing work in progress. While it naturally invites the work of established scholars, it is also geared for students who are beginning to write and formulate ideas and new areas of research in gender and development. In addition, the series also intends to maintain

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"LIKE BUSH FIRE IN MY ARMS"
INTERROGATING THE WORLD OF CARIBBEAN ROMANCE[1]

The early 1990s added a new event to the Caribbean literary scene. We have been ushered into "a world of Caribbean Romance" - mass produced fiction in a *Caribbean Caresses Series* commissioned by multi-national sellers of romances. This development, motivated in part by the promise of a lucrative market, has raised salient issues. These include the interplay between the formulaic narrative and the individual expressions offered by the Caribbean writers; the fictional portrayals of gender constructs and their impact on the negotiation of the heterosexual unions within this diverse social milieu.

The formulaic romance made its debut in 1950, when it was launched by Harlequin to swiftly become a publishing phenomenon. [1] According to Hubbard, of the 575 million paperbacks sold in the United States in a given year, 40% are brand name romances. And it certainly is women's fiction. Of the 100 plus category romances which are published monthly, the majority are authored by women for a female market. They rank as first choice among non-college educated readership and second choice among a college educated readership. *Caribbean Caresses* is a recent addition to the extended family which includes *Harlequin American Romance, Second Chance at Love, Silhouette Desire, Silhouette Intimate Moments, Candlelight Ecstasy Supreme.*

Why does romance continue to have such a pervasive hold on the human imagination? Why does each society, even the most realistic, the most cynical, insist on creating its own romantic fantasies? Why do peoples who live in the shadow of the cloud which mushroomed over Hiroshima, or, to bring the analogy closer home, who daily grapple with the legacy of slavery and the challenges posed by poverty, dispossession, social unrest, and homelessness continue to mass produce idealized fictions. Barron claims:

> Romance, though we scarcely recognize it, is so much with us, penetrating so many aspects of our lives, that the objective attention needed to define it confuses and embarrasses us.... Masters of science, manipulators of birth and makers of mass

> death, we dream of flight, from a polluted earth to clean new worlds beyond the stars, calling it romance and rivalling each other to make it reality. Confused by the complexity of its forms- ideal or identity, escapist fantasy or a facet of reality, reasonable aspiration or a delusory aspect of human temperament? -and bemused by our own ambivalence towards it we equate romance with fiction, fiction with falsehood, and flick through True Romance on the bookstall without noticing the contradiction in terms. (1)

It is not surprising that the term 'romance' eludes easy definition. According to the *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*:: "A term which can encompass the medieval narrative poem, Spenser's Faerie Queene, Gothic horrors and sentimental pap for the mass market is bound to be difficult to define" (Fowler 1973). Originally coined to designate that form of Vulgar Latin adopted by the Western regions of the Roman Empire as their vernacular, "Romanz came to distinguish the vernacular from the classical language, then the secular texts written in it from learned writings in Latin, then particular types of literature favoured by the lay aristocracy who were the patrons of the age." (Barron 1). The term was first applied to the emergent romantic genre in France, where it continued to be "widely and loosely used."

Today's sentimental romances for the mass market can claim noble forebears. They are "pumpkin vine" relatives of the medieval romance - non-didactic narratives of ideal love and chivalric adventure.[2] The Bronte sisters masterfully penned prose romances in which the didactic social world of the novel of manners is exploded by the elemental - sexuality, fear, and the darker side of the subconscious mind - larger than life isolated protagonists and near incredible situations which threaten to upset the social and moral order. Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*) and Edward Rochester (*Jane Eyre*) are forerunners of the teeth-grinding, masterful, passionate, dark heroes of today's sentimental romances. Rooted in a visionary perspective of ideal reality, the romance is also associated with folk tales and fairy stories which reject mimetic representation and weave through highly standardized, repetitious formulas, possibilities of transcendence in the face of fundamental adversities.

Their devices are repetition, magical transformations, shape shifting, iconography. Their terrain is the subconscious domain - dream, fantasy, aspirations, desires, wish fulfilment.

The romance is securely fixed in that nebulous space between "apparent reality and actual ideality". Barron identifies its essential qualities as a genre, traces of which have been preserved in pulp romances - as a quest for "love, honour, valour, fear, self-knowledge". Its conventional motifs are "the mysterious challenge or summons to a mission, the lonely journey through hostile territory, the first sight of the beloved, the single combat against overwhelming odds, or a monstrous opponent." The quest - whether pursued on horseback or through spaceship is "to some extent symbolic", the settings extraordinary and exotic, and the characters essentially representational rather than individual, "essentially stereotypes in service of its didactic purpose". (6)

The romance in its myriad forms has faced criticism based on moral issues -- its power to seduce the individual into "applying its values, appropriate enough to the artificial world treated by the writer, to a real world in which pain has genuine sharpness and the romantic pose is little more than a pallid gesture" (Fowler 209). Pulp romance for mass consumption has been criticized by feminists for the manner in which its gender-based power relations are negotiated in heterosexual unions to trap women into social and sexual subordination. They have been labelled as "corrosive and stereotyping narratives which invite the reader to identify with a passive heroine who finds true happiness in submitting to a masterful male."

The traditional romance novel encodes submission to sadism and suffering as the appropriate avenue to prepare a young girl for adulthood. The ultimate objective of the romance novel is marriage which is associated with the relinquishment of any sense of autonomy and acceptance of a severely circumscribed role limited exclusively to the domestic sphere. Yet romances do provide fascinating insights into culturally fashioned courtship rituals, and the interplay of social constructs of masculinity and femininity. Finally, the romance for popular market, which, in an ambivalent manner, valorizes female sexuality as an avenue of empowerment, incurs displeasure because of the issue of whether

its consumers, who tend to be predominantly teenagers emerging into womanhood, and middle-aged women on the brink of seniority, have a right to pre-packaged, vicarious pleasure in solitary intercourse with the text.

Clearly romance and its fictions answer a basic human need and will conceivably grow in significance the grimmer global socio-political scenarios become. Indeed we occasionally indulge in mass transnational fairy tale delusions - an outstanding example being the Charles and Diana drama. So deep is the psychological need to affirm the existence of romantic love and its potential to grant life happily ever after, that the spectacular failure of that union simply fuels the necessity for another such mass fantasy.[3]

Finally, this particular creative expression is formulated against a background of an increasing propensity among Caribbean as well as African-American and African writers to name marriage and heterosexual unions, as presently constituted, as a major plank of the oppressive structures erected against women. The creative writers contend that these structures must be demolished, if women are to find affirmation and a space in which to flourish. (Morgan 1994).

It is within this framework that the *Caribbean Caresses* series has emerged. What then is a Caribbean romance? Caribbean authorship is a defining characteristic. The series published in 1993 comprises *Sun Valley Romance* by Valerie Belgrave, *Heartache & Roses* by Dorothy Jolly, *Fantasy of Love* by Deidre D'Allan, *Love in Hiding* by Annette Charles, *Hand in Hand* by Lynn-Ann Ali, and *Merchant of Dreams* written by a male author under the pseudonym Lucille Colleton. I will also discuss Belgrave's *Ti Marie* (1988), an ambitious historical romance which is way beyond the scope of the Caresses series, and has been firmly located by critics within a growing body of 'serious' women's literature from the Caribbean.[4]

A definite innovation appears to be the creation of protagonists who reflect the multi-ethnic composition of this region's peoples. This can only be a service, given the extent to which the denigration of the ethnicities of the Caribbean peoples continues to assault the self-

image and self-perception of generations of young West Indians. One can expect these novels, at the very least, to undermine the myth that only Caucasian women can be beautiful. Instead of a monochromatic white hue relieved by the occasional hard-won and transient tan, think of the diverse palettes of coffee and cream shades, a multiplicity of shapes, an array of ethnic variations. What better mode within which to celebrate the erotic delights of generous breasts and bottoms, full figures and lips? The possibilities available should be endless - but are they?

Some of the offerings - Belgrave's and Jolly's for example - successfully incorporate the unique charms of their racially mixed beauties, complete with slanted eyes and high cheekbones which reveal traces of Oriental and Amerindian ancestry respectively. Ali's text portrays the delicate beauty of her Indian protagonist and creates out of the midnight-black past waist length hair, a multifaceted symbol. It represents her troubled past - her hair blazed when her Uncle thrust her into a fire because she witnessed his murder of her father; her sexual allure, particularly dear to her suitor who entertains that horrific memory of her burning hair and is grateful for her survival; her independence, when in adulthood she cuts her hair, and excises with it excises the burdens of her troubled childhood.

In some of the texts though, curious permutations remain. Whereas the dark-skinned hero dovetails neatly with the bronzed Caucasian hero of the traditional formulaic romance, the requirements for female beauty are far more stringent, leading to peculiar formulations. Colleton's full-breasted and round-bellied protagonist is severely embarrassed by her body and one of the tasks of her lover is to gently convince her to relinquish her low self-esteem. Charles' heroine may be brown of skin, yet her face, which is "a legacy from her Spanish ancestors, was that of a Renaissance painting of the Madonna" (Charles 1). In this case, the darkness is, in a literal sense, no more than skin deep; every other feature remains Caucasian in ancestry and in construction.

Messages inscribed by the body play a key role in romantic fictions which hinge on the successful resolution of the marriage plot despite apparently insurmountable obstacles, many of which are erected by that gulf between what the speakers say and the reality which

their bodies encode. There is the enduring assumption that a man's ability to sexually arouse a woman proves that she is in love with him, despite what she may say. Additionally, the true love is he who effortlessly arouses the heroine sexually by his mere presence or the brush of his hand against hers. These fictions allow no space between sex as a bodily response and love which requires a commitment of body, soul and spirit. There is no lust in these fictional worlds. Romance writers often exploit what Farrel terms "incivility and its associates embarrassment and confusion, as signs of love, in a resort to "involuntarity" (126).

In the traditional romance peopled by Caucasians, the blush is particularly useful to betray the body's involuntary response which invariably runs counter to verbal assertions. As if to compensate for having "mahogany-brown" skin, D'Allan's protagonist blushes with amazing regularity, at the slightest provocation. But as if to prove that it is possible, the blushing is constantly referred to in self-affirming, if not apologetic terms:

> Confused, she felt herself blushing.
> 'Are you blushing, then?' he said, laughing softly. 'Or is it just the light from the fire that's giving you that glow? And do you know that some people believe that dark-skinned people don't blush.' (D'Allan 12)

Indeed the blush is such a useful and persistent indicator of purity, it replaces virginity as a measure of innocence after the couple have indulged in pre-marital intercourse: "He turned to her and said, 'That smile on your face, Erica, is all the assurance I need.' And then as she blushed he laughed. 'Are you blushing, woman, after the event you're blushing?' (122). This protagonist is intensely self-reflexive about blushing and, for that matter, every intense emotional state required to keep the fantasy at slow boil. Apart from the recurrent "she blushed, she knew she did", self-reflexive narrative devices create distance between the protagonist and the heightened emotional experiences. Fleeing from the suitor who unexpectedly appears in an isolated place and whom she mistakes for a rapist, Erica questions herself: " Had she screamed? the man was bending over her. Now she knew she screamed " (57). D'Allan's work illustrates the danger of importing formulaic responses and

like newcomers to the club anxious for acceptance, using them to the point of absurdity. Nowhere is this more clearly indicated than in the use of stilted dialogue, and of culturally inappropriate language, expressions and situations.

Setting also appears to be a major criterion of Caribbeanness although this is not an exclusive marker. The Caribbean with its waving palm trees, beautiful beaches and exotic festivals has long been an idyllic fantasy retreat and setting for this brand of fiction. Indeed the projection of an idyllic Caribbean is a key marketing strategy for the kind of tourism for which the islands are famous. In *Heartache and Roses*, *Fantasy of Love* and *Love in Hiding* - the writers have, in keeping with generic constraints, heightened the beautiful and erased the ugly. Indeed these writers work diligently and often self-consciously to reshape the Caribbean to fit the realm of "romantic" fantasy.

Heartache and Roses, set in the island of Tobago, invokes the touristic notion of a Caribbean setting: "The hotel, chosen for her by a travel agent, was modest but the setting was perfect". (2) The text which is thematically weak and unfocussed, portrays a moody, older man, with children, whose accident and hospitalization help to eliminate the major barrier - the heroine's barrenness. The plot unfolds in the midst of a range of tropical blooms - poui, ixora, hibiscus and anthuriums, alemandas and chaconia. Yet the setting remains very superficial indeed - a Caribbean-styled overlay which can be peeled away and replaced with, say, an Australian, Hawaiian or any other "exotic" environment.

D'Allan goes a step further in her description of the Jamaican hills:

> This was limestone country which had weathered into an area of hills and depressions. As a child she'd thought it must be like the enchanted lands of story books - hills peeping up out of the mists. Now she just wanted to sit on top of the hill and revel in the beauty of her enchanted land as the sun broke through the mists to reveal the view in all its morning green glory. The mists swirled around her like friendly ghosts as she climbed the hillside to her favourite spot (56).[5]

Rather than celebrate the distinctiveness of the Caribbean landscape, the writers attempt to yoke the landscape into the “romantic story book” image. This seems diametrically opposed to the sentiments which prior to 1970 motivated Merle Hodge initially to wield her pen to record our fiction, our story book world in protest against the arrogant assumptions, "that I and my world were nothing and that to rescue ourselves from nothingness we had best seek admission to their story book world" (Hodge 202).

In terms of social settings, the writers do include some of the common patterns of interactions within the domestic enclosure. Jolly introduces the theme of the exploitative, promiscuous son and manipulative, domineering, potential mother-in-law as the obstacle to the union with the rival male. D'Allan makes mention of the stereotype of the "tallawah" indomitable Caribbean woman. The hero of *Fantasy of Love* has been negatively affected by his mother, "the typical strong, controlling, West Indian woman" but the writer is careful not to undercut this type. The heroine's propensity towards independence and self reliance is seen as inimical to the love relationship but not sufficiently so to cause her to behave differently..."She had to be herself" (135). The wider social realities remain severely locked out of the fictional framework. Although D'Allan's protagonist is involved in continuing education aimed at alleviating social and educational discrepancies within the adult population, the social realities remain peripheral to the novel. The exclusive concern of the fictional universe, as is also the case with Charles' and Jolly's offerings, is love and its many entanglements. Charles exploits quite effectively the tensions between the Indian arranged marriage as opposed to the love match and the preference within this social grouping for intra- racial marital unions.

The male-authored text by Colleton incorporates wider social realities. In *Merchant of Dreams* there are references to the theft of washing off the line, small cramped housing developments, unemployed men who wash cars unrequested in the hope of making small change to feed hungry families, unsavoury hotel rooms. Indeed the frame of this text is decidedly unglamorous. There is no slim, elegant, virginal heroine. Her former lover was prone to alcoholism and promiscuity and inclined to borrow money without returning it. The protagonist's round, dark-brown face is unadorned, her nails short and unpolished and

she is overweight such that the man of her dreams has to purchase a flattering swim suit to convince her that her body can be appealing in swim wear.

Predictably, given the constraints of the genre, this novel is the most unsuccessful of the five - because it is too real. It also suffers because of long descriptive passages on the fabrication of fantasies, which undercuts the glitz and glitter and unveils the essential dishonesty of the advertising world. But this may also be read as deconstructing the idealized world of romance. The tightening and relaxation of the sexual tension, jealousy, fear of rejection, incipient violence which Charles handles masterfully in *Love In Hiding* never surface in *Merchant of Dreams*. The realities of the world to which Colleton seeks to be faithful undercut the illusion of romance. It would be interesting in the long term to compare this text to other male-authored *Caribbean Caresses*, should they emerge.

Belgrave is more successful at conveying the Caribbean physical and social milieu, yet satisfying the formulaic requirements of the genre. In *Sun Valley Romance*, Belgrave deliberately interweaves issues of individual and social responsibility, questioning in the process, the class structures which underlie all category romances to ensure that the male protagonists are wealthy, powerful, well established in promising careers and therefore are socially desirable options for impecunious, beautiful and sensitive young women. Indeed, underlying the traditional romance is a stringent requirement of male power and ascendancy which the woman accepts. She imparts complementarity, tenderness and nurturance to the relationship and gains in the process upward mobility, financial security and the promise of unabated love and passion.

Sun Valley Romance is a far more interesting study of class relations than it is of gender relations. The love between the company magnate Gary and the beautiful, talented, impoverished young girl Giselle faces its greatest test when she discovers that he is head of a conglomerate which includes the firm whose quarrying has transformed their village into a barren, dust and disease-ridden ecological disaster. The climactic event is a life threatening flood which severely damages property and kills a young child. Belgrave's innovation is to constrain the reader to recognize the link between individual wealth and

prestige and the social injustice and exploitation on which it is founded. The hero dare not approach the protagonist for a resolution until he has displayed his resolve to use his power and prestige to alleviate the environmental problem and to cause his firm to act as a responsible corporate citizen.

Gary Henshaw is portrayed as masculine and sexually desirable yet sensitive, uncertain as to his role as a business magnate, preferring to pursue a more creative though less lucrative career. There is a tenuous humility to his advances. The typecast obstacles to their union - the rival (the rich, white, [bleached] blond, heiress) and the interfering mother are overcome almost as soon as they appear. Rather than display male arrogance, this hero courts his lover openly and generously displays his vulnerability from the onset and repeatedly confesses his fear of losing her.

On the other hand, Giselle is talented and capable. Although her career advancement is related to his wealth, she displays the potential to succeed without his patronage. To balance the scenario, he remains estranged from her after her unjustified denouncement of his complicity in the village's disaster, long enough for her to regret the way her hastiness has threatened their love and happiness. Their final reconciliation is engineered in part by her grandmother who is ever present throughout the text dispensing pithy folk wisdom and guiding the young people towards each other. In this scenario, there is no lasting division between the (female) affective domain and the (male) domain of power relations.

Belgrave's narrative displays the greatest potential for innovation within the generic form. Her accomplishment is to work the broader social and thematic concerns so intricately into the relationship, that it lets some air into what can become an airless, suffocating, domestic space. Moreover, she has done so effectively enough to escape the editor's pen ever ready to limit length and slash "irrelevance". Although Jensen in her examination of the evolution of the thematic concerns over four decades noted a growing propensity to introduce more socially realistic themes and situations, she concludes:

> The outstanding characteristics of this love are magic and transformation. Magic works to solve all problems: neither intellectual activity, the passage of time, frequent interactions, nor hard work are required for the development of a healthy relationship and the blending of personalities. Any problem of character, misunderstanding, or incompatible goals evaporates rapidly in the fire of love over a period of days, weeks, or months. And there are no problems beyond the relational. Economic, political, racial, sociological, or philosophical considerations do not intrude (485).

Not so in *Sun Valley Romance*. Belgrave's intrusion of current economic and social issues roots this text most firmly in the social milieu. Although the love relationship remains pivotal, its successful resolution is contingent on far broader concerns. Additionally, there is a subtext which hints at the Sleeping Beauty transformation identified by Gilbert and Gubar - and that is the process by which the talented nobody with a pretty face becomes transformed into the rich, successful, potentially heartless business magnate. The interactions between Gary Henshaws' mother and Giselle, the emerging business woman, play upon these possibilities.

Apart from their treatment of the Caribbean reality, what have these writers have done with the basic formula of romantic fiction? Nachbar and Lause comment: "Audiences experience an example of a specific formula more in terms of their implicit knowledge of the formula itself than with reference to a real world or a unique artifact or event". (417) Hubbard, tracing the development of formulaic visions of male/female relationships in over 40 years, examines gender constructs, particular fantasy themes and contemporary attitudes to romance in the four decades since the inception of category romances.

The predominant vision of the 1950s was of Cinderella as virgin earth mother and the prince as benign dictator. The novels of this time concurred with the rigid dichotomy - the instrumental male and expressive female formula. The union was based on complementarity with the hero bringing wealth, power and social status and the woman adding expressive potential and emotional richness, without which the hero for all his

superiority would remain deficient. The 1960s saw the Cinderella as feisty female with the prince as subduer. The average plot dealt with female rebellion and struggle followed by acquiescence. This scenario allows some play for the female's awareness of social inequity; however, her failure and acceptance of male dominance is built into the scenario.

The 1970s typically featured Cinderella as the virgin temptress and the prince as warrior. The plot operates to constrain the heroine to acknowledge female sexuality and militancy which emerge as a threat to her and to her lover's happiness and security. The typical novel of the period defines "a woman's thrust for equality and labels it dangerous and promises equality for those who accept complementary relationship styles". The counterstatement to her liberation includes verbal and physical violence. The formulaic vision of the 1980s constituted a marked departure with the introduction of "a new base of fantasy themes drawn from the feminist perspective: female control, male acceptance of equality between the sexes and negotiation of relationship terms" (Hubbard: 483). Exit the shy, insecure, clinging vine! Enter the self-assured, well-educated, sexually confident woman. Exit the arrogant, power-bent, chauvinist! Enter the articulate, sensitive lover who recognizes and leaves space for female potential and ambition.

Caribbean Caresses reflects each of these formulaic visions. Charles' *Love in Hiding*, which is quite compelling indeed, is very much in keeping with the visions of the fifties and sixties. This novel embodies a most dangerous propensity of this genre, given its formative influences on its teenage readership. Charles provides all that is required in terms of plot and formulaic construction and perhaps a bit more. *Love in Hiding* plays on several dimensions of Caribbean family life - the potential for romantic engagement between with the boy next door and the young pesky girl gone to woman; a burgeoning sexual interest of an older man for a girl young enough and close enough in terms of fictive kinship ties, for it to be conceived of as incestuous and perverse; an apparent attempt at rape which signals the change in the pattern of relations between the couple; and even male/male, father/son sexual tensions. The fictive kinship is sufficiently intense that the young man/fictive brother/seducer physically fights his father/ the surrogate father/avenger, over the right to pursue relations with the protagonist.

Charles handles the basic contradictions masterfully - simmering sexuality combined with a girlish innocence, a spiritedness combined with helplessness. The protagonist habitually falls asleep on drives as was her habit as a child, and needs to be lifted out of cars, changed and tucked into bed; moreover, she is often being fed on trays and given drinks which her suitor needs to hold to her lips. This incapacity and girlish innocence fuels her simmering sexuality which is constantly threatening to erupt at his touch.

The compelling nature of this offering becomes all the more dangerous as the young man Thierry becomes the primary caregiver to the child Rena, usurping the role of the grandmother who is relegated to the margins of the text. The fact that he regularly watches over her, soothes and cares for her when she is ill, makes it all the more credible that the twenty-one year old young man should become the custodian of the developing sexuality of the fifteen year old girl. When the youngster attracts vigorous sexual advances of a drunken admirer at a party, Thierry punishes her for inciting rape by putting her over his lap and soundly spanking her bottom "for behaving like a tramp". And thereafter, having crossed the thin dividing line between control of female sexuality and sexual violence, his attempts at comfort also change into passion.

Predictably the young girl considers his violent action to be totally justified punishment for her guilt and she is thereafter burdened with a dark secret - which has a passive dimension - that she is sexually appealing which is the cause of the initial assault; and an active dimension - that she is capable of passionate sexual arousal which she discovers in Thierry's embrace. This guilt, which is ripened during her incarceration in a convent as a result of the infraction, impacts her relationship to all other men. Even more alarming is the fact that Thierry becomes the internalized regulator of her sexual activity, the inner custodian of her virtue - she is haunted as she seeks intimacy with the rival, her fiancé Raj: "In their closest moments Thierry's face would rise before her." In adult courtship dance between Rena and Thierry, the correlation between violence and sexuality continues unabated:

....he bullied her mercilessly (28)

> She pulled away violently and swung her right hand at his face. He neatly sidestepped and caught her hand in mid-air. He twisted her arm up behind her bringing her very close to him (33)

> 'Rena?' he asked softly 'Are you afraid of me?'
> 'Yes' she whispered ashamed, eyes downcast.
> 'You damn well should be!' (65)

> Then he kissed her angrily. She fought him silently. His teeth savaged her lips and she was forced to open her mouth. She would have bruises tomorrow, she knew. Never a placid girl she nipped his tongue in sharp retaliation. (84)

There is another dangerous element which one might wish to attribute to the verbal extravagances common to the genre, if it did not repeatedly play itself out, often with fatal consequences, in the truth that is stranger than fiction. It is the assumption that male - female love is the ultimate reality that places one beyond all moral constraint. Says Thierry:

> 'You belong to me. Where you're concerned I revert to primitive man. You're my woman. I'm your man and heaven help anyone who comes between.' After that admission which every girl secretly longs to hear, she just had to kiss him again and again. (134)

Charles does make minimal use of that space permitted by the romance to interrogate the order which it will eventually affirm, when Rena states defiantly that slavery has ended and people no longer own people. This notwithstanding, the valorization in idealized romantic fiction of the male's right or even responsibility to impose chastisement and to control the sexuality of the errant female, in the name of love, is nothing short of subversive in a society which is reeling under the impact of domestic violence.

Moreover, it is retrogressive in terms of the developments defined by Hubbard, more in keeping with the formulaic vision of the 1950's - Cinderella as virgin earth mother/ prince as dictator model, with dashes of the 1960's vision- Cinderella as feisty female with prince as subduer. In this scenario, Cinderella eventually becomes the joyful recipient of the act of subjection. In *Love in Hiding,* the final submission eliminates all of the woman's decision-making capability. The ominous cast of the novel persists to the end:

> ' I'll have to lock you away ' he said deeply.
> 'Thierry, I love you. There's no need to go to extremes. I'll never want anyone else.'
> 'I know but when I'm sure no one can steal you away I'll be much happier.' (140)

At the other end of the spectrum are Belgrave's and Ali's offerings. *Sun Valley Romance* extends beyond the formulaic vision of the 1980's. Moreover, its successful incorporation of social issues into the resolution of the romantic plot may well point to contemporary directions and fantasy themes of the nineties. Ali's *Hand in Hand* displays the contradictions inherent in attaining gendered subjectivity within a restrictive social framework. Ali's text which includes murder and psychological intrigue plays with several of the stereotypical notions and cultural definitions of Indian ethnicity within Trinidadian society. The six-year old girl and the twelve-year old boy next door witness her uncle's violent act against his brother's household. Andel is exiled by his father to keep him out of Trinidad - an act which the child perceives as betrayal and rejection. He returns twelve years later when his father is dying to trigger in Khadija's mind the suppressed memories of the event, resolve the murder case and win her love.

Ali simultaneously exploits and deconstructs stereotypical notions of Indian ethnicity in a manner which emphasizes gender polarities. The intrigue and the characterization of uncle affirm a stereotype of Indian male as inclined towards exploitation, greed and violence, even to the extent of despoiling intimate family bonds. The father's fond but foolish indulgence of his younger brother is responsible for his death. Even the ideal young lover Andel refuses to forgive his dying father for his act of desertion.

But Ali decisively demolishes the stereotype of the passive Indian woman whose ultimate objective is to please her partner. Khadija is often robed in traditional Muslim wear but she is anything but the traditional bride. Indeed much of the turmoil and distress in the love relationship is borne by Andel when she experiences repeated memory losses. The successful resolution of the love plot between these doctors of medicine and linguistics respectively is subject to negotiations concerning her career and her preference to live in Trinidad. Eventually the couple settle in Tobago after Andel sacrifices his London career. She has been too busy earning degrees to learn how to cook; rather he turns out the rotis and leaps out of bed to make fried bakes for her breakfast. He professes his love early and is thereafter steadfast in his devotion; she withholds any such profession until the closing pages of the text and admits it only after he begs for that assurance.

Ali's *Fantasy of Love* is a cleverly disguised fantasy of female empowerment and control - a reversal of the stereotype of the Muslim woman and also of the traditional formulaic scenario. Compare for example the ending of *Love in Hiding* in which Rena voices the unconditional acquiescence:

> 'No matter what the rest of the world does you're mine and I am yours, beyond death.'
> She could find no argument with such sentiments.
> 'Yes Thierry, ' she agreed blissfully. (140)

Conversely in *Hand in Hand*, it is the male character who says "'Anything you want, sweet Khadija. I say yes to anything. Just make it soon'" (119). Note though that the fantasy of female control is neatly encapsulated within a celebration of several gracious dimensions of traditional Indian culture - forms of address, food, clothing. No element which can be perceived as detracting from the individual's freedom of choice in the love relationship is included. Ali's fantasy engages and challenges the qualities commonly associated with female, gendered, subjectivity within the Trinidadian Muslim community, while preserving the facade of traditionalism.

The *Caribbean Caresses* series fulfils the conservative demands of the marriage plot in diverse ways. The more traditional novels affirm cultural values of male dominance and female submission with minimal interrogation of this order. The more progressive affirm marriage but as the outcome of negotiation between highly educated and/or socially aware, independent parties. There is also wide variation in the portrayal of gender constructs within the social milieu. This may indicate that whereas issues concerning the quest for female identity and self-affirmation have made some impact on shaping gender constructs in the Caribbean, there are still those who would appropriate concepts of masculinity and femininity which were common four decades ago and more suited to the metropolitan framework from which these formulaic romances take their model, than to the complex Caribbean social milieu.

At the first international conference of Caribbean women writers held in 1988, Merle Hodge called for a development of a "modern tradition of popular literature to counterbalance the easily accessible paperback novel" that comes to us from the metropolis. She argues that although such an idea may be controversial it does not necessarily involve "a complete compromise of literary standards" citing as precedents the Onitsha Market Literature of Nigeria and the fact that much of what is perceived as mainstream classical literature today began as fiction geared for "a mass audience rather than a highly educated elite" *(Caribbean Women Writers* 207). Indeed the wealth of the Caribbean is undoubtedly located in its popular culture and the gap between high culture and low culture has not been as drastic in the Caribbean as it has been in other cultures.[66] In North America, the gap between high culture and low culture has been ably breached by novelists such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker whose works fall comfortably into both categories. Since Hodge's appeal, the *Caribbean Caresses* has hit the press. Although Ali and Belgrave have demonstrated the potential for pushing back formulaic constraints to introduce revisionary dimensions into the traditional form, it remains debatable whether these formulaic romances fulfil our needs, reflect the complexity of our social milieu, and ultimately empower the Caribbean peoples.

The final novel to be examined is a far more complex form of romance which has emerged - forging a new a space within which the creative imagination can celebrate the tangible, vital and positive aspects of Caribbean life. The year 1988 saw the publication of Valerie Belgrave's *Ti Marie*, a significant novel of female development. Set in the Trinidad of the late eighteenth century and written in the genre of historical romance, *Ti Marie* was created to fulfil an ideological objective. According to Belgrave, " [m]y artistic purpose... is a deliberate attempt to ennoble my country and its people, to promote racial tolerance...and to challenge the corrosion of our psyche and culture caused by the foreign mass media" (317). She chose the genre of the historical romance and the fairy tale because of its popular appeal in the West Indies. Possibly, Belgrave did not expect the novel to face the sustained glare of the literary critic or, even if it did, to be assessed as anything other than a fairy tale set among beautiful people, in a land of compelling beauty, inhabited by protagonists who are essentially enchanted because of "their liberalism, their enlightenment and even their futuristic interrelations in the given historical period" (326). The fact is, because of its intrinsic worth, the novel has faced critical appraisal and has more often than not, been found wanting.

The accomplishments are significant. The historical detail is, as I have been assured by eminent historian Bridget Brereton, extremely accurate. And the text successfully brings to life a people and a dimension of a Caribbean history which, were it not for explorations like this, would remain unidimensional figures on pages of tomes available almost exclusively to scholars. Moreover, the panoramic canvas surveys the complex melee of peoples, ideologies, languages, social and historical forces which erupted to make Trinidad the unique place that it. This text ranks then with the ground breaking explorations of the Caribbean peoples of various ethnicities - the unforgettable portraits of Naipaul's Mr. Biswas, Lamming's Boy G's and Rhys' traumatized West Indian white women - portrayals which brought social groups of the Caribbean alive and available to all, and in the process, unveiled mirror images which have taught us to better understand each other and ourselves.

And Belgrave sought to do this in a form that would have mass appeal. She certainly captures the elements of the fairy tale which appeal to the consumer of popular fiction - the vibrant, velvet-skinned mulatto beauty is won by the young son of an English Earl. The series of obstacles to be overcome come not only in the form of a rival, but moreso in the stringent race and class prejudices which militate against the union. Suspense mounts when Elena marries another to give a name to the child, conceived unknown to her lover, during their single sexual encounter. The estranged lover is alerted by a portrait in which Elena, despite her marriage, wears his gift, a pair of macaws which function as their symbol of constancy and enduring love. He returns to Trinidad and assists Elena and her ailing husband in their on-going struggle against the harsh and repressive British regime. The husband dies and Barry claims his prize.

Elena's developmental path is set off by that of the slave girl Tessa who functions as a kind of alter ego to Elena. Tessa's sole desire was to gain permission from her owners to marry and to set up a humble home with her lover in a rented room. The maelstrom of social and racial and gender antipathy envelops her and fate casts her instead as the sacrificial lamb - she is arrested on a trumped up charge as an act of revenge against her lover Fist. Her escape is flouted by her return to the danger zone to seek assistance for her masters attacked in a slave revolt. The pair of macaws which prefigure a happy ending for Barry and Elena are matched by the corbeaux which haunt this unfortunate couple and eventually overcome Tessa on her death-bed.

Ti Marie attempts to portray the resilient, resourceful Caribbean woman with a strong link to her matrilineage as the heroine of the romantic genre - a contradiction in terms, at best. The result is a text which simultaneously valorizes and deconstructs the fairy tale model. The undercutting of the fairy tale paradigm is nowhere more obvious than in the climactic scene in which Elena is tied to the stake above a pyre awaiting, so fairy tale logic would dictate, the dramatic entrance of the blond-haired, blue-eyed knight in shining armour. The pyre itself dramatizes a strange admixture of mythologies in that Belgrave imposes the text of the European witch-hunt onto the Afro-Caribbean reality. Moreover, the complexities of the socio-cultural environment work against the logical dénouement. The true rescuer here

is the mother, the inscrutable, spiritually empowered healer, indigenous Arawak woman, Yei who in a role reminiscent of Rhys' Aunt Clara's performance at the burning of Coulibri, draws on her understanding of the ethos of the attackers to win her daughter's freedom. The logic of the romance is subverted. The mother (goddess?) wins the freedom of her child, while Elena's lover armed with his gun (phallic symbol?) hides helplessly in the bushes. The mother appeals to a more effective and less destructive authority than the gun, the power of supernatural beliefs which rule the psyches of the disgruntled slaves.

The climactic incident also bears resemblances to other myths of conquest. The concept of the native paralyzed by the supposed deity of the conquistador was very popular among adventure writers who wrote on the cultural confrontation between the colonizer and colonized. In Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the European's claim that he can darken the sun (that is, predict an eclipse) proves the white man's deity in the minds of the African natives and ends their massacre of the white interloper. Haggard was drawing from accounts of the confrontation between the Aztecs and Spaniards under Cortez and Pizarro, according to which, superstitious natives became paralyzed before the white man, whom they believed to be the incarnation of the returning Aztec god Quetzalcoatl. Resonances of these myths are sounded in Belgrave's creation. Here rebellious blacks, using medieval witch-hunting methods, are held in check, not by the resourceful magic/science of Shakespeare's Prospero, nor by the fear that the conquistador may be the returned Quetzalcoatl, but by Sycorax's/Christophene's threat of an indigenous magic. Whereas in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Caliban invokes Sycorax's spells in a futile attempt to defeat Prospero's magic, Belgrave's Sycorax is working for the devitalized Prospero and confusion of intent, content and form abounds.

Contradictory forces also come into play in an earlier scene in which Elena views the Carnival. She would dearly love to interpret the masqueraded *neg jardin* and the French creole mulatresse as just being happy and frivolous. As soon as she speaks this naive sentiment, she witnesses white men brutally abusing a black slave. The aggression implicit in the Carnival is clearly manifested and at her interference is transformed into its twin manifestation, sexual aggression, as the men turn on her to attempt gang rape. The

knowledge of this violence, entrenched in social interaction and manifested in male female sexuality, freezes her and delays for years her emergence into female adulthood.

Elena's involvement in a premarital sex act is also fraught with contradictions. Here it is the earthy, sensual Caribbean woman and not the reticent Englishman who takes the initiative and speaks the encouraging word, whereas Barry begs to be stopped. However, the ensuing events illustrate the extent to which Belgrave's heroine is caught between conflicting social orders. She initiates the sex act precisely because she is not some delicate and supposedly virginal English lady. She speaks in the name of another stereotype: "Look at this primitive place! I too am as wild, as warm, as real! Wake up! See me as I am! I can stand it!" (199) Nevertheless when her passionate, illicit coupling results in pregnancy, Yei, Elena's Amerindian mother advises her not to marry simply to appear respectable, stating that among her people, Elena's "condition was no disgrace, that the white man's censures were inhuman, wrong and caused too much suffering" (249). As Yei's soulmate, Elena's intellectual strength, rootedness, defiance of custom and identification with the slave community should have enabled her to choose this option, but she is unable to embrace her mother's "world of simple practicality," and chooses in favour of the façade of social acceptability afforded by a hastily arranged cover-up marriage to an adoring stand-by suitor.

If the novel is perceived as a romantic fairy tale, which is how it has been promoted even by Belgrave herself, it stands to be dismissed as entertaining, but naive, simplistic, flawed because of the contradictory interplay of form and content. She states "I was going to write a fairy tale, a story that, though not attempting to change historical reality, would be an 'as it might have been' or as you like it' story" (*Caribbean Women Writers* 326). Belgrave, who lists among her formative experiences, participation in the Black Power student unrest of the Sir George Williams University in 1969-1970, attempts to chart an escape from the brutishness and cruelty of history, and perhaps even a particular historical moment which became personal experience, through a romanticization of a harsh and oppressive historical period.

Clearly themes, social framework and characterization of the novel are far too complex to be explored through such a simplistic genre. Can this failure to fulfil the generic contract be summarily dismissed as artistic limitation? Not quite. Belgrave is a highly conscious, sophisticated artiste who plays with the resonances of the genre too subtly to have repeatedly broken the author-reader contract unwittingly. Within the text she encodes her perception of the elusive nature of the romance. Elena is separated from the fairy tale world by a window pane:

> She leaned her forehead on the windowpane, feeling the cool of the glass against her skin, and watched distractedly as her breath caused a slow fog to appear, blurring her view of the outside. With her index finger she idly drew a pattern in the misty glass. Through that one clear spot she saw a lonely soldier, like a fairy-tale hero, come riding up. He looked so unreal. Lost in her own melancholy world, she simply stared lazily, enchanted by the picture-book quality of the image. Then quickly snapping out of her stupor, she wiped the glass clean and realised that Andre had come calling. [190].

And she constantly moves between a shimmering, "golden" world that has been touched by a magical wand and devastating and debilitating social realities: "She felt herself transported out of the normal pale of existence, to some mystical time and place where all problems disappeared and all prayers were answered" (198).

The picture book world may be enchanting, but ultimately it cannot be sustained. And while the fiction is about romance it is also about the intrusion of grim reality; about the base inhumanity which can underlie interactions of man within his collective groupings - the family, the community, the ethnos, the nation - and the hypocrisies with which such interactions are veiled; it is about the steady encroachment of disillusionment and impotence upon an intelligent and patriotic young girl; it is about the entrenchment of an unjust social and political order within an Edenic geographic and psychic space. Above all, it is about defining the limits of the romantic trope, within a romance which deconstructs itself.

Belgrave claims that the romance element was liberating, lending an "enhanced quality...engaging the emotions of the reader" the result being the capacity "to stir people's emotions - romantically, ideologically, idealistically and patriotically." She also argues that idealized reality serves to project positive images of the island of Trinidad and to counteract "too much promotion of negativity in the world and an insufficiency of examples of goodness, niceness, decency". (Letter from Belgrave to Morgan, June 30, 1995)

The fact remains that while one must acknowledge the effectiveness of the romance paradigm for capturing popular readership, for the careful, critical reader, the marriage between the political, ideological elements and the romantic, fairy tale elements remains uneasy. Perhaps the admonition of the fiery French Republican Louis Sauvage to Elena best encapsulates the ideal state which Belgrave seeks to create: "'Realistic yes, but in losing your innocence, don't reject all idealism. Without it one can become bitter and cynical'" (195). While I wonder at the potential of *Ti Marie* had it been conceived free of generic constraints, it nevertheless, in far greater measure than the *Caribbean Caresses*, answers the call for a popular novel which would convey a sense of empowerment to the Caribbean people.

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[1] This paper is an expanded version of "Caribbean Romances and the Problem of Form" presented at the seminar series of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies U.W.I. St. Augustine March 22, 1995. This version was presented at the 1996 International Conference for Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars at Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Women, April 24-27, Florida International University.

I am grateful for the input made by Valerie Belgrave into the final form of this paper, as discussant at the seminar at which I originally aired some of these views and through our subsequent exchanges. I am also grateful for the comments of Gordon Rohlehr, Barbara Lalla and Jennifer Rahim who took the time to read the paper and to give me feedback.

[2] Barron argues that it is futile to search for the origins of the genre in the texts to which the name was initially applied. Though the medieval romance was one of many roots of the modern novel, any attempt to define it by its affiliations with that remote and highly rarefied form would be to classify the acorn in terms of the oak....what distinguished romantic fiction across the ages is the characteristic mode in which it presents human experience." Barron:2

[3] The Christian symbol the bride of Christ - the called out ones of the human race as bought by sacrificial blood and longing for marital union with the divine lover is at the heart of the Christian doctrine of redemption. I wonder if this craving for true romance is not a shadowy, deficient and transient manifestation of an eternal spiritual hunger.

[4] Heinemann has produced an educational Caribbean writers series and conceivably the lack of financial success of this series may be a contributing factor in its quest for a share of an existing market for category romances.

[5] The pursuit of a romantic Caribbean has been with us practically since the inception of West Indian writing. In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul explored that space between the small lonely boy in the doorway of the isolated mud hut and the search for the material of fiction, the stuff of which romances are made. Although Biswas comes close to bridging the gap when he sings out the exotic place names as a bus conductor, the reality crowds him relentlessly.

[6] A prime example is the sobriquet of the famous calypsonian The Mighty Sparrow. After being honoured with an honorary doctorate for his contribution to the popular art form, he has periodically used the title Dr. Bird. Scholars such as Gordon Rohlehr and Carolyn Cooper through research into popular culture, have been bridging the gap between high and low culture particularly in relation to the oral tradition.

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Hooked…

Kavita Vidya Ganness

My mouth closed hesitantly around it. It was warm and smooth against my lips. The taste flooded my tongue like a sea of cappuccino. My jaw tensed with the flavour. My eyes watered with the moist heat. The musky, vanilla-like scent swirled in my lungs like breeze in bamboo leaves. The interior of my mouth felt alive, raw like how I expected a jelly fish would feel, if washed up on the seashore. Turning into dragon, feeling my eyes turn to rubies, feeling my muscles clenching with the moisture… I knew I was hooked…

My live-in girlfriend, Tenisha, had returned to me a changed woman. A world of experience was now in the palms of her hands. Abu Dhabi—the richest city of the world had been her destination. Dubai was where she had gone when she said goodbye. From the moment she had come back and knocked on my door using our secret knock, I knew something was different. Our home had changed. I knew it from the moment we had embraced and I smelled the sweet fog of Shisha in her long, silky black hair.

Tenisha had brought back two flavours of Halwa for me. It was a sweet delicacy with the consistency of firm clay cut into squares: one was made of green slivers of pistachio and the other was of chocolate ripples. I ate my Halwa and listened to beautiful Tenisha, with her lovely mole under her right eye, as she enthralled me with her stories. I had missed her so much. I listened to her for hours, lost in the grandeur of beauty she shared with me.

In her photos and in the revelations of her travels, I felt like I also had gone to that land of great sands, where Sheik Zaid's Mosque sprawled the desert like a magnificent lion in slumber. Through her eyes, I saw the sunset at Jumeirah that glowed like the ultimate solar spectacle. Every gorgeous oasis, great structures, beaches of pristine white sands, the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean. Tenisha took me halfway around the world with her stories.

A little shaken up and scarred after a fall off a camel in a faraway desert and an injury in a London airport, she walked with a limp and an exquisite scar at the back of her pale leg. Tenisha came back from weeks in the United Arab Emirates with stories that spoke of an extraordinary land of riches. Air-conditioned bus-stops and deserts of peach and orange sands, Khaldiya kingdoms of black-garmented women and gourmet food at extravagant restaurants—her stories fascinated and thrilled me. I went to sleep many nights with my mind full of exotic images. I saw the black and white falcon with a leather hood atop her wrist. I saw the camel with its lush eyelashes staring shyly at the sand as she mounted him. Huge, black cannons, forts and hotels of such spectacular dimensions blew me away in contemplation.

After weeks of missing her, fretting and calling her cell phone in the final days of longing, knowing full well it was at her Rio Claro home, while she was thousands of miles away, I was consumed with strange emotions. She came back to me a woman armed with a silver carrying case, lined with black velvet like an exotic coffin. She had brought back a Hookah and the possibility of Shisha parties. Hookah, what a lovely word, such a lovely sound. It sounded exciting and it looked exciting.

Hookah—12 captivating inches of pure delight, a vase of amber glass, a yellow cord of silk, coals and Shisha. A Hookah was a Shisha pipe, Shisha being a delicious mix of tobacco and exotic additives to be puffed away like oral incense. It lay in white containers like brown crushed leaves with a mouthwatering fragrance. Cappuccino, orange, mint, grape with mint and apple were the assorted flavours to be smoked. A flame was all that was needed for the enticing experience. Shisha, such a sweet word like the name Tenisha.

I remember our first Shisha party. Puffing away beneath the stars, lips closing over the silver bullet-mouth of the Hookah, fragrant vapours seducing lungs, me strumming my guitar and singing my soulful songs of experience, without a care in the world, high up on my balcony, overlooking the Aranguez savannah. Sebastian's lips had turned dark red when he declared, after his first taste, it's like kissing a girl wearing lip gloss. How profound a comparison, we had all thought.

Daidre and Tenisha, my eager audience, clapping away at my silly songs like excited children. Priya staring at me with sleepy eyes, caught up in the sweet steam of the Shisha thrills, begging Stephen to breathe the smoke into her hair and fragrance it; and smoke escaping Stephen's nostrils and lips in wispy clouds, the colour of camel's milk. Tenisha reigned supreme like a Shisha queen. Her eyes aglow like the golden pillars in the Emirates Palace.

Life was sweet wasn't it? A Hookah made life better and we owed it all to Tenisha. Smoke in the air mixing with my singing, whilst those who listened laughed, their throats gurgling with joy at my outrageous lyrics. On that night so fresh in my mind like dew on petals, I felt alive. The Hookah bestowed a Middle Eastern experience on us all, and we savoured it like the sheiks thousands of miles away in deserts of rippling, shifting ivory sands.

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Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation

Macmillan, UK, 2009
ISBN: 978-0-230-10449-5

Book Review

Professor Jane Bryce

Behind Patricia Mohammed's *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation* is more than a decade of research conducted in numerous places, but chiefly, the Caribbean. The scope of this research can be gleaned from the acknowledgements, which cite two UWI Principals, historian Professor Bridget Brereton, Gender Studies colleagues on all 3 campuses, as well as supportive individuals in Jamaica, Trinidad, Haiti, Cayman, St Lucia, the Bahamas, Suriname and Barbados. Archival research was done in Spain, England and Northern Ireland, Holland and North America, but the provenance of the work remains overwhelmingly the Caribbean. This is important in the face of a history of representation largely produced by outsiders—from explorers to colonial administrators to travellers and visiting artists, who viewed the region through the lens of European art forms and conventions.

This representational history, Mohammed suggests, goes back 500 years to the early maps and to engravings of Columbus's landing and first contact with the New World. The sheer breadth of the enterprise of her book distinguishes it from, for example, Krista Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (2006), with its much more specifically defined focus. Thompson's interest

is primarily in early twentieth century tourist photographs, which she uses to "illustrate the historical roots and long term effects of touristic representations on the islands and inhabitants, implications of tourism on ways of seeing the Anglophone Caribbean and lived experience of space for local residents" (3-4). The advantage of a narrower lens and a more restricted field of reference becomes apparent when compared with the breath-taking eclecticism of Mohammed's approach—which is both its strength and its weakness. Disregard for conventional boundaries results in startling and revealing juxtapositions, and frees the work from the stifling effect of 'official' categories. It is perhaps inevitable that this heady freedom at times shades into superficiality in the treatment of complex theoretical ideas and a tendency to generalisation. The author reflexively indicates her awareness of this when she says in her conclusion: 'It is expected in writing such a book within the academy that some unifying metaphor or clever theoretical argument will provide…a handle on this body of work'. (370) Ultimately, then, the book works best if viewed as a provocative and refreshing introductory survey, rather than a closely argued academic study. The larger significance of the work lies in its focus and its methodology. The idea of a *visual language* which can be read and decoded is not in itself new. It goes back to Saussure and the distinction he made between sign and signifier, or between an object and the ability to categorise it in language. What this means is that there is no such thing as unmediated vision: Everything we see, we see through a mesh of associations, and the act of looking is, therefore, always an act of interpretation.

But the book does more than simply adopt a now-familiar cultural studies methodology which treats all cultural forms as texts to be decoded. In taking the *visual* as the primary medium for reading Caribbean culture, it contests not only the primacy of writing as a way of organising knowledge, but also the conventional wisdom that the primary mode of Caribbean expression is orality. 'I privileged visual culture,' says the author, 'because I believe that human sense perception has survived over long periods because of visual production', from cave paintings onwards. 'Imaging,' she says, is therefore 'the act of drawing together many images which summon up the space, past and present, and configuring a future… If there is a purpose to this book it is to suggest that the visual is part of the sense experience of the Region which remains insufficiently translated or documented' (370).

This work of translation and documentation demands what Mohammed calls 'disciplinary promiscuity'. Interestingly, to begin with, the idea 'emerged from a search for gendered categories in history' (8)—namely, from Gender Studies. Yet, using a method she calls 'archaeological delving', she also draws on history, cartography, heraldry, art history and visual cultures including painting, photography and film. In the process, the author hopes to find 'new categories of analysis…other than the tired old ones of class, race and gender' (16). In fact, we soon discover, her project is much more ambitious. It is to reconfigure everything we thought we knew about our environment and the last 500 years of history, in the light of new ways of looking at the visual traces of the past and the way they inform and influence the present.

The book is not, according to Mohammed, 'a treatise on art, nor a book of art criticism, nor a history of art in the Caribbean…it's more a history of ideas or of knowledge as it has been created about the Region' (9). Her aim is nothing less than the 'writing of history through cultural production' (45), with the purpose of reimagining the Caribbean space. In an epilogue, she describes her process as akin to painting with tempera, 'an ancient and still used medium in painting' which involves the overlaying of paint to create different effects of translucence or opacity. 'The artists and architects of colonisation attempted to achieve opacity by overlays of the same tone in order to obliterate cultures…they were afraid of extinction and were successful in subjugation for harnessing wealth and power. But they were not successful in eradicating these (cultures) as the colours have seeped through to allow other readings' (373).

This is a good description of the multi-layered narrative and the juxtaposition of images we encounter in the book: an 18th century painting next to a snapshot of girls in a hammock in Port-of-Spain, or a sequence of portraits of men—from a half-naked Carib through to the leaders of the Haitian Revolution to the late Bob Marley. This eclecticism is the strength of the book and its originality. The disregard for conventional boundaries results in startling and revealing new significations: to quote the author, 'a kaleidoscope of juxtapositions', or to quote Antonio Benitez Rojo, a 'soup of signs', his term for describing the Caribbean.

Another example is the use of personal testimony alongside theoretical formulations. The starting point for the book, or the opening frame as you might say, is the author as a young girl growing up in a village in the south of Trinidad, where her first experience of art was the paintings by her father and uncle on the walls of her family home. At primary school, she encountered other images in the Nelson Readers, and reproductions of famous paintings like Constable's 'Haywain'. I mention this because I grew up with a reproduction of the same painting, not in the Caribbean, but several thousand miles away in Tanzania. This shared visual reference point is an example of the reach of colonial culture and the way it reproduced itself in different parts of the world; it suggests linkages between Mohammed's project and, for example, Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor's work, *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace* (2000).

Despite the kaleidoscopic approach, the book is carefully and methodically structured; the 10 chapters, each with a specific focus, map the visual constructions of the Region. ***Imaging the Caribbean*** begins by deconstructing a cultural hierarchy based on Western systems of knowledge which privilege writing over other sign systems. The third chapter looks at early maps—icons of territorial discovery and possession—as the first 'scripting of the Caribbean'; the fourth considers traces of the pre-Columbian past as symbols of Caribbean antiquity and the relation of these to alternative spiritual practices and folk beliefs. The next three chapters look at crucial aspects of Caribbean cultural identity.

Chapter 5 deals with 'The European Gaze', which discusses the collection and categorisation of plants and people as part of the colonial project of scientific exploration, and concepts of beauty related to race. Chapter 6 considers 'The African Presence',

which addresses the inscription of a hierarchy of white over black and the denigration of aspects of black culture and spiritual practice, taking Haiti as the main example: 'Because people were used to looking at art on certain places, on the walls of houses, or churches, or sculptured three-dimensional pieces, even on the body as in tattoos or scarification, they did not conceive of art as that on dirt floors and walls of huts, made of substances like flour and ashes on the floor' (246). (An example is the vèves, designs that embody the loas, which Mohammed calls 'the inscriptions of the religion of voodoo' [236].) Chapter 7 then reflects on 'The Asian Signature', where the author considers problems of "outsiderness", and the multiple influences of Hindu, Islamic and Chinese art in the region. The final two chapters focus on 'The Caribbean Picturesque', from travel narratives to contemporary tourism; as well as symbols of Empire and Nationhood. Here the author convincingly shows how the flags, crests and coats of arms of the new nations emerged as a way of inventing new national icons, around which a reinvented identity could coalesce.

Pat Mohammed acknowledges many other thinkers—C.L.R. James, Derek Walcott, Stuart Hall, Benitez Rojo, Wilson Harris—though I would like to end with a question she takes from Sylvia Wynter, from which the entire book in a sense opens out: 'Can there emerge a new and ecumenically human view that places the events of 1492 within a new frame of meaning, not only of natural history but also of a newly conceived cultural history, specific to and unique to our species?' (36) Mohammed sees the book as following Wynter's exploration of 'a newly conceived cultural history' by way of her own concept of 'visual translation'. This paradigm offers, for Mohammed, a path to Wynter's 'conceptual move into a "realm beyond reason" … which brings together a system of symbolic representation with subjective understandings' (37). *Imaging the Caribbean* (see picture below) is a provocative and joyful exploration of this synthetic and syncretic way of seeing.

An enormous maze of the Caribbean, a chain of small islands and adjacent territories defined by their geography and territorial resources, is one of hedonism – beaches, calypso, reggae, tradition and muscular black men. This ground-breaking study of the Region's iconography explores how a Caribbean sensibility has been shaped. It circles the Caribbean while focusing on Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados, tracing the indelible parameters drawn on each society by the colonial encounter, crossing the boundaries of disciplines and the methodologies and material of history, literature, art, gender and cultural studies. Including hundreds of images, from Aboriginal drawings and artefacts, European paintings, photographs and sculptures, to Haitis *drapeaux* and Haitian *vévé*, *Imaging the Caribbean* is a study of visual representations of the Caribbean as perceived by outsider and insider alike over the last five hundred years.

As contemporary globalization perversely invokes a commercialization of culture and packaging of national identity, the author asks: what is real and what is mythical, and how do we value the familiar? This journey through the visual archives of the Region, maps out the way ideas have evolved over different historical periods. The book reveals a perspective of the Caribbean as not only conquered territory on which empires were built, but where cultures were reborn in the New World, where adaptability and willingness to accept the Other has created an interlocking mosaic in which all peoples are reflected. Indeed, it asks how we might continue to shape the imagination of the Caribbean and of culture itself.

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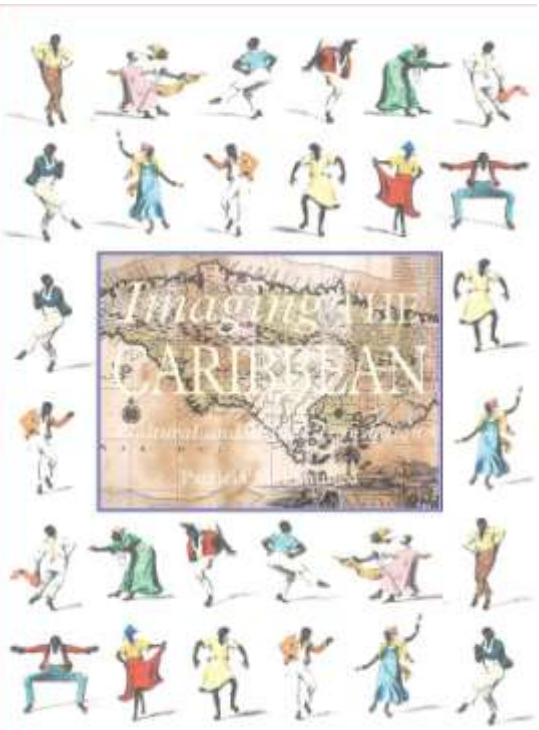
MACMILLAN

Imaging The Caribbean

Patricia Mohammed



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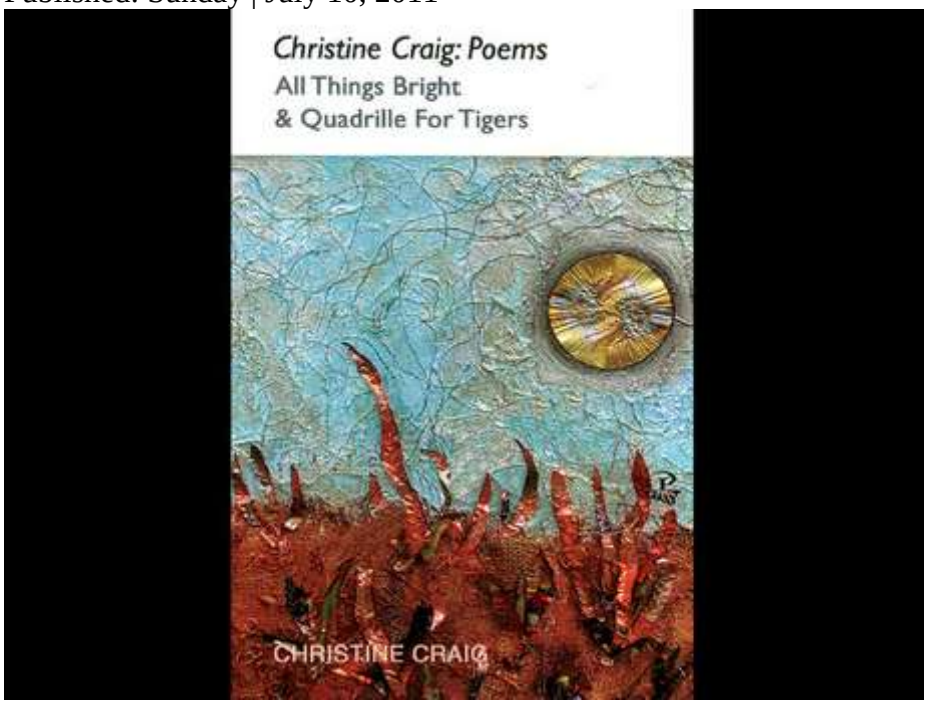
Christine Craig's *All Things Bright*:

TWO REVIEWS[1]

[1] The following two articles are reprints.

BOOK REVIEW: 'ALL THINGS BRIGHT', WONDERFUL IN CONTRASTS

Published: Sunday | July 10, 2011



Mel Cooke, Gleaner Writer

Christine Craig's **Poems** is a double serving from Peepal Tree Press, the more recent collection, 'All Things Bright', getting first billing, and 'Quadrille for Tigers' (first published in 1984) reprinted to make for a solid 161-page tome.

Reading through 'All Things Bright'—the focus of this review as, hopefully, the 17-year-old 'Quadrille for Tigers' has been given its due attention at that stage of Craig's development—the contrasts leap out immediately. For, while her talent is indisputable, Craig's consistent juxtaposition of vantage points and penchant of making striking transitions between the Jamaican English and its undisturbed British co-parent, gives 'All Things Bright' a distinctive tone.

In 'Kingston', the third poem from the collection's first section, 'Sweet Fruit', the contrasts in perspective and expression congeal in that most persistently insidious aspect of Jamaican life—classism.

'Kingston' starts:

"In a chic apartment high over the waterfront

an irritable intellectual looks over

the streets of Kingston, labels them definitively

Dante's Inferno. His book-lined walls stand

An army of soldiers to protect his troubled

sleep, yet he plans another flight."

In the next stanza, though, the vantage point is totally different as we are moved from intellectual to one with more pressing concerns, literally:

"Estelle irons khaki and navy

blue for school tomorrow.

Need a school shoes for Rosie.

A which part Sam gone? Dem

so sweet when dem a hunt you

down and swift as chicken hawk

fe gone when dem get you."

And in the closing stanza, where the poet asserts her voice after moving through the poem's three characters, predominantly Estelle's, Craig stands in the void between Kingston's social classes and observes their offspring:

"Weep, weep for us women on the streets

of Kingston. Weep for our children

hungry, angry in this town that blooms

large houses, smooth lawns where other

children play computer games and plan

the next trip to Miami"

It all makes for very strong writing. The thread of contrasts apart, Craig puts down some superb lines. Also in the 'Sweet Fruit' segment, in which she locates her poems in various areas of Jamaica (in addition to 'Kingston' there are 'St Thomas', 'St Ann

Saturday'—an easy walk in a funeral procession, filled with pithy conversation—and 'Discovery Bay'). In 'Portland Morning' she makes a statement about the transitory nature of life in a country which, for all practical purposes, marks its beginnings with the conquerors' arrival and, it seems, people are always coming and going. And, at the same time, there is that contrast in voice as Craig writes:

"Islands are every shape, every

colour of goodbye.

Walk good. See you next year

if life spare."

And, speaking of "if life spare", we cannot leave 'Sweet Fruit' without imbibing some of the grim humour in 'St Ann Saturday' which begins with the double play on clothing and flesh as the funeral procession slow-steps down the street:

"Saturday afternoon, so many shades

of black swinging down the road.

Funeral time.

Nice afternoon she get, eh!"

The poem closes with the image of the mourners, one with an especially caustic tongue ("Still an' all, dem neva come/when she was hearty,/so no mek sense dem come/when she direckly dead."), ambling towards the inevitability of death themselves:

"Nuh Granny Bailey dat from Retreat?

Well, I neva. Tink sey she dead

long time. Time passing chile,

we all moving down de line weself.

True word."

That sense of humour sparkles in 'Captive Audience', in the collection's second segment, 'Lithographs'. Craig rants about those who genteelly rave about themselves:

"Lord I hate volubility

especially in the 'learned',

streams of talk, great users

of parenthesis, repetitions

like a faded Mexican blanket

worn of its colour, symbols

no longer radiant with meaning"

In the final stanza, Craig leaps onto the soapbox and one cannot help but guffaw at:

"Listeners of the world unite!

Cast off the shackles of lingual oppression!

Strike now and establish your right

not to be bored to death."

In this segment, Craig expands her physical distances while retaining the sense of contrast (in 'Diary of a Disturbance' she closes with "The Caribbean writer muses over/wet landscapes. The English writer/plays with foreign dreams"), writing about incredible suffering in 'Ivory Beads':

"Ivory beads from Ethiopia

Children's teeth rot in the drought

Mother's tears glisten among the flies

the continent of all resources sends

precious trinkets to the West."

Craig also moves from observation to the personal in 'Ofrenda' ("I am making an ofrenda for you, my sister/for the thief who stole your smile") and 'Poems for Two Daughters'. Part II, for Rebecca, is especially beautiful:

"My daughter lends me her boots

it will be cold she says.

I slip my feet in and feel

the square, sure foot,

leather worn soft

at the instep.

Once her foot fit in my palm.

Oh, my lovely grown girl,

How warmed I am by you."

And the section closes with the connection between women, this time strangers, as Craig takes us to a smiling flash of an encounter in 'Islands' where "In that flash/of love and homage we know/it is sweet to be female."

There are three more segments in the excellent 'All Things Bright'—'The Stranger', 'Origami' and 'Florida Blues'. The first is a single poem, which speaks in part to manhood ("what blighted our men that/they cannot love, that sex is/a hoe for planting seeds left/untended, to straggle up like/weeds till they too seek their/manhood in loveless couplings?"), but also to migration, that hoped-for escape:

"We are smiling, successful, degreed,

nestled softly in our homes in famous cities,"

Craig is at her most consistently personal in 'Origami' and closes with another relatively short segment, 'Florida Blues', which treats with the angst of the resettled in an increasingly concrete place. In 'Mallory Square—Key West', Craig writes:

"The sun fell into the sea

at the end of America. No flags,

soldiers, no bugle-call of Taps,

but a Scotts man playing a bagpipe"

And, at the very end of 'All Things Bright', we find the title at the close of the personal statement 'Coda':

"This is all I have

all that beats in my veins

to seek, to walk, to lift up hands

to touch each dazzling note

all things bright and beautiful."

It is a strong, appropriate end to a collection where Christine Craig's voice of contrasts and striking imagery, with a couple dollops of Marley and Calypso Rose, sings.

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Sunday Gleaner – July 10, 2011

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All Things Bright
By Christine Craig

By: Heather Russell Ph.D.
Florida International University

Christine Craig, daughter of the Jamaican dust, reminds us in her collection, *All Things Bright*, why she remains one of our most talented, powerful, and relevant poets. The poems in this collection travel. Some demanding, some coercing, some entreating, some coyly teasing us—Craig's poems take us on journeys deep, deep into the realms of national belonging, nation language, memory, history, myth, tradition, family, culture, exile, life, pain, injustice, and too, in the best possible sense of the word, into righteousness.

Moving dynamically and evocatively across geographies of nation, place and time, nostalgic African "ancestral roamings" commingle with and ground in evocative ways, contemporary Kingston's dread realities of unemployment, struggle, exploitation, resistance. "We weep" for "women on the streets of Kingston" and with and for her children, even as we sway to the rhythms of gospel, reggae, blues, and stop short at the sharp, abrupt, familiarity of dominos, banging—urgent reminders of our rituals of survival, and of our cultural wealth.

In her collection, Craig pays homage to the literary forbearers that help to shape our understandings of ourselves, even as she presents this her latest installment reminding us of how much we have missed her own poetic wisdom. Resisting simplified, nostalgic portraitures of home, the poems are infused with the laughter, philosophy, resilience and complexity of everyday folk—a cultural grounding as it were for those of us who often feel we have traveled too far away.

And yet, there is nostalgia here too—as in the poignant recurrence of the phrase: "we should not have been allowed to leave." Here however, the painful reality of exilic existence is given full expression and nuanced articulation as nostalgia quickly gives over to the wonderment of standing at the U.S.'s Southernmost point—the Florida Keys—the poet contemplating if this is "the end of America," or "her beginning." Migration is a beginning too, a beginning albeit marked by the painful legacies of slavery, indenture, colonialism, but a beginning nonetheless of the possibility and promise that is diaspora community.

In the end, *All Things Bright* achieves the promise its title portends, to give poetic voice to: the great, the small, the wise, the wonderful, to creation … and it is… beautiful!!

The University of
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CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 5 – 2011

A Gun At Mi Head

By
Dahlia James-Williams

Every night I go to my bed
I sleep with a gun at my head
For the next time Joe touch me
I surely gonna shot him dead.

Every time Joe drink him rum
A me him a come knock down
Lick ina mi face
An kick ina mi back
Mi can't tek it no more
Mi tired a all a dat

So the next time Joe touch me
I goin bring dat man to him knees
I goin mek him beg fi him life
A goin show him a who a him wife

So every night I go to my bed
I sleep wid a gun a my head
For the next time Joe touch me
A di last night dat him a see.

Glossary

dat	that
di	the
fi	for
goin	Going to
gonna	Going to
ina	into
lick	slaps
mek	make
mi	my
wid	with

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Issue 5 – 2011

Joe Grind

By
Dahlia James-Williams

My cousin knows Joe Grind
He visits her all the time
For when her husband is out
Joe Grind is always about

My cousin utilizes Joe Grind
In those most difficult times
Like when she wants it hardcore
She knows Joe will provide the cure

My cousin says Joe is a handy fellow
Him know how to make her squirm and bellow
Uttering words in foreign tongues
Making her confess all of her wrongs

Joe Grind is very energetic, creative and optimistic
Always willing to try new things
Something original him always brings

Constantly aiming to please his clients
Joe keeps up to date with new inventions
Never using the same style twice
Adding spice to boring lives

Him is also quite athletic
Jumping fences
Squeezing through tight spaces
Never getting caught by unsuspecting husbands
My cousin says Joe is the right man.

Abstract

Joe Grind is the Jamaican term for a man, other than the spouse, who provides a woman with sexual favours. Such a relationship is engaged in secretly and usually does not involve any emotional attachment. Joe Grind is usually used by women who lack sexual fulfilment in their relationships. This issue is not primarily Jamaican. In Trinidad and Tobago he is known as the *horna man.* The poem *Joe Grind*, explores such issues.

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