

Working Paper No. 2

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CHANGE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF FEMINIST
DISCOURSE IN URBAN TRINIDAD
IN THE 1970S**

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by

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This paper* is an extract from my Ph.D thesis, **Gender, Race and Class in Urban Trinidad: Representations in the Construction of Gender and Gender Relations 1950-1983.**

The thesis seeks to explore the permutations of masculinities and femininities, as perceived through representations of women and men in newspapers and other sources, in relation to the historical development of urban Trinidad, within the context of evolving race and class relations¹. It also looks at how far representations in the press reflected the pre-existing gender order and how far they contributed to construction and change in that system. This paper will focus on the 1970s, a period of tremendous social and cultural change, both internationally and in Trinidad in particular.

I will briefly outline the role of gender in the Black Power Movement, the participation of women and the effect of the fight against racism together with an increased level of race consciousness on gender awareness. Then I will look at the emergence of a new and more radical phase of the women's movement in Trinidad in the mid to late 1970s and the beginnings of a feminist discourse at this time. I will also examine how the oil boom led to the conflicting ideologies of Black Power vis a vis the increased consumerism that the boom spawned and how this affected the gender system. The final section will examine how women and men were portrayed in newspaper advertisements, women's pages, letters, articles etc. and

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Besides the earlier two main newspapers, **The Guardian** and **Express**, my sources include short lived periodicals, ephemera, official commissions of enquiry, government publications, surveys from the Central Statistical Office and interviews. I have paid particular attention to pictorial representations of gender in newspaper advertisements.

how this corresponds to the major events and trends that took place. Throughout the paper I will look at what representations of women in the press can elicit about changes in the gender system and the nature of gender relations.

Until fairly recently, historians have tended to concentrate on putting women back into history. While this was and is an essential task, this paper argues that in order to understand the deep rooted oppression of women it is necessary to look beyond putting women back into the historical analysis and to focus on the level of gender relations. In my thesis, I utilize the concept that there was (and still is) in Trinidad, as in other modernizing or modernized societies, a hegemonic masculinity and a hegemonic femininity which dominate, but do not obscure other masculinities and femininities that, although subordinated, continue to be expressed.² The concept of a range of masculinities and femininities is of particular importance in a multi-ethnic society such as Trinidad, as it allows for the inclusion of diverse groups that cut across race and class. Although hegemonic masculinity is constructed to maintain control over all races and classes by displaying essential ingredients to appeal to most groups, specific groups for example, Indian or working-class Afro-Caribbean men, may create forms of subordinated masculinities. From within these subordinated groups, men are able to aspire to power over their peers, when access to the dominant system is remote.

This hegemonic gender order is built upon a general agreement within a society of what is masculine and what is feminine, and usually reflects the ideology of the ruling class. For

² The concept used here is based on the work of R.W. Connell in **Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics**, (California:Standard University Press, 1987).

example, in Trinidad in the 1970s, the man was supposed to be the breadwinner, clean shaven and dressed in a suit and tie - Eric Williams epitomizes this model; his characteristics were strength and control - control not only of others, but also of his emotions. A hegemonic femininity in Trinidad deployed all the constructs of woman as perceived from a Western model.³ In this model, however, there are two ideals that sometimes complemented and sometimes conflicted. These two images were continuously present in advertisements. On the one hand the ideal woman was an object of glamour, fragile and in need of male pampering and protection, such as in the advertisements for Lux and Palmolive soaps. On the other she was a homemaker dependent on the man's income. In advertisements, she looked with sheer delight at consumer items such as washing machines and floor polish. Both models serve to sustain hegemonic masculinity.⁴ That few people in a society may possess these attributes, or even strive towards them, is unimportant to the maintenance of the model. What was important to the ruling group was the preservation of these ideals.

Co-existing with the stereotype of the ideal woman were conflicting images of the negative attributes of woman. In these stereotypes, woman was manipulative, conniving, and

³ Ibid. Connell's model seems to apply aptly to Trinidad, the ideal woman should display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and child care as a response to labour market discrimination against women. At the mass level these are organised around themes of sexual receptivity in relation to younger women and motherhood in relation to older women. 187.

⁴ See, for example, S. Hyacinth. **Changes in the Status of Women 1900-1977**, (Draft) (Central Statistical Office, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. c. 1977) 8. The Report mentions the hope of forcing Trinidad society "to rethink its image of the ideal female as being only a homemaker and sex object." 9.

in some way evil and dangerous. More often than not, these negative attributes were given to women who challenged some of the ideals of hegemonic femininity, but they were, nevertheless, an intricate part of its construction.

For the most part, the hegemonic masculinity and femininity in Trinidad remained little changed from the stereotype of woman and man that was incorporated into the colonial discourse.⁵ Men held power over women in the public sphere, while the domestic sphere was seen as women's "natural" environment. In the multi-ethnic society of Trinidad there were clear differences between the Indian and African communities' social reality, but even where selected African and Asian ideals contributed to the construction of the hegemonic gender order, they did not seriously challenge the essence of the Western model as an ideal.

I argue that post-colonial discourse failed to challenge these entrenched ideals. Though Afro-centric groups that looked back to their so called "motherlands" for ideals of womanhood and manhood may have changed certain elements, patriarchy persisted, and essential ideals of a man's role and a woman's place and behaviour remained little changed. Furthermore, changes in the status of women and changing gender relations, such as the wide acceptance in Trinidad that women work outside the home in areas once deemed male preserves; as well as women should have more choice in relation to whom and when and if they marry, did not necessarily change the hegemonic gender order. For example, even when women were working full-time, they were usually seen as still responsible for childcare and the running of

⁵ The historical development of this model is discussed in Rhoda Reddock's *Women, Labour and Politics*, (Kingston, Jamaica : Ian Randle Publishers, 1994).

the household, while men's primary role remained that of breadwinner.

Black Power, Gender Ideology and Cultural Change

The Black Power Revolution of 1970 presented a serious challenge to the dominant cultural ideology based mainly on a European model which had, to a large extent, been left intact from the colonial era. African Trinidadians had a long history of struggle mirroring that in the rest of the African diaspora so that events in the late 1960s and early 1970s were part of a continuum of struggle that reached back to slavery, through the local branches of the early Pan-African movement, the United Negro Improvement Association founded by Marcus Garvey, and numerous other African nationalist organizations and the labor riots of the 1930s. Eric Williams' challenge in the 1950s was of particular significance, as for the first time in Trinidad, the black middle class gained control of the legislature. Yet, for the most part, by 1970 this challenge had turned out to be largely rhetorical. Despite the government's achievement of providing increased access to education, it had not fulfilled many of the other promises of independence. Institutionalized racism remained. For example, a 1970 study by Acton Camejo showed that whites represented 53 percent of the business elite in companies employing over 100 persons, while, 'off whites' represented 15 percent, mixed race 15 percent, Chinese 9 percent, Indians 9 percent and Africans only represented 4 percent.⁶

⁶ Susan Craig, "Background to the 1970 Confrontation : Trinidad and Tobago," in **Contemporary Caribbean : A Sociological Reader**, Vol 2, ed. Susan Craig (Trinidad, 1982) 402, from Acton Camejo, "Racial Discrimination in Trinidad and Tobago : A Case Study of the Business Elite and the Social Structure," **Social and Economic Studies** Vol 20, No. 3, 1971.

A number of events in the late 1960s led to the articulation of Black Power in Trinidad. The government had passed the Industrial Stabilization Act in 1965, at a time of severe worker unrest. It was the first piece of anti-worker legislation that the government had implemented, exemplifying the split between the PNM government and a significant segment of the organized labor movement.⁷ In passing the Act, the government severely restricted workers' rights to protest and settle grievances. At the same time, unemployment was growing, especially among young people, many of whom had benefitted from increased access to education provided by the PNM, but who by the late 1960s, were leaving school only to find that the limited availability of jobs quashed their aspirations⁸. The transport workers strike in 1969 was also of significance because of the range of support it garnered from crucial elements on the left, including trade unionists, students and members of grass roots organizations. The police severely repressed the strike which further galvanized opposition to the government, setting the mood for 1970. Finally, many Trinidadians began to feel that the black government of Eric Williams had done little to help the majority of poor people of both African and Indian descent.

The influence of international events played an important role in the changes that were taking place in Trinidad. The Cuban revolution of 1959, the African and Asian Independence struggles, and the Civil Rights movement and subsequent growth of more militant groups like

⁷ James Millette, "Towards the Black Power Revolt of 1970," in **The Black Power Revolution 1970 : A Retrospective**, eds. Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart (I.S.E.R., The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1995), 59-97.

⁸ The official unemployment figure in November 1956 was 17,000 by 1969 it was 46,000 according to Jack Harewood, quoted in Susan Craig, **Contemporary Caribbean : A Sociological Reader**, Vol 2, 398.

the Black Panthers, all had substantial influence on Trinidad. Consequently, the 1960s had brought forth a cultural revolution which reached fruition in the 1970s. Khafra Kambon, an activist and one of the leaders of the Black Power movement, commented on the range of literature that ordinary people, not just intellectuals, were reading. Besides a growing interest in African and Indian history, many young people became interested in black and revolutionary literature, by writers and thinkers such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevarra and Regis Debray, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X and others who reflected the mood of the changing times.⁹

In response to unrest in Trinidad and to the unfolding events in Canada, the Joint National Action Committee, which later become NJAC, had been formed in 1969. The committee, which was to be at the forefront of the Black Power demonstrations, consisted of around 26 groups and organizations, including youth groups, trade unions, students and sporting and cultural associations. Geddes Granger (now Makandal Daaga) was the chairman and he played a major leadership role in the revolution.¹⁰

A march in solidarity with the Trinidadian students on trial in Canada was a major catalyst for the demonstrations to begin. This, together with disillusionment with the PNM,

⁹ Khafra Kambon, "Black Power in Trinidad and Tobago February 26-April 21, 1970, 1970," in **The Black Power Revolution 1970 : A Retrospective** eds. Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, 215-243.

¹⁰ Susan Craig, "1970 Confrontation : Trinidad and Tobago," in **Contemporary Caribbean : A Sociological Reader**, Vol. 2, ed. Susan Craig, 410. In Canada, Trinidadian students were under arrest following the incident at Sir George Williams University. The affair exposed racism in the university. For a full account see Valerie Belgrave, "The Sir George Williams Affair," in **The Black Power Revolution 1970 : A Retrospective**, Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, 119-133.

(which, ironically, the spread of mass education had fuelled) culminated in February 1970 with the massive demonstrations of the Black Power movement, which came very close to overthrowing the government. Among the many demands behind the slogan of Black Power, perhaps the most urgent were against the racial discrimination in the society as a whole and in employment in particular. For example, commercial banks employed few black people. Other demands included an end to exploitation by foreign capital and the local mostly white business class, and for a change in the dominant cultural ideology, supported by the government, the Christian churches, the media and the education system, which revered aspects of European culture whilst denigrating those aspects which had origins in India and Africa.¹¹ The imprisonment of its leaders and the government's imposition of a state of emergency eventually repressed the movement. The events of the demonstrations have been described elsewhere.¹² The literature, however, has seriously neglected the involvement of women in the Black Power movement. Yet women played an active part in both the mass demonstrations and the subsequent guerilla struggle.

The Gender Ideology Within the Black Power Movement

Although gender as a category of consciousness was not developed by this period, looking back at the movement with a gendered lens, gives some important insights that

¹¹ Susan Craig, "1970 Confrontation : Trinidad and Tobago," in *Contemporary Caribbean : A Sociological Reader*, Vol. 2, ed. Susan Craig, 394.

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participants and observers of the movement may not have been aware of at the time. The Black Power Movement clearly demonstrated the resilience of the gender system. The language of the Movement is of particular interest. It was a very masculine language that focussed almost exclusively on the "Black Man." It equated the lack of power with the denial of manhood. The movement derived its concept of manhood directly from the model of hegemonic masculinity of the ruling class, the same elite whom advocates of Black Power were challenging, yet they never seriously questioned the structure of masculinity, nor the oppression of women.¹³ The following examples of male focussed language come from pamphlets put out by various groups advocating Black Power. In **Black Sound Vol 1, No 2** dated about 14 December 1970, with the headline **FREE OUR PEOPLES ARMY POWER TO THE PEOPLE**, the writers saw the struggle against exploitation by capitalists as the "struggle for manhood and Black Power . . ." It went on to say : "But racism is not a passive force. It is an attempt to deny us our MANHOOD. " In 1971 in an NJAC pamphlet on **Confrontation: White Power Structure vs Workers**, about the strikes at Federation Chemicals Ltd. and Dunlop, the pamphlet stated that the demands of workers were . . . "no longer concerned about wage increases. **THEIR STRUGGLE IS BASICALLY ONE FOR THEIR MANHOOD - A struggle for the recognition of their humanity, a struggle to assert their pride, to realize justice for Black People.**" The pamphlet included the following statements: "Black Manhood Trampled" and "Workers forced to suppress manhood to preserve their jobs." **A Statement on Elections** by the Central Committee of NJAC, circa

¹³ See bound collection of Black Power pamphlets in The University of the West Indies Library, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

1971, mentioned "white vultures who have been preying upon our suppressed manhood for hundreds of years". Even a calypso by Chalkdust in 1971, "An Answer to Black Power", stressed solving the black man's problems. Finally, an updated publication called **Black Sound**, with "No More a Slave! Free to Burst the Final Chains" on the cover, claims "The Black Liberation Movement call on all Black People to become a Black Man". Thus at this stage, the movement paid little attention to the double or triple exploitation of black woman based on their race, sex and class.

But some of the pamphlets did call for women to join the movement. One specifically called for African and Indian women to join the liberation struggle. In **East Dry River Speaks: "The Voice of the Hills," Issue No. 5** (n. d.) there is a paragraph entitled **GET ON UP SISTERS!** which used Leila Khalid and Angela Davis as examples. It advocated that women "fight like the brothers, stand side by side with our brothers show them the fight also belongs to us" and . . . "level the earth according to Eldridge Cleaver in our attempt to gain our manhood". It called on the "Sisters" to get up on up and join the march for freedom. Women did participate in the mass marches and demonstrations as well as the numerous organizations that spiraled out of the mass movements. Young women also played a leading role in the secondary school movement which led street demonstrations after the sentencing of the army mutineers in 1971. Some of these young women went on to join NJAC¹⁴. However, it is clear from these pamphlets that the movement saw freedom for the black man

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This is evident from photographs of the demonstrations, mentioned in press reports and from interviews conducted with participants - both male and female.

as the priority.

It is important to note that NJAC after 1970 became a very different organization. NJAC splintered into two trends, the cultural nationalist trend to which NJAC subscribed and various groups with Marxist-socialist tendencies.

In late 1970, NJAC formed a women's arm which it officially launched in January 1971. The impetus seems to have come from the men in NJAC, not the women¹⁵. Indeed, from interviews conducted with former members and the NJAC publication *The Black Woman*, which came out in 1974, it appears that the NJAC leadership did not challenge gender roles. The man was the head of the household and the black woman was a sort of earth mother. Her role was to support the black man in the struggle, to make the home comfortable and representative of African/Indian/Caribbean culture, and to inculcate that culture to the children, while the group somewhat glorified the role of women in Africa.¹⁶ NJAC did not accept birth control, perhaps partly due to the FPA's insensitive campaigns that somewhat ignored issues of race and class, stressing population control, rather than arguing for the rights of women to control their bodies etc. NJAC women stressed traditional gender roles along with natural hair, African/Indian dress, and no make-up, mini skirts or high heels.

Although NJAC women members discussed the long history of exploitation of black

¹⁵ Thelma Henderson, "The Contemporary Women's Movement in Trinidad and Tobago," in *Gender in Caribbean Development* eds. Patricia Mohammed and Cathy Shepherd, (The University of the West Indies, Women and Development Studies Project, Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. 1988), 363-372.

¹⁶ See articles by an NJAC woman in the *Express* in August 1975 and in the *Black Woman* in November 1975, in which she stated that "The African Woman was secure, loved and respected ..." which overlooked the ongoing struggle for women's rights on that continent.

woman, they distanced themselves from what they and the predominantly male leadership, saw as the white women's liberation movement, which they felt had little relevance for black women. Furthermore, reports in the press suggested that some sections of Trinidad society saw NJAC as a protector of women's rights.¹⁷ The group's leadership stressed respect for women and was against the sexual exploitation of women's bodies, protesting the treatment of women in some calypsoes. At a cultural rally in 1972, Daaga publicly attacked Sparrow's derogatory portrayal of black women in his calypsoes.¹⁸ There was one woman member of NJAC's central committee, but the role of women in NJAC's decision making is still unclear. Nevertheless, as a consequence of becoming politically active through NJAC, women were able to develop a sense of self-worth and also a level of gender awareness.

Indicative of the trend away from cultural nationalism was the formation of the revolutionary National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF). NUFF was launched on May 31, 1972 with the raid on what was then Texaco Estate Police Station, located at Forest Reserve in South Trinidad. Young activists had formed NUFF after the Black Power demonstrations and the army mutiny. Its members took a Marxist-socialist line that saw class not race as the main problem in Trinidad and Tobago, believing that armed struggle was the only way to change the society. This was in part a response to the brutal and repressive tactics of some of the police force in the aftermath of the Black Power revolution.

¹⁷ **Express**, June 12, 1971. 4.

¹⁸ **Express**, Dec. 6, 1972, front page. Sparrow angrily responded that in 400 calypsoes he had never tried to decry the black woman. A brief survey of Sparrow's lyrics show that Granger was closer to the truth. See, for example, Gordon Rohlehr, Sparrow and the Language of Calypso. Mimeograph, (The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1968).

Consequently, a number of NUFF members took up arms to fight a guerilla war until around late 1974/75 when the government and the security forces had either killed, imprisoned or released on bail most of its members.¹⁹ Women participated in the armed struggle and NUFF fighter Beverley Jones was killed in action. She subsequently became a popular heroine among the mostly young supporters of the movement. Women fought equally alongside the men in guerilla warfare, camping out in the bush and tracking. They were not assigned traditional roles of cooking and caring. The fighters shared these things amongst themselves. It does not seem that they discussed much the "woman problem", but neither did they question the ability of women fighters.²⁰ The fact that woman fought on equal terms is a significant indication of equitable gender relations. In addition, the picture on the front page of the *Express* of the young Beverley Jones, gunned down in action in September 1973, most likely impacted on the subconscious of Trinidadians' providing a serious challenge to the ideals of hegemonic femininity.²¹

Other socialist-oriented revolutionary groups that came out of the Black Power uprising after 1970, which like NUFF took a class position, such as the United Revolutionary Organization (URO) and the Youth Forces and Working Class Movement, finally took up the issue of gender discrimination. Significantly they did not form separate women's arms and URO supported women's right of access to birth control and abortion and control of their

¹⁹ David Millette, "Guerilla War in Trinidad : 1970-1974," in **The Black Power Revolution, 1970 : A Retrospective** eds. Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1995. 625-660.

²⁰ Interviews with former fighters 1994-1995.

²¹ *Express*, Sept. 15, 1973, front page.

bodies. A URO paper entitled "The Myth of the Equality of Women in Trinidad and Tobago Society," around 1973, argued that to be black, working class and female was to be "relegated to an extreme position of inferiority."²² In accordance with Marxist analysis at the time, they believed that women would only be free when the revolution came.

Cultural Change

The Black Power movement was accompanied by significant cultural changes, some of which impacted on gender roles. Articles in the *Express* in February and March 1970 indicated some of the changes that were taking place. *Express* writer Rosemary Stone noted that:

Boys and girls are wearing tiny little vests with flared pants and leather thronged sandals and boleros. Boys and girls are wearing afros or long hair. Things like homemade jewelry, beaded fringes on skirts and trousers, square fingernails, chunky shoes, alpagats and heavy thronged sandals and gold peeper glasses.

She went on to discuss the "whole scene". She claimed that it was "in" to "turn on" with grass, speed, tampis etc. and to be a "brotherman". She continued:

The best thing about a brotherman is that he doesn't make a big thing out of being one. He doesn't announce to the world that he takes drugs, lives with a girl, is involved with the Black Power Movement, reads revolutionary books or does work for the union. He is just cool and does his own thing quietly . . . unless he is roused by something disturbing.

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Thelma Henderson, "The Contemporary Women's Movement in Trinidad and Tobago," in *Gender in Caribbean Development*, eds. Patricia Mohammed and Cathy Shepherd, 1986. 366-367.

She defended the occasional smoking of marijuana as not necessarily addictive "just like having a drink with friends or taking a tranquilizer when you are all uptight." These extracts clearly show change in the way young people were dressing and living.²³

Then in March another article gave a glimpse of the changing fashion and accompanying cultural change. "The mood is new", the writer commented on the new fashion mood where clothes had become more useful and comfortable: sandals (for marching), solid colors, military bush jackets worn over skimpy jerseys and either denim trousers or mini skirts instead of see through clothes. Also girls were wearing trouser suits and using "bags gathered at the top in fabric leather". Boys were wearing ponchos and Cuban shirts as well as Mao jackets and afro jacks, tank tops and tie dye jerseys.

The writer continued:

Every body wears berets and sneakers and head bands tied around their foreheads. Everybody's wearing as much leather as possible and armbands on their wrists. Everyone with an afro' sticks an afro comb in their hair so they can touch up their hairstyles as the march goes on. [*It could also be used as a weapon as in Express on Feb. 27, 1970 a headline read "Afro'Comb Murder" Charge" - 2 brothers charged with stabbing a recording company worker to death with Afro comb.*]

Everyone is wearing African prints. Everyone wears jersey outfits slashed to give a fringy appearance also juju beads, on wrists, necks and gold rimmed glasses. Khaki is also popular. Plaits were also important as well as beards and moustaches for men.²⁴

Although the clothes the writers described reflected an international movement of dress,

²³ **Express**, Thursday Feb. 26, 1970. 10.

²⁴ **Express**, March 15, 1970. 6-7.

the Black Power movement entrenched this style of dress in Trinidad. These clothes also had implications for gender relations and construction. Flat sandals provided an alternative to the crippling high heel, thus giving women freedom to walk around, run and generally move more freely. At the same time that many young women and men were taking part in the mass demonstrations that rocked the country, clothes in general became more comfortable, less restrictive. Trinidadians paid much more attention to male clothing, which had undergone considerable change from the business suits or casual shirts and trousers of the 1950s and 1960s to the dashikis and vest tops that exposed the male body. Moreover, a debate arose after the Black Power demonstrations about the relevance of Western style dress for men in Trinidad, which led towards the wearing of shirt jackets on formal occasions.

A major indication of cultural change was the way in which young people took part in funerals. The first one, the funeral of Basil Davis, a young man of twenty four who was the first fatality of the Black Power demonstrations, seems to have started the trend. Basil Davis, was shot by a policemen on 6 April 1970. His funeral attracted a very large following, estimated by one reporter as between 20,000 to 30,000.²⁵ At this funeral and at several others that followed, mourners wore red and black, the coffin was draped with red and black flags or later red, black and green and there was African drumming and chanting along the way. Young men and women both wore casual dress of jeans, red T-shirts and the like. It is important to note that after NUFF had launched its armed struggle, whereas the police and

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See Raoul Pantin, **Black Power Day : The 1970 February Revolution, A Reporter's Story**, (Trinidad, Santa Cruz : Hatuey Productions, 1990) and **Express**, April 7, 1970. 10.

daily newspapers were talking of the wanted NUFF guerillas as Trinidad's number one enemies, funerals of gunned down guerillas were attended by thousands and they were given a hero's burial in the style of Black Power burials, thus showing a significant split in the country. Some young men and women were taking initiatives and often acting independently of their elders' wishes.

The cultural change implemented by NJAC has already been discussed -- natural hair and African influenced dress. There was also a change in attitude to color and beauty that focussed on the beauty of African women. For instance, Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycee) beauty queens, for a while at least, were black. In 1971 Miss Angel Face, who was incidentally picked by a public poll conducted by Angel Face and the *Express*, was the second darkest of the 10 contestants and wore an afro.²⁶ In the wider population, African type dress and African style weddings became much more common. There was stress on using local foods, (it must be noted however that Eric Williams' PNM had started a buy local campaign in the late 1950s) also, local food that the middle class had previously stigmatized, such as rotis, ground provisions, breadfruit and bake and saltfish, began to gain popularity amongst this class.²⁷

²⁶ *Express*, July 4, Sunday, 1971. While it is important that white and light skinned women were no longer seen as the ideal for female beauty, the objectification of women in beauty contests warranted further discussion.

²⁷ See for example, *Express*, May 21, 1975.5 : "Doubles Are no Longer Simply a Grassroots Thing." Foods like 'bara, coconut and sno cone' "long considered to be items consumed only at "grassroots" level," had taken on "an aura of respectability recently." The vendors had been hit by rising prices so that they may have been pricing themselves out of the "poor man's" reach.

The Rise of a More Radical Women's Movement in Trinidad: The Beginnings of a Feminist Discourse.

During the 1970s references to women's liberation began to enter the newspapers of Trinidad and Tobago. Although the women's movement that developed rapidly in the 1970s had connections with the international movement of North America and Western Europe, Trinidadian women have had a history of struggle, so that similar concerns that refueled the movement in the industrialized countries also existed in Trinidad.²⁸ Furthermore, as in the United States, women in Trinidad had been fighting in support of the black man, and it was inevitable that they would eventually start to question their own subordination.²⁹ Groups such as NJAC, while emphasizing respect for women and stressing the importance of their role beside the man, still saw men as the heads of household, thus entrenching rather than challenging traditional gender relations. On the other hand, the experience that women gained from actively participating in the Black Power movement helped them mobilize to articulate their own demands. Although there appears to have been little public discussion of women as fighters, the existence of women guerillas in Trinidad encouraged a subtle challenge to the gender system. As activists had used Angela Davis as a rallying cry to women to join the struggle, they must have felt the impact of her trial in March 1972, in which she challenged the gender order, further chipping away at traditional constructs of womanhood.

²⁸ This struggle has been well documented in Rhoda Reddock's **Women, Labour and Politics**. London, Zed Books, 1994.

²⁹ For an account of the development of an awareness of gender discrimination in the United States Black Panther movement, see Elaine Brown. **A Taste of Power : A Black Woman's Story**, (New York : Anchor Books, 1994). (First published Pantheon Books, 1992).

Besides Black Power other forces contributed to changes in the gender system. Perhaps most importantly, since Independence in the 1960s, women had gained increasing access to education, both secondary and higher and were moving into areas of work that had been traditionally male dominated.³⁰

There were also indications in the press that changes were taking place within the realm of sexual relations. In the 1970s, articles appeared in the newspaper that discussed how it was now accepted that women were as entitled as men to experience sexual pleasure and orgasm. At the same time, FPA campaigns and wider use of the birth control pill allowed many women to express their sexuality without fear of pregnancy. One statistic claimed that in February 1970, researchers estimated that 50,000 Trinidadian women were on the pill. An article on dating indicated that changes were taking place in the relationships between young men and women. Under the title "It's a Little Naughtier" the anonymous writer argued that in recent years, dating had changed. It was no longer necessary for the young man to meet the parents first. The dating activities were also much freer. Going to the cinema and fetes (Trinidadian parties) was most popular. Disco and disc jockeys had become an institution.

Couples now held hands in the streets. It was now a necessity for boys to have a car to attract girls (an indication of the class perspective of the article - although change did seem to

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Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s the Express and Guardian mentioned several areas that women were moving into for the first time such trainee welders, chemical engineers, dock workers and in September 1974 there was a first woman pilot. See Express 5 May 1972. 2; 15 Sept. 1974; 24 Feb. 1975. 4; 30 March 1975. 12; 29 July 1975. 5. Guardian 5 April 1966.

have cut across class); also motor cycles had increased in popularity. The writer argued that "no doubt [there was a] rise in sexual freedom". Necking was more pronounced than in mother's day - but, the writer argued, it may have been more freedom in talk than in action. Nevertheless, relations between young people seem to have become more open and informal.³¹

Additionally, in the 1970s, the government began to take an interest in women's affairs. In 1971 the Ministry of Labour set up the Division of Women's Affairs, aiming to assist women in the labour market. Then in 1974, the government set up the National Commission on the Status for Women in preparation for the conference to be held in 1975, during the United Nations International Women's Year. The broad aims of the commission were "promoting the extension of full civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to the women of the country and assisting government in integrating women into the development process". Although the commission received more funding than most women's organizations had ever had access to, the commission had no full time staff and all its members were voluntary, so that its impact on women in Trinidad was very restricted.³² However, the final report that the commission published is a useful document indicating areas in which discrimination existed. The commission generated various reports from sub-committees on conditions of women in the workforce and the like. The National Commission on the Status

³¹ **Express**, Dec. 1, 1972. 11. In 1973, the Family Planning Association began a controversial campaign to give out contraceptives to teenagers with or without parental consent - another indication of changing attitudes. See **Guardian**, May-June 1973; **Express**, June 6, 1973, back page.

³² Thelma Henderson, "The Contemporary Women's Movement in Trinidad and Tobago," 366. See also Rhoda Reddock, "Contemporary : The Quality of Life," in **Trinidad and Tobago : The Independence Experience 1962-1987**, ed. Selwyn Ryan (I.S.E.R., The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1988).

of Women also organized events for International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8, 1975.³³

Middle class women formed a new type of women's organization, the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HATT) in September 1971. In retrospect it appears to have been a fairly conservative organization, yet HATT's actions challenged the view of what society saw as acceptable behaviour for housewives. Consequently, the press at the time depicted the women involved as militant. In the *Express* in October 1971, HATT firmly denied they had any political aims, and clearly stated they were housewives with "homes to run, husbands to look after and children to raise. We are either the bread-winners or women who work to augment household earnings. We seek involvement in matters affecting the housewife." They wanted to focus on rising prices and operate as a pressure group. Nevertheless that same month the *Express* used front page headlines such as WIVES LAY WAR PLANS when HATT called for a boycott to get better quality and lower prices. Again in 1973, it ran a front page headline WOMEN ON WARPATH when HATT members staged a protest by entering the Parliament Chambers.³⁴

It was this kind of protest and the use of placards that earned HATT its reputation for militancy. HATT functioned very actively for about 5 years and then began to decline. Former member, the late Faith Wiltshire, saw HATT as being more of a women's movement

³³ See for example, *Guardian*, March 5, 1970. 9. The NCSW organised a forum "Men and Women : The Next 25 Years," to be held on March 8, 1970.

³⁴ *Express*, Oct. 3, 1971. 11; Oct. 6, 1971, front page; Feb. 1, 1973, front page.

than a consumer movement, which had used consumerism as its "drawing card."³⁵ This was also suggested in a feature in the *Express* in May 1972 on "The New West Indian Woman" which claimed that "shades of women's liberation [were] emanating from HATT". In 1973, the deputy chairman of the Commission on the revision of the constitution suggested that HATT, because of its interest in the institutionalization of pressure groups and in the elevation of women, should prepare a case to be submitted to the commission of areas where gender inequality existed, so that HATT seems to have moved beyond its earlier aims.³⁶

One of the most interesting issues that HATT took up was the relationship between household workers and their female employers and conditions of household workers in general. In 1972, HATT undertook a survey of domestic workers in which they gave a rough estimate that domestic workers earned about \$40-50 a month while the average accountant earned \$1500-2000. The survey stated that the Black Power upheaval in 1970 caused a lot of tension between employers and domestic workers in affluent areas, so that HATT was trying to create a dialogue between the two groups. This brought to the forefront the importance and complexity of class in addressing issues concerning women. The issue of the conditions of household workers became very controversial and caused some of the employers to leave HATT. Throughout the late 1970s, HATT pushed for a minimum wage for household workers and in 1975 published a report.³⁷

³⁵ Faith Wiltshire, "Organising as Consumers : The Experience of the housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago," *Woman Speak*, No. 26-27, (1990), 34-37.

³⁶ *Express*, May 12, 1972. 12-13; March 1, 1973.4.

³⁷ HATT, *Report on Employment Status of Household Workers in Trinidad*, (Tania House Publishing, March 1975).

What seems to have been HATT's greatest achievement, again quoting from Wiltshire, was the feeling of self worth it engendered in its members, some of whom are still active on women's issues in Trinidad.

Finally, towards the end of the decade, some women began to question the nature of the gender order in itself, beginning the emergence of more radical feminist thought. As one of these women Thelma Henderson points out, by mid-1976 some of the women who had been working within the socialist movement and pushing the need to put women's rights on the agenda decided to mobilize separately around issues of particular relevance to women. One such group was called the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Women which in November 1976 and January 1977 it published a magazine **The New Woman**.³⁸ The group existed for about 18 months and apparently disintegrated because it was unable to sufficiently mobilize members to active participation, thus the weight of the work fell on one or two members. Some of the women involved in this group went on to form or join other organizations that came into existence in the early 1980s. It was precisely this questioning of the gender order and the sexual division of labour that can be determined as the beginnings of a feminist discourse.

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Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Women, *The New Woman*, Vol. 1. No. 1, 1976. The magazine stated that its target was "the re-introduction of the debate on the women's question" and to raise it to the level of national debate.

The Oil Boom Years

Inherent in the Black Power philosophy was a concern for the underprivileged masses. The movement had arisen out of a period of increased social consciousness within the labour movement in the Caribbean, especially as the gains of the Cuban Revolution became clear. Money from the oil boom began to flood the economy, the Trinidadian middle class expanded rapidly. In the ensuing decade, in an environment of increasing consumerism, a large proportion of Trinidadians did come close to achieving the American ideal of owning a house, car, TV etc. which further placated the tense climate of 1970 and its aftermath. Looking at Trinidad today, one can conclude that the money from the oil boom appears to have had little impact on the poorest groups in depressed areas of Eastern Port of Spain such as Laventille. Money did enter these areas during the boom and there was expenditure on consumer durables. Yet, for example, even in the midst of boom, the *Express* ran a story in August 1978, in which four young men, members of Unity Youth Group of Mon Repos Road, Morvant (a severely depressed area) talked about their frustration and poverty. One sold marijuana, which he thought better than stealing, while one sold fruit that he stole. They wanted jobs, claiming that there were 350 unemployed members of the group living in dire poverty.³⁹ Although the government provided works projects, they were to a large extent merely band aids. The government did little to address the underlying structural and social problems of inequality and poverty in urban Trinidad.

The oil boom and accompanying increased consumerism had somewhat conflicting

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Express, August 22, 1978.21.

effects on gender. On the one hand, the boom meant that more jobs were available to women, and more access to consumer items like washing machines or even a basic cooker relieved women of some domestic work. On the other hand, there was an increase in depictions of women as objects of consumption. For example, pretty women were used to sell cars. This was not new, advertisements for cars had used women as decorations since the 1950s - presumably as an enticement to the male buyer - but the boom seems to have increased it.

Representations of Gender in the Media

In general, the press reported news of the developing women's movement in a frivolous manner. It exaggerated anti-male aspects of women's liberation, as well as bra burning and the like. Consequently, many women distanced themselves from women's liberation, but still advocated women's rights and equal pay. Articles on "women's lib", reviews of books like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, and news of the women's movement overseas, did creep into the newspapers and began to subvert the dominant discourse of the gender system from within. 'Women's lib' was frequently used in headlines to attract attention, such as "Freedom . . . Yes, Women's Lib. . . No Says the Jaycee Queen" in 1975⁴⁰. A typical article written in December 1970 by *Express* writer Rosemary Stone asked, "What's really gone wrong with our men?" She said that she was not for organized Women's Liberation, instead she wanted to subtly change the order of things without having to burn bras.⁴¹ There was also

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Express, February 9, 1975. 15.

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Express, December 22, 1970. 13.

a number of articles and references to the fear of men (and women too) that women would somehow lose their "femininity" if they achieved any degree of equality. For example as early as March 1970, there appeared in the *Express*, on the page "For Women", a piece entitled "Watch it girls, you're in danger of losing your femininity" and another article on the plight of "hen pecked husbands" which claimed most women preferred a masterful man not a submissive one.⁴² At the same time, however, in April 1970, the *Express* ran a new series on how men could captivate women. This is interesting because previous articles in this vein had generally been directed at women. These articles demonstrated an underlying fear that in challenging the hegemonic gender order, by calling for equality, women posed a threat to masculinity in particular.

During International Women's Year in 1975, both the *Guardian* and the *Express* carried a series of advertisements throughout the year showing the United Nations International Women's Year logo with a thought for the month. The National Commission on the Status of Women ran a series of articles in the *Guardian* dedicated to women. This indicates that the press had begun to portray the growing women's movement in a more responsible manner.⁴³ Yet masculinity was itself challenged by the development of women's movement and changes in the status of women. For the most part, male reaction was to try and strengthen the hegemonic gender order rather than explore how change could benefit both men and women. Nevertheless, subtle changes to the dominant gender order were very slowly taking place.

⁴² *Express*, March 15, 1970. 11.

⁴³ See for example, *Guardian*, March 2, 1975.3.

Masculinity

The changes in newspaper advertisements depicting masculinity were of particular interest in the 1970s. For the most part, the images of men in newspapers between 1950 and 1980 reflected the hegemonic masculinity. Most men were clean shaven, depicted in business suits, shirts and ties, and had usually been white. In the 1970s, however, besides an increasing use of black male models, the advertisements began to show an image of masculinity that differed from previous years. The trend began in December 1969 when an advertisement used a bare chested man to advertise slacks. Then in February 1970, Habib's, a local Lebanese owned store, ran a series of very interesting advertisements - particularly so, as they preceded the mass demonstrations of the Black Power movement in late February. The first one in the *Sunday Express*, February 1, featured African Trinidadian men with Afros and dashiki; this was followed on February 3 with two men with afros, one in dark glasses, and a dashiki, both wearing striped pants. The advertisement claimed that fashion for men had arrived. Then an advertisement for the store's Carnival Collection stated "Easy Pickings from Habib's Carnival Collection: The word is Tough!" The men looked tough, but after the Black Power demonstrations began, these images disappeared. On Sunday March 1, 1970, the Habib's advertisement showed hippy fashion, with white men in the illustration. At the end of March, they used a full page advertisement to depict an African couple in a European setting. The man was wearing a suit, with antiques in the background; the woman was holding an antique gun or trumpet. Habib's store had at one point been targeted during the demonstrations, hence it seems likely that these changes were the store's response to pressure from the Black

Power uprising.⁴⁴

Images of men in these advertisement contrasted sharply with previous depictions of masculinity. They showed a new emphasis on the male body and male beauty which increased during the decade, so that by 1978 a modelling agency suggested that more men should take up modelling as a career. In October 1978, the **Express** published an interesting article "He's Now on to Powder, Make-Up and Wigs : Make Way for the Beautiful Male", which stated that the beauty business for men was becoming very profitable not only in traditional areas of colognes etc. but "more and more men were wearing wigs, false mustaches, powder, going for hair transplants and a variety of other "beauty aids" and they were having their hair styled etc.⁴⁵ Images of men in the press thus depicted two trends in the construction of masculinity. On the one hand, the media showed a growing acceptance of men as objects of the beauty business. On the other, it depicted a different masculinity that was emanating from the Black Power movement, which although containing many of the ideals of the hegemonic masculinity, was expressed very differently. Neither of these subordinated masculinities challenged patriarchy or questioned the oppression of women, yet they did allow for a broadening of definitions of masculinity, some of which, like the wearing of shirt jacks and use of toiletries, were absorbed into the hegemonic construct.

⁴⁴ See **Express**, February and March, 1970. The advertisements with a Black Power theme did not appear in the **Guardian**, although the one's described above with men in suits did. Habib's store was apparently picketed briefly during one demonstration. See **Guardian**, Feb. 27, 1970. Front page.

⁴⁵ **Express**, October 6, 1978. 20-21. The article was written by journalist Sunity Maharaj.

Images of Women in Newspaper Advertisements in the 1970s

Advertisements showed a distinct increase in the number of black women models during the 1970s. Black women also appeared more frequently as fashion models and beauty queens. These were mostly African women. Indian women seldom appeared, unless they had an ethnically ambiguous look. The trend for using black models in advertising had begun little by little in the 1960s, but was much clearer in the 1970s. Yet the shift toward black models did not result in a change in the gender roles that women depicted. Generally, women in advertisement in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s either appeared as happy housewives, glamorous objects of male desire, or, and this trend seemed to increase in the 1970s, as irrelevant decorative objects to attract attention to consumer goods like cars. If advertisements showed working women, they were generally in traditional women's jobs, such as secretaries advertising office equipment.

As part of a new trend stressing youth and beauty beginning in the 1960s, there were also some images of the independent young woman, carefree and liberated. For example, in 1967 an advertisement for televisions showed a young, smiling woman driving a scooter with a portable TV on the back and an advertisement for clothing from Stephen's store in March 1970 claimed "Stephen's liberates the TOTAL woman". It showed women in mini dresses and other fashions.⁴⁶ At the same time, there was an increase in explicitly sexist advertisements like the ones advertising Famous Recipe Chicken, a local product. In January 1976 the copy read "Baby, I've got exactly what you want . . . Succulent, savoury, delicious, tempting"

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Express, Dec. 12, 1967 and March 22, 1970. 7.

which showed a young, dark woman with long flowing hair sitting provocatively, wearing short shorts with her knees bent, holding a stick of chicken. This advertisement was followed in February with another one showing the bare back of a black woman her head turned to us with the copy reading "I'm so easy to have around on weekends". Interestingly, in October 1977, the *Express* ran a front page headline "OH THOSE SEXY ADS - SAVE THE CHILDREN". The Ex-Director of the FPA, Allison Gibson-Lewis, challenged businessmen and advertisers on the effects of using sex to advertise their products. She questioned the "morality of using female nakedness to advertise fried chicken". It was not until May 1978 that Famous Recipe Chicken changed its image and used an advertisement depicting a black family enjoying its product. It is not clear what brought about this change.⁴⁷

A survey of newspaper advertisements depicting women in the 1970s thus shows two trends. There was an increase in black images, women with Afros and natural hair styles, but women also appear to be depicted more and more as sex objects and they were seldom pictured in positions of power. Few of the advertisements posed a serious challenge to the gender system.

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Express, Jan. 19, 1976. 2; Feb. 29, 1976.16; Oct. 14, 1977. Front page; May 18, 1978. 13.

Conclusion

Because of the complex nature of Trinidad society with its permutating interaction of gender, race and class, the concept of a hegemonic gender order which allows for the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities is a useful tool with which to examine the 1970s. It has been particularly useful in this study in analyzing the pictorial sources and articles concerned with gender in the newspapers. It has shown that it is possible to detect subtle shifts within the gender system thus giving a more accurate analysis of society than other methodologies have so far permitted. Bringing gender into an examination of major historical movements like the Black Power movement gives a new perspective that has important implications for the study of Caribbean history in general. Furthermore, since post-colonial discourse has failed to significantly challenge the hegemonic gender order in the Caribbean, it is important to understand the historical development and construction of that model in order to better understand Caribbean societies.

Events of the 1970s had a profound impact on urban Trinidadian society. Although basic inequalities continued and continue to exist, the Black Power movement did set the stage for a thorough questioning of the elite's position. There were some visible changes such as an increase in the number of black bank tellers and an end, although temporary, to the light-skinned winners of beauty competitions. As this paper has shown, the Black Power movement itself failed to challenge the gender order. The participation of women in the movement, however, led some to question their own subordination within a radical movement and their relationship to black men. The following decade, the 1980s, would see this expressed

through a deepening of feminist discourse in Trinidad, the roots of which had emerged in the development of the Black Power movement in the 1970s.

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