



## ∞ Hermione ∞

From 1962, and all of the forty-plus years since, Hermione McKenzie has been a defining presence at the Faculty of Social Sciences and at the University of the West Indies Mona, Jamaica, her contributions are as varied and interesting as the everyday pronunciations of her name.

Energy and light, she has attempted to illuminate and to transform both in the academy and in the wider Caribbean community. There has been an endless and continuing list of engagements in teaching, research, consultancy, institution building, public and political service. From 1962 onwards, we know of her relationships with:

Sites and Services Project  
Worker's Bank  
Family Planning Board  
YWCA  
Breakfast Club  
Jamaica Women's Political Canons  
Gender Studies  
Canadian Upliftment Services Organization  
Association of Women's Organizations of Jamaica  
Council of Voluntary Social Services  
Bureau of Women's Affairs

And there have been many more.

Peripatetic and purposive, she has held together and worked within the tensions and contradictions of her life and her society. She showed us how family and gender were absent and present in troubling ways throughout all the discourses and experiences of Caribbean life; how philosophy and a caring praxis often challenged each other, how development and chaos, and social structure, place and personality intersected.

It's been forty years, yet we can't say that Hermione has mellowed or slowed with time. She still climbs all the stairs to the top of the Social Sciences Building. She is still, here, there and everywhere, peripatetic always. She is still Hermione, the individual. Beautiful, troubling and engaged as ever.



# IDEAZ

Volume 4 Numbers 1-2 Special Issue  
2005

## Conference honouring the contribution and work of **Hermoine McKenzie**

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IDEAZ is a forum to discuss new, interesting and/or controversial ideas about human society. IDEAZ is also a peer reviewed, interdisciplinary journal, catering to persons in the social sciences and the humanities.

Manuscripts are welcome and submissions should conform to Notes for Contributors printed on the inside back cover. Articles should be submitted to:

Editor, IDEAZ  
c/o Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work  
University of the West Indies  
Mona Kingston 7  
Jamaica  
E-mail: [ian.boxill@uwimona.edu.jm](mailto:ian.boxill@uwimona.edu.jm)

### ***Subscription rates (postage included)***

	<b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>
Annual subscription... Vol 4 Nos 1 & 2 / 2005	US\$40 UK£18 J\$1200	US\$60 UK£34 J\$3000
Back issues	US\$15 UK£9 J\$600	US\$20 UK£12 J\$1000

### ***Subscription Address:***

Journals Desk  
A r a w a k publications  
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### ***Payment***

Payments can be made in Jamaican or US dollars or in pounds sterling.  
Cheques and money orders should be made payable to  
the Dept of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work, UWI Mona.

Typesetting and cover design by Annika Lewinson-Morgan

© IDEAZ  
ISSN 0799 1401

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# Editorial

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Hermione McKenzie is a Caribbean academic (born in Grenada, resident in Jamaica) at what is now the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work (formerly the Department of Sociology) at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies. Hermione has been a member of the Department from 1963 to the present and in that time she has held nearly every post in the Department – including Head/Chairperson – at one time or another. Also, during her tenure she has been the spirit and the soul in the pioneering role of establishing teaching and research in the sociological sub-discipline of Social Policy and Administration.

It is very difficult to describe Hermione in terms of any one dimension or activity. It is difficult to fit her into any one place or space. Hermione is known for her multi-dimensionality, a multi-dimensionality that she has maintained throughout these long years with engagements at many levels and in many activities across a wide spectrum of disciplines. She is more than an academic, she is an intellectual; she is more than an intellectual, she is Marx's fully evolved citizen and human being.

In appreciation of this remarkable person and of her substantial contribution to the development of a Caribbean Civilization, the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at Mona held in her honour, a number of celebratory functions in the last week of June 2004. Among the activities was a Conference under the title "Gender, Race, Class, Social Policy and Social Administration in the Caribbean". The Conference was held in the Faculty of the Social Sciences at Mona, on 25 June 2004.

The Conference focused on the many sociological arts that Hermione practices and on her research contributions in the areas of social policy, family studies, gender and the status of women, low-income housing, forms of poverty, Caribbean population dynamics, social administration and the social welfare system. Michael Burawoy, in a recent call for Public Sociology (Burawoy, 2005) outlines four sociological roles, the Professional, the Critical, the Policy and the Public. The Conference gave eloquent testimony of Hermione's engagement in all four of these sociological roles, consistently and throughout her long and continuing career. Also, many of the presenters from across the three campuses of the University of the West Indies, established the significance of her research for the developing social scientific tradition of the region and for the foundations of a Caribbean civilization.

Twelve papers were presented at the Conference, including a keynote address by Professor O. Nigel Bolland entitled "The UWI, Regionalism, Development and the Birth of a Caribbean Civilization". O. Nigel Bolland is Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology and Caribbean Studies, Emeritus, Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y. Of the twelve papers presented at the Conference, eight are included in this volume, among which is Professor Bolland's keynote presentation.

The papers that follow present on many of the areas of work of Hermione McKenzie and allow an appreciation of the breadth of her research, teaching and engagement.



They make an eloquent testimony of her contribution to the developing Caribbean Civilization.

*IDEAZ* and its Editor Professor Ian Boxill have been very happily associated with the entire project of tribute to Hermione McKenzie, and the Journal is particularly pleased to publish this very special collection of papers in her honour.

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**Heather Ricketts** *and*  
**Clement Branche**  
Guest Editors

**Note**

Burawoy, M. "For Public Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 2 (2005).



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# The UWI, Regionalism, Development and the Birth of Caribbean Civilization

O. Nigel Bolland

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that there is a palpable and substantial Caribbean regional tradition and civilization. It argues that the University of the West Indies and intellectuals associated with this institution, persons like Hermoine McKenzie, have made significant contributions to the development of this civilization. This civilization, with its evolving positive dialectic of alterity continues, to present to the world a vision and alternative to the reckless domination inaugurated in 1492.

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Friends, West Indians, and colleagues, we come here not to bury Hermione McKenzie but to honour her. I say this because last night she told us that a friend who had heard Barry, Heather and I talking about her on the Breakfast Club thought she must be dead. So let there be no mistake, Hermione is alive and well, and we are here with her today to celebrate her forty years of important contributions to the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work, to the University of the West Indies (UWI), and to the region. As her friends as well as colleagues, we celebrate not only her work and contributions, but also her generous spirit and warm personality.

What I intend to do in these remarks is to draw attention to the context in which Hermione and I taught here in the late 1960s by saying something about the relation of the University of the West Indies to regionalism and about some aspects of development, which was the subject of the two-year course we taught together, and then to comment on the relation of development to Caribbean civilization. In doing this I hope to show how important Hermione has been to me, even in some ways of which she may not be aware, and thus to thank her publicly for her guidance and friendship.

Hermione and I first met in 1968, when she was teaching sociology at the UWI and I came here as a Junior Research Fellow in the Institute of Social and Economic Research. When we collaborated in teaching a course called Social Aspects of Economic and Political Development I was very much the junior partner, learning a great deal from her as I went along. Hermione was in some ways my mentor and I learned a lot from her about the craft of teaching. It is hard to say precisely what I learned about teaching from Hermione, but I know it was important. We taught in the chalk and talk days, before power point presentations, and it was a real skill to get the students' attention and to hold it. There is an element of performance about this, and Hermione's outstanding

energy and endless enthusiasm, along with her remarkable intelligence, were hard to keep up with. But she was not merely a performer, and it was in the substance rather than the style of her teaching that I learned the most.

Above all, what I learned from her was the importance of demonstrating, and then engaging students in, critical thinking, especially critical thinking in the application of theories and strategies of development to the Caribbean. What little I knew at that time was gleaned largely from books, and I lacked experiential knowledge of the Caribbean. Hermione, of course, had both. It was her approach to the subject that made my task possible. She showed how important it was to subject all theories and generalizations, most of which came from the traditions of Western Europe and North America, to critical scrutiny in light of the experience of Caribbean cultures and societies. Whether we were teaching about Karl Marx or Max Weber, the Cuban Revolution or Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*,<sup>1</sup> we sought what was relevant to the Caribbean experience. I could not have begun to do this without Hermione, and this approach, which enabled me to think critically about the relations between "western traditions" and Caribbean culture, has been crucial to my approach to sociology and Caribbean studies ever since.

In my evening class in 1968 I was younger than my students, and that's something that has not happened to me since then. They were exciting times, to say the least. Soon after the new academic year began, all teaching came to a halt during what became known as the "Rodney Crisis." Teaching ceased in the classrooms, but for most of us this was an extraordinary learning experience, never to be forgotten. The UWI may not have been quite the hotbed of radicalism that the Jamaican government and Morris Cargill seemed to think it was, but it was certainly a hotbed of regionalism. Just six years after the collapse of the Federation and the independence of Jamaica, the university's organization, ideology and personnel still reflected the federal aspirations. Alongside the many outstanding Jamaicans at Mona, led by Sir Philip Sherlock, were West Indians from all over the Caribbean, among them Roy Augier, Lloyd Braithwaite, Kamau Brathwaite, Monica Brown, Steve De Castro, Elsa Goveia, Eddie Greene, Keith Laurence, Vaughn Lewis, Woodville Marshall, Alister McIntyre, Kenneth Ramchand, George Roberts, Walter Rodney, Dunbar Steele, Clive Thomas, and Hermione and Herman McKenzie. This outstanding group of intellectuals and teachers were working in a highly politicized region when the British colonies were becoming independent and during the early years of the Cuban Revolution.

The circumstances of the time led us to explore problems of development in a series of concentric circles, from Jamaica to the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean and the newly-created CARIFTA, and then to Cuba and the wider Third World, as it was then called. Following the change of leadership of the PNP in 1969, a revival of regionalism was reflected in the publication of Michael Manley's essay, "Overcoming Insularity in Jamaica,"<sup>2</sup> in 1970. Few of UWI's intellectuals would have disagreed with Manley when he asserted not only that "regionalism is important to Jamaican development" but also that "the ability of the Caribbean to achieve progress goes beyond regionalism to the necessity for the developing world as a whole to evolve a common strategy with regard to its economic dealings with the metropolitan nations." This is at least as urgent today as it was 35 years ago.

Many of the UWI's intellectuals were in fact at the forefront of advocating regional economic integration in the 1960s and they understood this imperative within a global framework of political economy, most widely described at that time in terms of dependency theory. The dependency perspective, which Hermione and I used to teach, viewed development from a Third World viewpoint, challenging the intellectual hegemony of

the modernization perspective. It arose in the 1960s in response to the bankruptcy of the programme of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and a crisis in orthodox Marxism in Latin America. Some of the faculty and students of the UWI at that time became supporters of Manley's efforts in the 1970s to develop a third path of development between the models of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

What did development mean in the 1960s? At that time, the newly independent and soon-to-be independent countries of the Caribbean shared a series of problems with other countries in the region and the rest of the Third World. Plagued by widespread unemployment and underemployment, inflation and currency devaluation, declining terms of trade and increasing debts, many governments were challenged by persistent social problems and popular protests. While the United States urged that the Puerto Rican model of dependent capitalist development should be adopted in countries like Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Guyana, some academic theoreticians, such as Andre Gunder Frank, argued that the unequal economic relations established during the colonial period persisted long after political independence and that exploitation by the capitalist world perpetuated, and even deepened, underdevelopment. The alternative, it was suggested, was a revolutionary break with the capitalist world and a socialist strategy of development that would respond more directly to the basic needs of the poor majority. One of the important contributions of the dependency perspective, which arose as a critical response to modernization theory, was to draw attention to the importance of the *history* and the *structure* of underdeveloped economies in relation to the development of the capitalist world and of their connections to contemporary inequalities and social problems.

There was a lively debate in the 1960s between the advocates of the Puerto Rican model of development, often referred to as "Industrialization by Invitation," and those who advocated a more self-reliant and indigenous strategy. A group of young economists at the UWI, including George Beckford, Lloyd Best, Havelock Brewster, Norman Girvan, Owen Jefferson and Clive Thomas, led this debate, which took place in the classrooms and in *Social and Economic Studies*, and also in the New World Group and its quarterly journal. Their work, combined with that of historians and sociologists, such as Elsa Goveia and Orlando Patterson, generated a powerful critique of the "plantation system" as a particular kind of economy and society that had developed in relation to the emerging capitalist world through the double oppression of slavery and colonialism. The New World Group was intellectually impressive, but it remained a middle-class discussion group without any substantial connections with working-class organizations. When Walter Rodney attracted large audiences for his lectures on African history and Black Power off campus among poor Rastafarians, as well as among middle-class students on campus, he was expelled from Jamaica. In a society that was still steeped in prejudices and biases inherited from the colonial era, almost any social criticism seemed to be revolutionary. This was the context in which Hermione and I collaborated in teaching the course Social Aspects of Economic and Political Development.

While the most prominent and public debates concerned economic strategies and political ideologies, the discussion of social development could not be reduced to these and our course raised issues of cultural and institutional development in relation to the challenges facing post-colonial societies. When I try to recall what we taught, I think it was a good course for its time, but I'm quite sure we would not teach the same course were we to do it today. What has changed in the sociology of development since the 1960s? To answer this question would require an entire lecture, so I will limit myself to four comments about the dependency perspective, environmental considerations, women, and non-government organizations (NGOs).

First, the dependency perspective has been widely criticized, among other things for over-emphasizing external and economic relations to the neglect of internal and social factors, and for being unable to account for a kind of development that takes place within conditions of dependence. Be that as it may, when we see the awful social consequences of the debt crisis and structural adjustment programs all around us, and of the pressures induced by neo-liberal trade policies to reduce production costs to the lowest common denominator, then I think the dependency perspective, suitably revised to include internal and socio-political factors as well as external economic factors, is still useful. While we should not claim that all contemporary problems are caused by colonialism and external economic factors, it would be absurd to ignore the far-reaching consequences of persistent dependency in many societies.

Second, we said very little about the environment in the 1960s, and it would be impossible today to teach the sociology of development without serious consideration of the environmental consequences of development and the question of sustainability. Even today, not enough attention is given to strategies of sustainable development, both in the local and the global context. Just consider these facts: in the past 20 years the world's population has grown by 35 percent, energy use by 40 percent, and automobile production by 45 percent. If the rest of the world were to consume energy and use automobiles at the rates of the developed regions of north America, western Europe and Japan, all the known reserves of oil would become exhausted and we would all choke on the resulting pollution. It has been projected that in the next 20 years worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide will increase by 60 percent, as China and other countries imitate the consumption patterns of the US. In terms of the consumption of energy, China has already overtaken Japan and is now second only to the United States. An obvious but difficult question urgently needs to be raised: are the "over-developed" regions of the world a suitable model, or should an alternative set of priorities and values be devised that are compatible with sustainable development in the world as a whole?

Third, I don't remember Hermione and I teaching much about gender in relation to development in the 1960s. If we had done so, of course, we would have been ahead of the wave. We did teach about family structures, and socialization, and the sexual division of labour, but this was before we had the benefit of insights of feminist theory, so I suspect that what we were saying about women and gender was quite limited. But Hermione soon became a pioneer in this field. She wrote the introduction to an early publication on women in the Caribbean, in *Savacou* in 1977, and she participated in the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) that was initiated in 1979. This was followed by a steady flow of publications about women, and by the creation of the Centre for Gender and Development. There could be no excuse now for omitting a gendered perspective in a sociology of development course.

Others who are here today, and who are more qualified than me to talk about the subject, will discuss Hermione's work on gender and social policy. I will give just one example of her work in this field, which exemplifies the importance of understanding the dynamics of social development. When she analyzed a survey of women's educational experience, she found that "the instrumental uses of education, such as developing cognitive skills and earning a living, rank below the value for personal development and socialization into female roles."<sup>3</sup> She found that younger women were generally better educated but also less satisfied, and that the better educated were often frustrated that their education did not help them as a practical preparation for adult life. Many women wanted their education to be more effective in helping them earn a livelihood but, Hermione found, their aspirations were generally along the "conventional paths" of educational subjects and jobs that are traditional for women. Hermione's

participation in the UWT's Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) exemplifies her commitment to applying sociological research to important questions of social development policies.

If one of the chief areas that has changed in perspectives on development since the 1960s is the focus on women, another has been the enormous growth in the number and variety of NGOs, including local development organizations, community action groups, and other forms of participatory development, and any course on the sociology of development should reflect this. Women have become increasingly involved as social actors in a wide variety of such organizations. Some of these involve women in what may be called traditional roles involving care for the young, the infirm, and the elderly, while others, like *Sistren* in Jamaica, focus more on women's issues, often challenging restrictions on women. Many NGOs fill a vacuum, responding to social needs that governmental or business organizations are not meeting, and to some extent they may constitute a sort of grassroots social movement, even if they are uncoordinated. The range of NGOs is vast, including income-generating and marketing/consumer projects, health and nutrition campaigns, popular education and research groups, and they are frequently involved, whether explicitly or otherwise, in the development of community consciousness and self-empowerment. Two examples with which I am familiar are in Belize: SPEAR (the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research) that was founded in 1969 and revived in 1987, and the BCVI (Belize Council for the Visually Impaired) that began in 1981 as a committee of the Belize Red Cross and became an independent organization in 1987. They continue to flourish and to do good work.

NGOs that have a more regional scope include academic organizations like the Association of Caribbean Historians (ACH), which began meeting in 1969, and the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA), which was founded in 1974. Other regional NGOs are the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), associations of women and of media workers, and the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples (COIP). They bring together people of the Caribbean who, despite their different languages and nationalities, share common concerns and who feel that, as Caribbean people, they can work better together than they can separately. Since we taught our course in the 1960s, in other words, there has been a rapid growth of organizations that often promote aspects of development and regionalism in practical ways.

This brings me to a point concerning the relation between regionalism, development, and the emergence of a Caribbean consciousness, or Caribbean civilization. The history of regional cooperation in the English-speaking Caribbean was often characterized by attempts by the British government to impose some kind of union from above, but there were also some important initiatives from below. One of these emerged from the labour movement in the British West Indian colonies in the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in the creation of the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC) in Barbados in 1945. Although it was essentially a confederation of trade unions from the British colonies, it did include representatives from Suriname and Aruba, and efforts were made later to include representation from trade unions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe and Martinique. The CLC had a great potential but it became a victim of the Cold War, disintegrating under intense pressure from US and British trade union organizations and governments, often aided and abetted by West Indian leaders who put their own ambitions above the working-class goals and regional emphasis of the CLC. Its successor, the Caribbean Area Division of the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (CADORIT), was launched in June 1952, at the height of McCarthyism in the USA, as a subsidiary of the US-dominated International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, in order to combat and replace the CLC. The new trade union federation was

more comprehensively regional in its affiliations than the CLC, but it was considerably less independent as its major financial sponsor was the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL). I think that the collapse of the CLC is an important example of a lost opportunity, because it was an early organization with a grassroots base and regional aspirations that, had it thrived, could have contributed to greater regional consciousness and development through the years of the Federation and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

Many of these NGOs are important, although they generally focus on a single issue or activity and are rarely related to a broadly conceived social movement, such as the labour movement. The most important regional organization is CARICOM, which replaced CARIFTA in 1973. It links over 13 million people in 15 countries in an effort to achieve economic cooperation and greater coordination of services, such as health and education, and foreign policy. Recent events in Haiti are a test of CARICOM's coherence and resolve. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) is a more inclusive regional organization, consisting of 25 members, including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the Central American states, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela, as well as the members of CARICOM. Formed in 1994, this organization has yet to achieve much, but it does represent a continuing aspiration towards greater regional cooperation, if not regional unity.

Regionalism in the Caribbean is far more than the sum of these organizations, however. Regionalism is apparent also in the parallel and converging intellectual and cultural traditions of the Caribbean, traditions that reflect, and reflect on, the common historical experiences that are shared, more or less, by the people of all Caribbean societies. These historical commonalities, Sidney Mintz says, "consist largely of parallels of economic and social structure and organization, the consequence of lengthy and rather rigid colonial rule."<sup>5</sup> My recently published anthology, *The Birth of Caribbean Civilization: A Century of Ideas about Culture and Identity, Nation and Society*<sup>6</sup>, includes works by 45 Caribbean intellectuals from the Hispanophone, Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean, between Antenor Firmin, J.J. Thomas and Jose Marti in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and George Lamming, Edouard Glissant and Antonio Benitez-Rojo in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these intellectuals wrote about the political, cultural and psychological impact of colonialism, slavery and racism. Another broad theme concerns the development of a distinctive creole culture and society out of the synthesis of elements from various sources, primarily, but not exclusively, African and European. A third theme, which contains something of the first two but with a different emphasis, is concerned with the differences and relations between the Caribbean, which is seen as the inside or "us," and the non-Caribbean, seen as the outside or "them." These intellectuals, and many others not included in the anthology, contribute to the continuing debate about Caribbean culture, society and identity, nationalism and regionalism, in ways that, deliberately or not, are shaping a distinctive Caribbean civilization, with an increasing consciousness of itself.

As I worked on compiling and editing the anthology I thought about what is distinctive about this Caribbean civilization, about its place in world history, and about some of the things it contributes to the world. It is a truism, but an important one, to say that our modern world began on 12 October 1492. The flash point was a small island in the Bahamas. A new civilization, which grew within and bore many key features of our modern world, developed in the Caribbean in the five centuries after 1492. The Caribbean, therefore, should be seen as the original centre and crucible of our modern world, but it is more often seen as peripheral.

The global process of social and cultural change that was initiated in the Caribbean in 1492 is without precedent. What was important was that a new and, for the first time, a

truly global social system developed, in which people, goods and ideas circulated, and through this movement and exchange there arose new cultures and the first possibility that humankind could recognize itself as an inclusive species. From 1492, at an accelerating pace, the Caribbean and then the rest of the Americas became integrated with Europe, Africa and Asia in a single system in which changes in any part could be understood only with reference to the whole. This fact, and not the idea that Columbus discovered a New World, is the reason why 1492 is so important in world history. It was a watershed, in the sense that what came after was of a different order, qualitatively different, from what had previously existed. Some people claim that “globalization” is a new phenomenon, but this is clearly not so. The process of globalization may be analyzed in terms of its various phases, and it exhibits novel features from time to time, but it has been the central process of world history for over five centuries.

The history of the Caribbean since 1492 has generally been written from a Eurocentric, and more recently a “US-centric,” viewpoint in which its importance, or its supposed insignificance, is seen only in terms of its contributions or problems in relation to European and Euro-American history. Thus, beginning with the claim of the “discovery of the Americas,” this viewpoint emphasizes the narrative of European expansion, colonization and rivalry, culminating in the “American century” that began when the United States invaded Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898, a long century of US hegemony that shows no sign of ending in the near future. From this viewpoint, the ownership and value of each colony has meaning only in so far as it contributes to the economic and strategic worth of the metropolitan power. Spain led the establishment of European settlements in the Caribbean but, this viewpoint emphasizes, the importance of the region declined with Spanish conquests on the mainland. It became important again only after northern European powers developed the Lesser Antilles in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and development meant the mass production of plantation commodities for export to metropolitan markets. The Caribbean, seen in this light, was little more than a transit region between Spain and its American empire, and then a valuable production zone of the competing French, British and Dutch empires. Seen chiefly as an area over which the principal European powers fought numerous wars, it later became an “American Mediterranean” which was important primarily for its strategic value in relation to access to the Panama Canal.

Although these are important facts of Caribbean history, they do not amount to an adequate, much less the only, interpretation of the Caribbean. Certainly, the evolution of Caribbean societies and cultures after 1492 has to be seen in relation to the region’s many connections with other parts of the world, which must include Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as Europe and Anglo-America. However, to perceive the Caribbean from a Euro- or US-centric viewpoint emphasizes only a narrow range of events and institutions, and it also assumes the centrality of values that prevail in Europe and the US, values that make a priority of wealth and power. The Caribbean, from that viewpoint, was important to the degree that it contributed to the development of the North Atlantic system, but then it became quite insignificant, either poor like Haiti and Guyana, or anachronistic like Cuba and Puerto Rico, the last communist state and the largest colony, respectively, in the western hemisphere. Most people outside the Caribbean think of it, if they think of it at all, largely as a tourist paradise where the relatively rich people of Europe and North America may take a refreshing break from the serious and stressful business of their lives.

It seems obvious that the structure and direction that the process of development has taken over the last five centuries in the Caribbean has been largely shaped by the assumptions and values of this Euro- and US-centric perspective. But is this obvious

simply because our conception of what constitutes development – economic, political and social development – is shaped by these hegemonic assumptions and values? The ideology of the world capitalist system, which is now dominated by the USA, claims that its particular institutions and values are universal, when this clearly not the case, and that private enterprise and free markets are to everyone's benefit, and are intrinsically linked to freedom, equality and democracy, when this is also not the case. In fact, the origins of capitalism were inextricably linked to a variety of forms of coerced labour, including slavery, to colonial conquest and oppression, and the growth of racist ideologies. Every capitalist society is structured in terms of more or less rigid social hierarchies based on distinctions of gender, race and class, and these hierarchies and the ideologies that rationalize them are very resistant to change. While none of this is news to sociologists in the Caribbean, the intellectual problems to which it gives rise in the sociology of development seem to be beyond resolution at this time. Hermione and I were certainly aware of these problems in the late 1960s when we tried to teach our course with a critical view of the sociological tradition.

While the Euro- and US-centric viewpoint condemns the Caribbean to a permanently peripheral role in world affairs, there is another perspective in which the region is shown to be a crucible of new cultures and intellectual trends that anticipate and have the potential of influencing others way beyond the Caribbean itself. From this point of view, the Caribbean has been and continues to be important in some of the principal developments in world social and cultural history, and Caribbean people may be seen, and should be understood, to occupy a central place in the emergence of "modernity." Indeed, I argue that we cannot really understand the nature of what is called "modern Western culture" without recognizing the centrality of the Caribbean in its history, although this centrality is almost always denied.

The distinctive history of the Caribbean has given rise to a civilization that is at once an integral part of "Western" cultural history and yet remains distinct from what is generally conceived as "Western Civilization." The imagined community of "the West" defines itself as a civilization with ancient roots that largely exclude what it has chosen to lump together as "non-Western." In most surveys of Western Civilization the history of important influences from African, Arab and Asian cultures has been suppressed, as has Europe's relationship with the Caribbean. The grand narrative of Western Civilization is one of self-genesis, excluding its historical relationships with the Caribbean and other "non-Western" regions. Most modern social theory, since its origins in 19th century Europe, uses "non-Western" cultures as counterfoils for "Western modernity," in a dualistic distinction between traditional (implying backward) and modern societies, and the Caribbean is lumped in with the former despite the fact that it has been intimately connected with western European and North American societies for five centuries.

"The West," as it defines itself, emphasizes individualism, rationalism, consumerism and nationalism. Consequently, its dominant ideas, values and political culture focus on concepts such as "citizenship," the "nation state" and "free markets," and its account of history focuses on events such as the American and the French revolutions, which defined the nation state and the rights of citizens in "modern" terms, and on processes such as the Industrial Revolution, which increased efficiency and productivity. This view of "modernization" assumes that it is an irreversible process and that the present phase, globalization, is inevitable. Of course, to the extent that people come to accept this dominant view of modernization and globalization it will help to make the process inevitable because there will be less resistance to it. The critical analysis of the origins and assumptions behind the claims of Western Civilization and its offshoots,

modernization and globalization, are therefore essential in order to understand the social forces at work in our present world.

“The West” claims that its culture embodies universal truths and values, and, indeed, that these are the only universal truths and values, and therefore that its own history is *the* narrative of modernity. However, the dominant ideas, values, laws, technologies and organizations that emerged and spread between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did not develop in a social vacuum but, on the contrary, in quite specific social circumstances. Western nations, led first by Spain and Portugal, then by the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom, and now by the United States, have defined their particular religions, philosophies, and economic and political systems as embodying transcendental values and universal laws, and it became “the white man’s burden” to impose these on people throughout the world. Europeans, and also people of European descent and people who accepted Europeans’ claims to superiority, imposed their particular concept of human progress, and even their definition of who was human, in ethnocentric and self-serving ways. Those who possessed power used that power to write their own version of history and to manipulate others to accept their cultural priorities and social systems. The concept of the “humanities,” George Lamming points out, “has a history that is inseparable from the history of Western imperialism from the fifteenth century to the present.”<sup>7</sup> As one would expect, when this tradition is articulated in academic circles or imposed by political power, the culture of “The West” occupies the centre of the stage.

The West’s narrative of modernity, therefore, is not only partial but also totalitarian because it condemns all other narratives and perspectives to the status of inferiority. This is true of US views of economics and politics today as it was true of British and French philosophies in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and of Spanish and Portuguese religion in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ironically, they all smell of fundamentalism, that is, the conviction that there is an absolute truth, to which they alone have access, even when such dogmas are understood to be antithetical to modernity. Any partial view is incapable of understanding the whole, and therefore even of really understanding itself, and so it suffers from illusions even while it propagates these illusions as universal truths and eternal verities. Eurocentric, and now US-centric, interpretations of the world’s history and cultures are hegemonic in the way they seek to impose their views, values and agendas on all others, while refusing to acknowledge, and much less to understand, the contributions of others to their own. The closed minds that reflect the illusions of cultural and racial superiority refuse to contemplate alternatives because the idea that they have learned, or that they may learn in the future, from “others” is contrary to their view of themselves. Human progress has become defined largely in terms of Western Civilization and so “Western” achievements are triumphantly evaluated as superior to all others and as central to human history. When some other region or culture has contributed to this development that contribution is suppressed or appropriated in order that the fiction of European superiority and self-genesis may be maintained intact. The current revival of old-fashioned Western ideas about “the clash of civilizations” by prominent academics such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington are based on dogmatic assumptions about the superiority of Western civilization. And, of course, it would be shocking for any of the supposedly inferior people to dare to criticize Western Civilization, and unthinkable that their criticisms could have any merit.

But this, precisely, is what some of the greatest Caribbean intellectuals have succeeded in doing. They succeed in criticizing Western Civilization because, like C. L. R. James, they are at one and the same time formed by the culture and yet personally excluded from it, so they are intimate with the culture and critical of it. This is why

Caribbean Civilization is distinct from and transcends Western Civilization. I will give you just one example of a Caribbean intellectual who responded critically to an important aspect of Western Civilization: the 19<sup>th</sup> century Haitian intellectual, Joseph Antenor Firmin.

When people refer to “Western Civilization” today they generally mean the community of people of European origin that spans the Atlantic, with a few remote outposts such as Australia. The civilization is conscious of itself as an essentially “white” community, its “whiteness” being defined in relation to all the “non-whites” who are either beyond the boundaries of this civilization, or are pariah minorities living within but not part of it. While many indigenous people and cultures were destroyed by European expansion and the survivors were excluded on reservations, people of African descent who played a vital role in the making of this Atlantic-based civilization were everywhere relegated to the most inferior social status within it. Racist ideology was shaped by and supported the expansion of European domination throughout the world, and it is a central feature of this civilization because it establishes the rationale for such domination. Racism, of course, has a history. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideology flourished when the end of slavery in the Americas resulted in millions of Africans and their descendants becoming legally free at the same time that European domination of the world reached its peak. The idea of a group of people of common descent or “stock” constituting a “race” developed alongside scientific systems of classification, and by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century “Western” scientists were distinguishing between “races” on the basis of measurements of their skulls as well as their skin colour. A landmark in this physical anthropology was Count de Gobineau’s *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, published in 1853-55, which proposed the superiority of the “Aryan race.” His racist doctrine was widely accepted and became linked to Social Darwinism, an application of the idea of a struggle for existence between species to social and political conflicts within the human species. These ideologies were vital to the maintenance of European world domination and so were absolutely central to Western Civilization’s consciousness of itself.

Enter Joseph Antenor Firmin, who was born into a black working-class family in northern Haiti in 1850. His formal education was entirely in Haiti, at the Lycee National du Cap-Haitien and the Lycee Petion in Port-au-Prince. He was a scholar of the classical languages and civilizations of Europe and of law. He practiced law in Cap-Haitien, where he was also appointed inspector of schools and founded a newspaper. He was a diplomat in Venezuela and then, from 1883 to 1888, in Paris. In 1884 he became a member of the Societe d’anthropologie de Paris, which had been founded in 1859 by Paul Broca, a French surgeon and the leading physical anthropologist who was a supporter of polygenesis, the doctrine that each human race had a different biological origin. Firmin argued forcefully against the prevailing racist doctrines and in 1885 he published a book, *On the Equality of the Human Races: Positive Anthropology*. This is a more scientifically accurate account of racial origins and differences than that of any of his contemporaries, and was years ahead of Franz Boas, the distinguished anthropologist at Columbia University who argued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century against the fallacies of racist craniology and the claim that societies could be ranked in a developmental scale. In fact, Firmin’s critical view of racial classification, his insistence that all humans belong to a single species and his argument that there is no scientific basis for a hierarchical ranking of human races were decades ahead of his time. While polygenists sought to show that the children of different races were infertile, like mules, Firmin could point to the fecundity of mulattoes in the Caribbean as evidence of the essential unity of the human species, “with the same organic constitution, thus confirming the existence of a single blueprint.” Firmin’s book is a pioneering work of anthropology not only because it rejects

the racist ideas that predominate in Western Civilization but also because, in doing so, he defines the subject of this new discipline as the scientific and comprehensive study of the whole of humankind, inclusively and without prejudice. Unfortunately, it is symptomatic of this civilization and its pseudo-scientific study of humankind that Firmin's book was ignored while de Gobineau's racist tract was translated into English and German and published in many editions, including five German editions between 1910 and 1940.

This is what Firmin wrote in 1885:

Whatever transformations the different human groups have undergone under various influences, they all retain the primordial, constitutional, imprint of the species, bearing the same intellectual and moral traits inscribed in the original common human blueprint...

To embrace the concept of the unity of the species involves, through the exercise of a great keenness of mind, rejecting all the false ideas that the existence of diverse races might inspire and seeing, instead, only the essential characteristics that make of all human beings a community of beings capable of understanding one another and of joining their individual destinies into a common destiny. That destiny is civilization, that is, the highest level of physical, moral, and intellectual achievement of the species...

The notion of a hierarchy of the human races, one of the doctrinal inventions of modern times or, rather, of the present century, will be seen some day as one of the greatest proofs of the imperfection of the human mind and of the imperfection, in particular, of the arrogant race that made it into a scientific doctrine...

The races are equal; they are all capable of rising to the most noble virtues, of reaching the highest intellectual development; they are equally capable of falling into a state of total degeneration... [A]n invisible chain links all the members of humanity in a common circle. It seems that in order to prosper and grow human beings must take an interest in one another's progress and happiness and cultivate those altruistic sentiments which are the greatest achievement of the human heart and mind.

The doctrine of the equality of the human races, which consecrates these rational ideas, thus becomes a regenerative doctrine, an eminently salutary doctrine for the harmonious development of the species.<sup>8</sup>

Two hundred years ago Haiti became the first independent and *free* nation in this hemisphere. Firmin was proud of his nation's place in the history of the Americas and of the achievements of many Haitians in literature, law, sociology, medicine, agronomy, mathematics and political economy. He was an early Pan-Africanist who participated in the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, and a friend of Jose Marti and Ramon Betances, the Cuban and Puerto Rican nationalists. Firmin advocated Pan-Caribbeanism, which he thought should include regional economic development and a federal system of government. He died in St. Thomas in 1911. His pioneering anthropological work was almost unknown outside Haiti until 2000 when it was published in an English translation. The reason for this neglect is obvious, and tragic. His inclusive, egalitarian and altruistic conception of humanity not only refutes the exclusive, hierarchical and exploitative conception of humanity that predominates in Western Civilization, but it also promotes a consciousness of our species that provides the necessary basis for what he calls our "common destiny," the development of a new civilization that is, for

the first time, a civilization of humankind. I believe it is no accident that this radical and modern conception of our species and this vision of a possible new civilization began here in the Caribbean.

Stuart Hall and others have pointed out that there is a connection between the character of Caribbean cultures and identities and the diaspora experience. The connection results from what Fernando Ortiz calls the “transculturation” between people of overlapping diasporas. Two contradictory tendencies are apparent in this cultural process: on the one hand, the thrust of globalization toward homogenization and assimilation based on the domination of some groups over others, and on the other hand the reassertion of localism and particularism, often in the form of adherence to cultural traditions, that is a resistant response of the oppressed. The dialectic between these tendencies shapes the evolving creole cultures of Caribbean civilization in which, as Hall puts it, people are “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference,”<sup>9</sup> and which are emblematic of our modern world. It has taken me many years to reach this understanding, and my starting point was here, working with Hermione, between 1968 and 1971, and I am truly grateful to her.

I will conclude with some tentative remarks, which are offered with the appropriate respect of a visitor to his generous hosts, about the role of the UWI in this Caribbean civilization. You all know, better than me, the huge contributions that this institution makes around the region in a wide variety of fields, including medicine, scientific research, education, and cultural and continuing studies. I cannot even catalogue, much less evaluate, all these achievements, so I will limit myself to making one observation. Since 1968, when I first came here, I have observed two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the UWI brings together people from many countries in the region between Belize and Guyana, in an institution that teaches West Indian history and West Indian literature across national boundaries. Among the UWI’s founders, faculty and students, as I noted earlier, are many transnationals, like Hermione, who are committed regionalists. Moreover, the UWI, unlike the West Indies cricket team which has its ups and downs, is a consistently excellent institution with high academic standards and an active research agenda that contributes to regional knowledge, culture and development.

On the other hand, the university seems to be less rather than more regional now than it was in the 1960s. Many of the faculty I mentioned earlier, including Lloyd Braithwaite, Keith Laurence, Woodville Marshall, Kenneth Ramchand and Clive Thomas, returned to their countries of origin, as did Lloyd Best, James Millette, and Walter Rodney. Each of the three principal campuses of the UWI, as well as the University of Guyana, took on a more national character, particularly in the student body. In some ways, too, the UWI is still quite parochial in the sense that its emphasis in curriculum and research is largely on the minority of the Caribbean, some 16 percent of the total population of the region, that resides in the former British colonies. Many English-speaking West Indians talk of “the Caribbean” when they are referring only to this minority, and few have much extended contact or deep knowledge of the other 84 percent of the region. I have heard an educated West Indian claim, for example, that cricket unites the people of the Caribbean, when it may be more accurate to say that the adherence of a minority to cricket separates them from those Caribbean people who play baseball. The reason why the regionalism of the UWI remains constrained in this way is the legacy of the colonial heritage and the resultant “fragmented nationalism,”<sup>10</sup> as Franklin Knight calls it, but that is not a good reason in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is no good reason why West Indian intellectuals who are familiar with the work of Elsa Goveia, Merle Hodge and Michelle Cliff, for example, should not also be familiar with the work of Esmeralda Santiago, Maryse Conde and Edwidge Danticat. The regionalism

of the UWI, in other words, is still quite limited when seen in the entire Caribbean context.

C.L.R. James, one of the Caribbean's foremost intellectuals, said in 1977 that it is "clear that the birth of a nation is in process."<sup>11</sup> He was referring, with his characteristically broad vision, to the unity of the Caribbean experience, not to a political unity, which remains far beyond reach. While few people would claim that a pan-Caribbean nation, in the sense of a nation-state, is in the process of being born, it is clear that the common experience, and often the activities and organizations, of Caribbean people have already given rise to the consciousness and expression of a distinctive civilization, a culture and society unlike any other, which reflects its unique history in its own way, through its social and political ideas, its institutions, literature, music and art, and, of course, its food.

Hermione McKenzie helped me become aware of this Caribbean civilization and to understand its importance in the wider world, as I am sure she has helped thousands of students at the UWI over the years she has contributed to this distinguished institution. Hermione's ideas and critical thinking, her energy and enthusiasm, her generosity and warmth, helped me when I most needed help, as she welcomed me, ignorant expatriate and novice that I was, as a colleague and then a friend. And I still remember with great pleasure the amazing feasts of roast suckling pig in the McKenzies' yard, although I am now a vegetarian.

I am privileged to have been able to participate in this conference where we are joined to honour our dear friend and colleague. I know that you all join me in praising Hermione for her immense contributions to the Department, the University and the region, and in wishing Hermione and Herman good health and happiness in the coming years.

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### Notes

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# Petticoat and Coat-tails: The Dialectic of Educational Attainment and Socio-economic, Political Autonomy and Control in the Caribbean

Barbara Bailey

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, data are used to illustrate that in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, higher education is now predominately a female activity, but with the traditional sex segregation of the curriculum remaining fairly intact. It is posited that one factor accounting for patterns at the tertiary level is that they mirror those at the upper secondary level. It is further suggested that the global feminist agenda coupled is creating pressure for change in both the ideological and material dimensions of prevailing gender systems and thereby opening new opportunities for women's economic and political participation. In this regard, education is presented as the means for achieving these ends.

Finally, data will be presented to show that in spite of the challenges of the women's movement and other global changes the project of patriarchy has not been significantly disrupted.

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## Introduction

In this paper four issues germane to the topic are addressed: the historical role of education in gender and class coding; the increasing and almost universal contemporary phenomenon of the feminization of higher education; possible explanations of the shift from male to female advantage at this level of Caribbean education systems; the dialectic of the overall higher and better educational attainment by Caribbean females but continuing male hegemony in economic and political spheres of Caribbean life; and an indicative policy option to promote the project of gender equality and social justice in the Caribbean region.

## Differentiating role of public education

Drawing on the earlier analysis of the relationship between schools and the economy by Bowles and Gintis, Nicholson (1994)<sup>1</sup> takes the analysis a step further and elaborates on the relationship between schooling, the economy and the family in modern capitalist

societies. She contends that both the school and family are structural features of modern societies that maintain sex role differentiation and the reproduction of a gendered division of labour.

The development of public education as a formal institution had its roots in the process of industrialisation and the

...removal of labour from the interior of the household to the exterior of the public world. What has emerged with industrialisation is not only the realm of "society" but also, in part in opposition, the realm of the "private"... What is important to stress in the growing demarcation between the realms of privacy and subjectivity enclosed within home and family and the external world of society is that the realms became in an important sense gender coded....

In sum by the 19<sup>th</sup> century there existed... a strong separation between the realm of the family and home judged women's sphere and the external world of "society" including business and politics, the realm of men.

(Nicholson, 1994:75, 76, 77)

This author contends that these two realms, the private and the public, were governed by different values and practices and as a result the family became insufficient as a socializing agent. The school then became the conduit for socializing young people, primarily young boys, out of the family and into the public realm whereas schooling was seen as less important for the preparation of females for the realm of home and family.

The relationship between schooling and the economy does not only involve the reproduction of gender codes appropriate to the private/public dichotomy but is regarded as a major site for the allocation of roles and functions and the inculcation of skills necessary for future occupations consistent with a gender coded division of labour. Functionalists<sup>2</sup> argue that, in this regard, schools operate on the basis of a meritocratic principle rather than on ascription and all individuals therefore have an equal opportunity to succeed. Other educational sociologists, however, contend that schooling fails to offer the same opportunities to lower social classes as it does to higher social classes.<sup>3</sup>

It is now recognized that the intersection of both sex and class hierarchies in schools determines access to educational resources and to curriculum options and produces hegemonic and subordinated groups socialized into different roles and functions associated with the private and/or public domains and ultimately confers different life chances beyond school. These ends are achieved through the structural organization of schooling and selection processes which sort and allocate students to different types of schools offering different curricula and which are differently endowed financially, physically and sometimes in terms of their human resource.

Hamilton (1997)<sup>4</sup> traces the availability and suitability of educational opportunities for Jamaican female students over the period 1655 to the 1960s. The situation she outlines of early provision of post-primary formal education being mainly for males with girls being admitted at a later stage would be typical of other British colonies in the Caribbean as would the provision of elementary education for both boys and girls in the post-emancipation period. Her account points to the fact that from the outset education was divided along class and gender lines in terms of a two-tiered system of grammar and elementary schools differing in structure, administration and financing and offering a differentiated curriculum for boys and girls (see Table 1).

From the outset, therefore, gender and political economy played an important role in access to formal education in the Caribbean while the sex-segregation of the curriculum ensured socialisation into sex-linked roles and functions appropriate for the

distinction between private and public domains. The consequences of the education of girls and boys from different social strata are self-evident. Lower class girls were prepared to be mothers or paid servants in the homes of upper class homes while lower class boys were prepared for manual labour on the plantations. Middle class girls were prepared to be good wives, clerical workers and to enter the teaching profession while boys from this social stratum were prepared for commerce and politics, among other things. From inception, gender and class have therefore been basic organising hierarchies in relation to educational provision and participation in the English-speaking Caribbean and have regulated the distribution of both material and symbolic power.

**Table 1: The Early Years: Sex-Segregation of the Curriculum**

18th Century	19th Century	20th Century
<p><b>Pre-emancipation:</b> mainly for white boys; those of means sent to mother country, private tutors, free schools set up from bequests. Late 18th century girls admitted but with a modified curriculum.</p>	<p><b>Post-emancipation:</b>  <i>Elementary system:</i> established based on 3 Rs and Religious Education with focus on Agriculture and industrial instruction for boys and sewing and domestic science for girls.  <i>Secondary system:</i> classical education for boys and domestic and commercial training for girls.</p>	<p><i>Elementary:</i> agriculture for both sexes, domestic science and child welfare for girls;  <i>Secondary:</i> domestic and commercial arts, and some sciences (biology and health science) for girls and the other sciences (chemistry, physics) for boys.  <i>UWI:</i> at first largely male in all faculties and eventually female enrolment but with women being the majority in arts based faculties with men predominately in science based faculties.</p>

Source: Hamilton, Marlene, 1997

### Feminisation of contemporary higher education

A number of English-speaking Caribbean countries gained independence during the 1960s and embarked on successive educational reforms during the second half of the 20th century aimed at modifying the elitist nature of secondary education and increasing opportunities for both working class boys and girls to benefit from education at that level.

Reforms also created increased opportunity for tertiary level education on the basis of both class and sex.

The University of the West Indies (UWI) was established in 1948 to allow a larger pool of persons to benefit from higher education and so support the growth and development of Caribbean societies. A case study of the UWI shows that it remained predominately a male-biased institution up until the 1980s and parity in enrolment was not evident until the 1982/83 academic year, three and half decades after its establishment. In that year, the Gender Parity Index (GPI), that is, the ratio of females to males, was 1.03 moving from 0.4 in 1948/49. Since 1982/83 the GPI has steadily increased indicating the widening gap in the female to male enrolment ratio (See Table 2 and Figure 1). In the 2003/04 academic year the GPI had moved to 1.9 indicating an almost 2:1 female to male ratio.

**Table 2: Male/female patterns of enrolment at UWI: 1948-2004**

Year	Male	Female	GPI
1948/49*	23	10	0.4
1958/59*	391	231	0.6
1968/69*	2657	1559	0.6
1978/79*	4485	4046	0.9
1982/83*	4704	4869	1.03
1988/89	5336	6560	1.2
1998/99	6894	12451	1.8
2003/04	7708	14755	1.9

Source: \*Hamilton, Marlene, 1997  
UWI Official Statistics 1988/89, 1998/99, 2003/04

**Figure 1: GPIs, UWI overall enrolment 1948-2004**

The shift in higher education from serving a predominately male to female clientele is not only a Caribbean phenomenon. Data on gross enrolment ratios taken from the 2003 Human Development Report<sup>5</sup> indicate that in both developed and developing countries the trend of higher female participation at this level is evident. Forty-one (41) of forty-seven (47) that is, 87 per cent of developed countries for which data were available, classified in the high development group, had gross enrolment ratios of females to males at the tertiary level which favoured females.

Enrolment ratios also favoured females in thirty (30) of fifty-eight (58), that is 52 per cent of countries classified as having medium development, while in the 25 countries with low development for which data were available ratios favoured males in all cases. Overall 55 per cent of the reported countries registered higher female to male enrolment at that level (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Universal feminization of higher education**

Level of Human Development	No. of Countries	No. with F Advantage	No. with M Advantage
High	47	41 (87%)	6 (13%)
Medium	58	30 (52%)	28 (48%)
Low	25	-	25 (100%)
Overall	130	71 (55%)	59 (45%)

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2003

Figures extracted from the Human Development Report are consistent with those presented in the EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2003/04<sup>6</sup> which indicated that female tertiary students outnumbered males in 59 per cent of all countries reported on. Females are poorly represented in Sub-Saharan Africa, with wide variations in Arab States while in Asia and the Pacific, female Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is less than two-thirds of the male GER. The report states that in Latin America and the Caribbean, female rates are generally higher than male rates while in almost all countries of North America and Europe females rates distinctly exceed males rates and often substantially so.

The numerical dominance of females in higher education tends to obfuscate a continuing discernible sex-linked pattern of participation in various fields of study at this level. An analysis of undergraduate and graduate full-time and part-time enrolment by field of study at the UWI for 2002/03 academic year shows that although GPIs favour females in all Faculties except Engineering, in keeping with historical sex-linked trends, males are clustered in the science-based faculties (Medical Sciences, Agriculture and Pure and Applied Sciences). In the case of PAS there is almost parity at the undergraduate level with a slight widening of the gap in favour of females at the graduate level. GPIs also indicate that the gender enrolment gap in the Education, Humanities and the Social Sciences is much wider at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level and whereas Law is a female domain at the undergraduate level, males predominate at the graduate level (See Figure 2).

### Explanations of the UWI feminization phenomenon

One obvious explanation for observed enrolment differentials and sex-linked participation patterns at the University of the West Indies is that they mirror what obtains at the upper secondary level of Caribbean education systems. Sorting and allocation of students at the secondary level determine progression to the tertiary level. GPIs for overall enrolment at Grade 11 for 2001/02 in nine Caribbean countries indicate that only in two cases, Dominica and Turks and Caicos Islands, was there male advantage. In Trinidad and Tobago there was parity in enrolment and in the remaining six countries GPIs favoured females with the widest disparity (GPI 1.55) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (See Figure 3).

The fact is that the gender gap widens at Grades 12 and 13 where only a small proportion of the Grade 11 cohort move on to advanced level studies. Ultimately, these enrolment figures need to be referenced to population statistics for the relevant age cohort to determine the extent to which these ratios reflect actual male/female advantage or simply reflect population differences. Nonetheless, what is beyond question is that, numerically, enrolment at the upper secondary level favours females.

Higher female enrolment at the upper secondary level translates into higher female entry in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean

**Figure 2: GPIs, Full/Part-time Undergraduate & Graduate UWI Registrations**

**Figure 3: GPIs, Grade 11 Enrolment in 9 Caribbean Countries (2000/01)**

Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) offered by the Caribbean Examination Council and used as the main route for normal UWI matriculation for undergraduate programmes. Data for the 2000/01, the year prior to that of the UWI data illustrated in Figure 3, for the CSEC examinations reported for nine Caribbean countries in a database<sup>7</sup> developed as one aspect of a wider project of *Gender Differentials in Caribbean Education Systems*, indicate that entry and achievement gaps for the General Proficiency Humanity and Science subjects correspond with the pattern of enrolment in these fields of study at the UWI.

CXC data were analysed using a method supplied by Gorard *et al* (1999)<sup>8</sup> who recommend that the calculation of the achievement gap on any assessment involve a preliminary analysis of the patterns of entry for boys and girls in each assessment. These authors define the 'entry gap' as the difference between the entries for girls and boys relative to the age cohort for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the secondary school leaving examination taken by British students. The result is the difference between the percentage of the entry for any assessment who are girls and the percentage of the entry for that assessment who are boys. The following formula is used for the calculation:

$$\text{Entry Gap} = (\text{GE} - \text{BE})/(\text{GE} + \text{BE}).100$$

In this formula GE equals number of girls and BE equals number of boys entered while GE+BE equals the cohort entered for the examinations.

The entry gap is then used in the calculation of the gender achievement gap, which can be determined for each level of pass or for combinations of levels, for example, Grade 3 or better, within an assessment. The 'achievement gap' is defined as the difference between the performance of boys and girls relative to the performance of all entries minus the entry gap. This is represented by the following formula:

$$\text{Achievement Gap} = (\text{GP} - \text{BP})/(\text{GP} + \text{BP}).100 - \text{EG}$$

In this formula GP equals the number of girls passing and BP the number of boys passing in a particular subject area while GP+BP equals all passes at a certain level or for a combination of levels in that subject. Negative values are in favour of boys while positive values favour girls.

When these formulae were applied to entry and performance data for seventeen countries participating in the 2001 sitting of the CSEC examinations offered by the CXC for seven Humanity subjects at the General Proficiency level, the results indicate that in all cases entry gaps were extremely wide (21.5 to 52.0) in favour of females and although there was also female advantage in performance in all subjects the gender achievement gaps were much narrower (0.2 to 10.6) (See Figure 4).

On the other hand, although entry gaps favoured females in nine of the eleven General Proficiency Science subjects, numerically the gaps were much narrower than in the case of the Humanities (4.6 to 24.1) indicative of the fact that although, overall, fewer boys than girls enter the CXC examinations, more boys opt to pursue the sciences than the humanities. Physics and Technical Drawing were male bastions with entry gaps of -17.4 and -75.8 respectively. Achievement gaps in the Sciences were also very narrow indicating that in most instances male/female performance was on par. Deviations from this were in the case of Information Technology with a gap of 8.5 in favour of females and Mathematics with a gap of -6.7 in favour of males (See Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Regional Entry and Achievement Gaps for 2002 Sitting of CXC  
General Proficiency Humanity Subjects**

**Figure 5: Regional Entry and Achievement Gaps for 2002 Sitting of CXC  
General Proficiency Science Subjects**

The distribution of the two sexes in relation to entries in the Technical Proficiency subjects stands in stark contrast to what obtains in the Humanities and Sciences. Except in the case of Information Technology, entry gaps favour males in the remaining 5 subjects and are extremely wide (-74.6 to -90.8) indicating that girls are almost totally absent from these subject areas. The few girls who enter these subjects, however, perform as well as their male counterparts as indicated by the gender achievement gap indices which are clustered around a zero value. The only exception is Basic Electrical Technology where the gap is -9.2 (See Figure 6). Qualification in these subject areas, no doubt, propels males into areas such as Engineering which remains a strong male preserve at the UWI and also to institutions such as the University of Technology with its greater emphasis on technical fields of study.

Factors accounting for the sex-linked patterns evident in subject choice at the secondary level and ultimately at the tertiary level have been frequently linked to the sex-role socialization paradigm used to explain how home and school, whether wittingly or unwittingly, are used as tools of patriarchal capitalist societies to reproduce and maintain a sexual division of labour and hierarchal relations of gender in public and private spheres.

**Figure 6: Regional entry and achievement gaps for 2002 sitting of CXC Technical Proficiency Subjects**

Research, however, shows that whereas sex-role socialization theory explains between group differences in male/female participation and performance in the range of curriculum areas, it does not adequately account for within group differences based on the interaction between gender coding of individuals and a range of other personal demographic variables including social class assignment. A study of the gender regime in two schools located in contrasting social settings carried out by Bailey (2002)<sup>9</sup> revealed evidence to support this claim. Not only were there within school differences

between males and females, based on sex stratification, but there were marked between school sex-linked differences related to social class stratification. A clear intersection of sex and social class was therefore evident so that the position and status of males and females in the social system of these schools was deemed to be a function of both sex and class assignment.

Arnot (1994)<sup>10</sup> therefore asserts that gender reproduction is inherent in and not independent of class reproduction and suggests that

If we want (therefore) to research the role of schools as one social 'site' in which the reproduction of the socio-sexual division of labour occurs, then it is necessary to be aware of the nature of these two forms of social struggle, the different stakes involved, and how such struggles are 'lived through' by individuals who negotiate terms within these power relations and who construct for themselves specific class and gender identities. (p.85)

This author claims that it is not only a sexual division of labour that results from these struggles but a socio-sexual division of labour related to both social hierarchies. Political-economic factors that frame and influence gender reproduction and male/female experiences both inside and outside of the school therefore have to be considered in any effort to identify factors that account for observed gender disparities in participation and performance at the secondary and tertiary levels of Caribbean education systems.

This leads to a discussion of a second set of explanatory factors that have contributed to the shift from male to female dominance in enrolment, not only at the University of the West Indies, but generally in Caribbean tertiary level institutions. There is some indication that the interaction between the feminist agenda for greater gender equality and concurrent impacts of globalization on the political economies of Caribbean societies are presenting a challenge to prevailing gender ideologies and gender role assignment as well as existing relations of gender in the political and economic spheres. Traditional sex-linked patterns of access to productive resources including education, jobs and political power are therefore under threat.

I wish to suggest that the international women's movement and the several associated conferences held over the last 4 decades, with their focus on critical issues facing women including the need for economic and political empowerment within a human rights framework and dismantling of male hegemony, have been 'driving forces', which have forced Governments and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to move towards strategic goals identified for women's advancement. Existing material and ideological dimensions of gender systems have also been challenged by the accelerated pace of globalization, rapid developments in information communication technologies and corresponding impacts on social, economic and political structures and systems (See Figure 7).

One area of women's lives that has been impacted is their status in capital labour markets. A United Nations Report on *The World's Women*<sup>11</sup> states that over the last two decades the differential between women's and men's economic activity rate, that is, the proportion of the working age population in the labour force, has narrowed in many regions of the world as well as within regions. In almost all regions of the world, including the Caribbean, women's economic activity increased between 1980 and 1997 while that of men decreased slightly in all regions except for the Caribbean where it remained constant.

In the Caribbean, as in other regions of the world, challenges to prevailing gender ideology have resulted in women taking greater control for their sexuality and

**Figure 7: Impacts of Driving and Restraining Forces on Situation of Women**

reproductive health as reflected in reduced fertility rates, thus expanding their capacity to grasp opportunities for education and employment. Data supplied in the 2002 Human Development Report<sup>12</sup> show that in eight Caribbean countries for which data were available, fertility rates declined dramatically in all except Haiti between 1995 to 2000 compared with 1970–1975 (See Figure 8). Over the same approximate time period (1980 to 1997), women's employment rate in the Caribbean moved from 44 to 53 per cent while that of men remained constant at 75 per cent.<sup>13</sup> It is also over this time period that enrolment at the University of the West Indies shifted from male to female advantage (See Table 2 & Figure 1).

Other global factors more favourable to the employment of women include changed attitudes toward employed women as well as establishing public policy on family and children, part-time employment, maternity benefits and parental and maternal leave. At the same time paid employment is increasingly incorporating different forms of work arrangements such as part-time and temporary employment that increase possibilities for women's involvement in capital markets (United Nations, 2000).<sup>14</sup>

In this period of flux and transition in gender systems globally, education has been promoted as the vehicle for the social, economic and political empowerment of women and as the tool for equipping them to grasp resulting opportunities and their fuller participation in the development process (Bailey, 2003).<sup>15</sup> Mitsos and Browne (1998)<sup>16</sup> concur and contend that, in recent years, the impact of the women's movement and feminism have achieved considerable success in improving the rights and raising the expectations and self-esteem of women thus contributing to girls' improved access to and achievement in school.

**Figure 8: Shifts in Fertility Rates between 1970–1975 and 1995–2000**

### **The more things change the more they remain the same**

These increased opportunities for women, however, have to be viewed against the backdrop of the resilience of patriarchal systems and structures to change and the increasing gender vulnerabilities that women face in the education and formal economic sectors which, continue to serve traditional interest and motive. Gender systems are extremely dynamic and fluid and even as driving forces are exerted to improve the rights and self-esteem of women, opposing restraining forces operate to maintain the *status quo* and ensure that the project of patriarchy is not significantly disrupted (See Figure 7).

Data related to women's positioning in Caribbean labour markets and their involvement in representational politics are two signifiers used to substantiate the claim of continued male hegemony and female subordination. Labour force participation and unemployment rates, extracted from a UNECLAC/CDCC document<sup>17</sup> for nine Caribbean countries for which data were available, show that highlight very clearly the significantly lower female labour force participation and their higher unemployment rates (See Figure 9).

Factors accounting for these differentials are discussed in a paper by Bailey and Ricketts (2003)<sup>18</sup> on gender vulnerabilities in Caribbean labour markets. In that same publication the authors point to the fact that not only do women have lower participation rates and experience higher levels of unemployment but labour market participation in the region is marked by occupational sex-segregation with females predominately positioned in the lower paying least protected job categories. Added to this, because of higher participation rates and the fact that a larger proportion of males than females work more than 40 hours per week, aggregate average wage/salary levels are also higher for males.

Transitions in labour markets which have created greater opportunity for women's participation have also at the same time undermined both the stability and quality of employment. In relation to provisions, as laid down in the four pillars of the

**Figure 9: Male/Female Labour Force Participation and Unemployment Rates, 9 Caribbean Countries**

International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda (employment, workers' rights, issues of social protection and participation in the tripartite social dialogue), women in the Caribbean are more at risk and disadvantaged than men, particularly those from the lower class strata in elementary occupations that attract a minimum wage, even as their proportion in the top occupational category has now surpassed that of men (Bailey & Ricketts, 2003).<sup>19</sup>

Although there has been no decline in the regional rate of male participation in Caribbean labour markets, transitions in ideologies that govern gender systems and in global economies have also impacted men. Mitoš & Browne (1998), in relation to the British context, advance the view that one of the reasons for the underachievement of some boys in school is that the decline in some traditional areas of men's work resulting in many working-class boys experiencing an identity crisis since it has become more difficult to see their future as breadwinners for their families: a strongly entrenched dimension of accepted masculine identity. These boys therefore lack motivation and see little point in trying hard at school if it is unlikely to result in the sort of job they would be seeking.

Branche (1998)<sup>20</sup> in discussing conflicts that arise for 14 to 16 year old males in inner-cities of two Caribbean countries, points to environmental influence on producing a restricted norm of masculinity that places great emphasis on the development of the 'tough man' who can hold his own against all circumstances.

A factor associated with schooling and male drop-out and underachievement and subsequent economic survival is the fact that this macho type masculinity is fostered through contact with the street at an early age. In his research Branche found that

...the street influences are particularly telling in the transitional period to adulthood, especially when the young male had not performed particularly well in school and had very few job or vocational options. In such circumstances the street provides the basis for identity... The street is

trouble but the street is where a man is made, the street is a dead-end but the street offers ways of hustling, of surviving, of working out some relatively independent manly way of living (p. 191).

In the Caribbean the influence of certain groups of men on young adolescent boys can be readily deduced from those identified as their role models. When asked this question, boys of school age, including those who had dropped out of the formal system, often cite sports personalities, disc jockeys (DJs), rap artists and music personalities, many of whom did not excel in the formal school system but claim their fame from large financial gains from various enterprises. Some boys even go as far as citing persons with questionable criminal records as their role models.<sup>21</sup> The choice of role models is no doubt influenced by media images emanating from local and cable networks and is linked to cultural globalization and the appeal of personalities in the multimillion music and sports industries.

Globalisation has also brought with it the spread of organized crime. In the 1999 Human Development Report<sup>22</sup> the view is expressed that globalisation opens many opportunities for crime and crime has rapidly become global. The report states that at that time there were 200 million drug users, threatening neighbourhoods around the world and illegal trafficking in weapons had become a growing business destabilizing societies and governments. At the heart of this, it was claimed, was a growing power and influence of organized crime syndicates and estimated to gross \$1.5 trillion a year.

The Caribbean is well positioned as a trans-shipment point for many of these activities and although some women engage in related activities such as transporting hard drugs, opportunities for engagement mainly appeal to young males. The global movement of these goods and services and offshoot local activities, have created more lucrative, even if not desirable, means for men to create wealth. These opportunities, although risky, offer immediate gratification and require less formal education and therefore, in my opinion, are a factor which cannot be ignored in looking for explanations of under-participation of males in the higher levels of Caribbean education systems. Data for Jamaica indicate that in 2003, of those arrested for major crimes during the year 51.5 per cent were in the age group 16–25 years, and 99.1 per cent were males.<sup>23</sup> This age range is the period of time when these males could be participating in upper secondary and tertiary level education.

Working class girls, although not as visible as underachieving working class boys who are part of the street culture are just as vulnerable in terms of dropping out of the formal system and underachieving. Data from the 2001<sup>24</sup> Economic and Social Survey support this concern. Information on adolescent health indicates that 25 per cent of the total visits to antenatal clinics were within the 10 to 19 age group, an indication of the high level of pregnancies among teens.

This is supported by a survey<sup>25</sup> of girls 14 to 18 years old who had dropped out of the formal school system. The number one reason for school drop-out supplied by these girls, many of whom would have been below the legal age of consent at the time, was pregnancy. The prevalence of teenage pregnancy feeds into the cycle of poverty for women, as these young girls become the next generation of low-skilled, low-waged workers responsible for a female-headed household, or, at the very worst, are trapped in undesirable relationships in their quest for economic viability.

In terms of opportunity for participation in political decision making, data for 1998 for nine Eastern Caribbean States indicate that female representation in parliaments in was well below the minimum 30 per cent proposed as the goal for countries in the British Commonwealth. This under-representation of women in decision-making, in these and other Caribbean countries, points to a lack of parity between men and women in socio-

political matters and limited opportunity for women to exercise economic, political and administrative authority in national affairs at the macro and meso levels.

**Figure 10: Ratio of males to females in political decision-making in 9 Eastern Caribbean States<sup>26</sup>**

What is therefore important in determining the extent to which patriarchal structures that maintain sex stratification and female subordination are being dismantled, is not so much to focus on the considerable gains women have made in terms of access and achievement in higher education and their increased engagement in paid work, but to examine relations of gender and women's positioning relative to that of men in these spheres. What such an analysis reveals is that, in spite of the significant gains women have made in education and in spite of the challenges to entrenched gender ideologies which have improved women's access to material resources, male control of social, economic and political institutions in Caribbean societies has not been significantly ruptured. In fact, the more things change the more they remain the same.

Maintaining male control of the governance of social, economic and political institutions is one way in which this is achieved. Educational institutions are a case in point and the University of the West Indies is illustrative of how in spite of serving a predominately female clientele academic and administrative governance is predominately male. In terms of full-time academic appointments, overall males dominate with a GPI of 0.5. In 2002/03, as might be expected, the gender gap was widest at the level of professorial appointments (GPI 0.2) and with GPIs of 0.3 and 0.6 at the Senior Lecturer and Lecturer levels respectively. Females were therefore underrepresented in the three top academic job categories and only at the lowest level of Assistant Lecturer did the gap favour females (GPI 2.1).

In terms of male/female ratios in leadership positions data from the Mona Campus<sup>27</sup> typify what obtains at the other two campuses. In the 2002/03 academic year, Deans in all four faculties were male and only in Humanities and Education were there female appointments at the level of Deputy Dean. In that same year, in all Faculties, except for Humanities and Education (GPI 3.5), Heads of Departments were predominately male with GPI values of 0.14 for Pure & Applied Sciences, 0.25 for Social Sciences and 0.33 for Medical Sciences. Membership of committees that set policy and manage academic and financial matters were also predominately male with GPIs of 0.4, 0.4 and 0.5 for Campus Council, Academic Board and Finance & General Purposes Committees respectively.

### **Indicative Policy Direction**

The fundamental basis of gender inequalities discussed in the preceding section is not merely due to gender differentiation consistent with cultural norms but are largely the result of the assignment of different value and worth on economic and political practices related to the private and public domains and the resulting institutionalised subordination of the majority of women in both domains. Gender inequality is therefore not only ideological but more so structural and systemic and needs to be tackled at the institutional level. In this regard, social, economic and political institutions need to be targeted.

Addressing the anomalous relationship between educational outputs and outcomes, for males and females, has to go beyond purely educational solutions and must be viewed in relation to the impacts of wider social, economic and political factors and within the ambit of race and class which mediate and articulate expression and performance of the full gamut of masculinities and femininities.

At the level of policy, I therefore fully endorse the CARICOM Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) which adopts an integrated approach to analysing and addressing issues of inequality and disadvantage at both the programmatic and policy levels in relation to three areas identified as generally impacting regional development: education, with a focus on building human capital; health, with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS; and, labour in the social dialogue.

In order to ensure that the compelling needs of both sexes across all vulnerable groups are met and that development is pursued within a framework of social justice and gender equality, it has to be accepted that gender is at the heart of interlocking hierarchies that shape relations in the Region and therefore needs to be treated as a cross-cutting element in all programmes aimed at human and social development.

Gender mainstreaming has the potential to achieve this end based on the fact that it involves

...a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action... It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres...<sup>28</sup>

In proposing the strategy, the CARICOM appointed Gender Mainstreaming Task Force, endorsed the need to locate the strategy within a rights-based social justice framework 'premised on the understanding that all groups and individuals have equal rights to the conditions that will allow them to realize their full human potential to contribute to development in its broadest sense and to benefit from its results.' (W/BUR (DC) 2002/212, Item 6, p12).<sup>29</sup> The overall goal of the strategy is therefore:

...the building of new structures of power-sharing at the household, community, national and regional levels where both men and women can participate fully in developing a system of cooperation in decision-making, as equal partners in the sustainable development of their societies (p.10).<sup>30</sup>

An expected outcome is:

...a more strategic, rather than purely practical approach, to pursuing gender equality at both national and regional levels, to be reflected in macro-economic, social and governance policies and programmes (p.6).<sup>31</sup>

In discussing details of implementation of the GMS it was agreed that education would be treated as the priority and as the entry point for implementation. This decision was influenced by the fact that, at both regional and national levels, work was already in progress in this area and there were collaborative research projects already in train involving a number of funding and executing agencies already in place.

Any gender mainstreaming strategy is dependent on a proper situational analysis and must therefore involve an 'a priori' research stage. In relation to the education sector, the main concern in this regard, particularly in light of the persuasive arguments in support of the male underachievement and male marginalization theses, is to get a better understanding of precise points of gender difference in participation and performance at the secondary and tertiary levels of Caribbean education systems and how a range of other factors such as ethnicity, social class status, religion, geographical location, and disability influence observed patterns. Already CARICOM is collaborating with the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, with funding primarily from the Caribbean Development Bank and the CIDA supported Canada Caribbean Gender Equality Programme to undertake this research.

Successful implementation of the GMS is going to be largely dependent on political will on the part of the major players in relevant government sectors at institutional, national and regional levels. It will also largely depend on the building of a critical mass of persons equipped with the skills and tools required to carry out gender analyses at all stages of the project/programme cycle and to advance the sensitive gender disaggregated data required to inform policy formulation and implementation.

For this reason, an important centerpiece of the education strategy is a module for teacher education, *Gender Issues in Caribbean Education*<sup>32</sup> which has already been developed by the CARICOM Secretariat in association with the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. The introduction and use of this Module in all regional teacher training institutions will go a far way in producing the critical mass of educators equipped to carry out the analyses required to inform gender mainstreaming in daily practice and the engendering of policy at all levels of Caribbean education systems. The ultimate goal, starting with the education sector and establishing linkages with health, which is essential to daily living, and the development of our human resource to enhance productivity through gainful employment, is: to improve organizational effectiveness, transform power relations and increase returns on investments in education for both females and males.

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# A Woman's Academic Career: Seasons of Change and Development

Elsa Leo-Rhynie

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## ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the academic career retrospectively, from the standpoint of five women who are at, or close to retirement in 2004, and documents their unique interactions and experiences. These interactions and experiences reveal the meaning that being part of the academic setting has had for them and for their lives, and are important in understanding the seasons of change and development, the challenges and satisfactions, frustrations and benefits, that women experience as they journey through the stages of their personal and professional, private and public lives. The context is the University of the West Indies (UWI) but parallels are drawn with women in academic careers in other settings, and the implications for university administration and policy are considered.

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## Introduction

Hermione McKenzie is the longest serving female academic at the University of the West Indies (UWI). The changes and developments of the institution over a forty-year time span have paralleled her own career development, and she has had the opportunity to experience and contemplate both using the lenses of gender and a feminist frame of reference. We look forward to a retrospective from her on her personal recollections, reminiscences and interpretations of this developmental journey, but in the context of this Conference I wanted to share and document some of the interactions and experiences of five other women who have spent most or all of their careers in the UWI. These interactions and experiences reveal the meaning that being part of the academic setting has had for them and for their lives, and are important in understanding the seasons of change and development that women experience as they journey through the stages of their personal and professional, private and public lives. It also highlights issues which speak to the need for change in university administration and policy.

The academy and women's role in it have been the subject of much research and investigation. Feminist researchers have seen the university as a fertile source of information as women have been expected to be agents of change in what is viewed as the strongly patriarchal culture of the academy. For liberal feminists, this can be achieved if women are present in sufficient numbers and are represented at levels where they can be expected to exert influence. Socialist and radical feminists point out, however, that educational institutions actually reproduce gender and social class inequity (Measor and Sikes, 1992). Therefore, research has focused on participation levels, discrimination and

women's status within the academy (Brooks, 1997), also on the vital importance of women's contribution to knowledge creation (Rich, 1980; Harding, 1987; Hartman and Messer-Davidow, 1992), as well as women's participation in the policy making and administration of the university (Kolodny, 1999). These have all been seen as crucial to effecting change in these institutions.

This paper departs from that tradition. The information is anecdotal, and seeks to determine from women who are at or near a major transition point in their lives, the roles and functions performed, the insights gained and lessons learned as they progressed along the many pathways of their academic journey.

### **Method**

The information sought was expected to provide retrospective explanations of women's lives in the academic environment, how this intersected their personal lives, and the changes, the growth and development which marked various stages in these lives. Hartman (1991) endorses the use of women's stories and experiences; noting that they are very often "narratives that have explanatory power" (p.12).

The five women selected all retire at age 65 between 2004 and 2008. They are all graduates of the UWI, are married with children, and have served the university for between 22 and 35 years in academic as well as in administrative posts. They were interviewed in May 2004, and all participated willingly in this exercise. Information was gathered on a variety of issues which formed the basis of the interviews, and the data obtained were analyzed and are presented in response to the following specific themes.

1. Factors triggering entry into an academic career.
2. Multiple roles at different work sites: tensions and stresses during the early career years, mid career years and later career years.
3. The academic work site: challenges of professional development.
4. The value of mentors and friends.
5. The academic work site: challenges of being female.
6. The extent to which the feminist movement, which was at its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, was a personal and professional life influence.
7. The satisfactions and disappointments of the academic career.

### **Factors triggering entry into an academic career**

None of the women applied for a job at UWI, they were all invited to join the staff because of their performance in their post first degree work; for one this was the Diploma in Education, for others it was their work in the Masters/MPhil programme. These invitations resulted from the perceptions of one or more senior faculty members that they would be valuable contributors to the faculty in which they had studied. All five had been educators – four at secondary school level and one at the tertiary level, and all had considered teaching to be their career. Four of them had not seriously thought of leaving their original work setting until the opportunity presented itself for employment at the UWI. The other woman, who was teaching outside of the Caribbean, confessed that although she enjoyed secondary school teaching, she felt strongly that there was "a higher level" to which she could aspire. She had friends who were academics and in conversation with them recognized that she had more to offer, and that she should challenge herself more. She actually began looking for a university position in that country, as well as others, when she was invited to return to the UWI, where she had done her first degree.

She refused initially but on the second invitation she felt that she was both “mentally and emotionally ready”, and accepted the offer.

Once employed at the UWI, the experience incorporated those elements of teaching all the women enjoyed, provided the opportunity to use the research skills and the increased knowledge to which they had been exposed in their graduate programmes, and thus offered a broader experience and greater possibilities for working in education. Noting that she had always been “intellectually curious”, and experienced an “adrenaline rush” from identifying and being able to research a new area of knowledge, one of the women recognized that research, rather than teaching, was her primary motivator. One interviewee commented, “It (the job) offered an expanded horizon, one not available in a secondary school setting”; another considered her appointment “serendipity” as the person in the job had resigned. Three were temporary at first, found the experience very satisfying and hoped it would continue. None started out with a conscious goal of building an academic career; one confessed that she was not at the time even aware of what the post she had agreed to fill demanded beyond the teaching of the courses assigned.

#### **Multiple roles and different work sites: tensions and stresses during the early, mid and later career years**

For three of the women, marriage and childbearing took place immediately or very soon after leaving UWI with their first degrees. In all three cases, employment at the university came while their children were still young, and they had the task of coping with growing families as well as with developing their academic careers. For the other two women, marriage and family came after embarking on their academic careers, and one of the sample was the first faculty member to benefit from the 1970s legal requirement that women be given maternity leave. In all cases, the women had to combine the triple roles identified for women by Moser (1993): reproductive, productive, community involvement, with the fourth role of graduate student. All the women pursued and completed their doctoral degrees while employed at UWI, and so had to perform multiple roles in different work sites.

The early career years were very stressful for all the women; the reproductive role was particularly demanding, and the academic focus needed, along with time for independent thought and concentrated work were not compatible with caring and rearing small children. It was particularly difficult for the two women whose childbearing took place while they were employed to UWI. In both cases, the student role added another work site, as their programmes of doctoral study took them overseas for prolonged periods of time. In one instance, her first child was actually born in the country where she was doing her data gathering, which had been delayed because of a previous pregnancy, illness associated with this, and the loss of the foetus close to the time of delivery. Her second child was born soon after the first, and the demands of two young children, the persistence of her illness, and her husband’s involvement in his own career activities, which were very intense and demanding, impeded her career progress, as she was forced to make the family her first priority. The other woman who left Jamaica to study overseas was able to take her two young children – then four and a half and three years old respectively – with her, as her mother offered to accompany her and provide the necessary care for the children. She commented that she owes her PhD to her mother as she could not have completed all the field work, which required extensive travel, without that support.

The other women who had young children also spoke of the family support that they received, especially from mothers, and in one case from her father also, who would

transport the children from school and take them for outings thus freeing her to concentrate on her work. In all cases, the women's husbands were also building and consolidating their careers and so were very involved and fully focused on that activity, and it was accepted, by both partners, that responsibility for the children rested primarily with the woman, despite the fact that she was also involved in building a career. Her career was seen, as one husband commented, as "secondary". In two instances, the husbands' careers made substantial demands on their wives: for one this was often an irritant and something which interfered with her own desires and direction, while for the other the demand coincided with her own commitment to community involvement and through that involvement she was able to receive exposure to and acquire competencies related to work in a national, regional and even international context. In a third case, the strong community involvement of her husband was not part of his career development but she shared that with him, seeing this as part of their joint outreach to the community. In the other two instances, the husbands' work and community involvement were intimately linked and separate from their wives' pursuits, and in both cases were demanding and occupied long hours. Both women shared a similar sentiment in that the intense and time consuming nature of their husbands' work allowed them space to devote to their academic pursuits, and academic work became their strategy to avoid boredom and possible resentment of their husbands' unavailability much of the time.

In the mid career years the stresses were different, with the demands of both productive and reproductive roles being more intense. The pressures of gaining tenure and promotion made the work demand more stressful. One woman found herself the object of her 9-year-old son's pity: she recounts how he woke up one night at about 2.00 a.m. and saw her working and commented "Mummy, your work is torture". The emphasis on career development often relegated family and home to second place even though this may not have been consciously done. One woman recalls that when she completed her PhD thesis and was celebrating her success, her 13-year-old daughter asked if this meant that she could "get her mother back now". This comment surprised her, as she had not been aware that her preoccupation with her thesis work had been perceived by her children as "robbing" them of her attention. Another woman revealed that her focus on the demands of her work made her unaware of the insecurity and serious emotional and psychological dislocation which her family members were experiencing for different reasons. She was lulled into a false sense of security because the operational aspects of the home were taken care of by the household helper, and she had not paid sufficient attention to the very special psychological and emotional needs of her husband and children at this time. This created a crisis point in her life and the effort to save her family life was major, took almost three years, and resulted in her own ill health.

In this period of career development and growth, sabbatical leave, study and fellowship leave necessitated travel overseas and fairly lengthy stays away from home. Sometimes the family traveled together, at other times the women went alone. Always there were elaborate arrangements to be made to ensure that the family environment was not too disrupted by her departure. One woman had to make a difficult decision when her husband was posted overseas for a prolonged period. She recalls the conflicting advice given by her two close friends and mentors at that time – one advising her to give up the job or take no pay leave and travel with her husband, the other urging her to follow her own path and do whatever she could to preserve the marriage from a distance. She took the advice of the latter friend, and commuted to ensure that she was frequently 'home', and present at his important work related functions, but the importance of being with him on a continuous basis caused her to schedule her sabbatical leave so that the family

unit could be intact for one of the four years he was away. The marriage survived the long distance arrangement.

The reproductive role also changed, as the demand of being caregiver was not confined to children; all the women mentioned having to care for parents, accommodate unexpected demands and deal with family crises and emergencies, including, in three instances, their own deteriorating health. One woman had to delay completing her thesis, first because of her father's illness and her need to be away from Jamaica to assist with his care, and again for her mother's illness at another time, while two women dealt with the death of parents during this time. One of the women attributed her fairly severe health crisis and current concerns to the pressures exerted by juggling the roles of wife, mother, housekeeper, researcher, teacher, as well as entrepreneur at one point, and trying to accomplish each role in an exemplary fashion. She also had to cope with the guilt generated from comments made by her children who, as they got older, questioned her priorities vis-a-vis their needs. One woman did not get that reaction from her children, but definitely from her husband who considered her travel and work commitments excessive and felt that she ought to be devoting more attention to the home and family. Her taking up a one-month fellowship two months prior to their daughter sitting Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) examinations was considered by him to be a serious misplacement of her priorities. One of the women reasoned that trying not to sacrifice one aspect of her life for another exerted a tremendous emotional toll.

In the later career years, the productive/reproductive/community roles and concerns shifted again. The reproductive role changed from care giving for children to that for grandchildren and aging parents, as well as to an ailing husband in one case. In terms of the productive roles, the demands of the work environment changed also, as promotions into administrative posts caused a change in focus and forced the development of different skills and competencies while still ensuring that the research, teaching, and graduate supervision required of the academic, continued. All the women spoke of the growth and learning which promotion into administration meant for them; the initial uncertainty, the importance of understanding the demands and expectations of their new roles and carrying them out competently. The administrative role provided an opportunity to effect change, to be in a position to make a difference, but also of having to cope with resistance to change, which was not always overtly expressed, and so sometimes threatened to undermine the change process. Despite the difficulties of handling the conflicts generated from time to time, the expanded perspective and understanding generated by the move, and the leadership opportunity provided have been satisfying for the women. There have also been other compensations; in one case, the community involvement which had to be suspended while her career was in the developmental and consolidation stages could be revived in this later phase, to her great joy and satisfaction. In another case, the outreach related to her work was another facet of the community work with which she had been involved since her early career and so it was a natural progression for her, and proved to be very satisfying.

The women all attested to the value of good household helpers in the maintenance of a manageable balance between home and career responsibilities. They spoke to the role of the household helper in freeing them of domestic duties so that they could devote time to their research, marking, preparation as well as to oversight of their children's homework. In one case, the teaching schedule included a class which ended at 9.00 p.m. on one day each week and she had to be able to depend on her helper to get her children their supper and put them to bed. One woman had a housekeeper in whom she had absolute trust, so that she was able to leave her in charge of her home, with her two young

children, for a year while she was away completing work for her doctoral degree. Another of the women has had the same trusty helper for over thirty years.

All the women admitted that the need for expansion of the self to accommodate new roles at the work sites of home and the university, caused them to experience a fragmented sense of self at different times; one mentioned the challenge to her identity when faced with the requirement that she change her name on marriage, others recounted the times when the family had to be second to the career, and the other times when family had to be first. All testified to the difficulties of the early years, but the mid years seemed to be the time when the demands of family and career seemed to be in greatest conflict. By this time the decision had been taken to "be an academic" and combining the expectations and demands of that role with the responsibilities of the family role was tension generating and very stressful. This stress was significantly increased by the demand that as academics, the women were expected to present themselves as integrated, competent individuals, carrying out a successful research agenda, and being able to advise and counsel students as well as teach and motivate them, despite the fact that so many personal adjustments and conflicts were affecting their own lives.

### **The academic work site: challenges of professional development**

All the women experienced support from the university for their professional development activities. This came through approval of study and travel grants, attendance at Conferences, permission to take up fellowships, the grant of sabbatical leave, assisted leave in one instance and no-pay leave in another. The developmental assistance which was expected as a junior faculty member was not provided, however, and the women depended very much on their personal networks to "discover" the norms and expectations of the academic role. Family support ranged from strong and enthusiastic to limited and contingent on the home situation. The women who had strong family support for their activities appreciated this; as one expressed it

*I always had my own space, and the capacity to be myself without having to conform to the expectations of others. Seizing opportunities for self and professional development were always encouraged, never suppressed.*

Another woman spoke of the intellectual stimulation and encouragement provided by her husband and the reciprocal nature of this interaction. Two others had family support, but felt some reservation on the part of family members from time to time, while in one case the woman's husband, although expressing support for her work, made it clear that it ought not to interfere with the smooth running of the home. It did not help when one of his colleagues told him, in her presence, that he would never "allow" his wife to be "going off on her own to any Conference". She observed that:

*As a married woman and a mother, and with my husband's expectations of me in that role, I was unable to immerse myself in the process of career building; networking, pursuing collaborative research and publishing to the extent that it was possible for single women as well as for men, whether single or married.*

All the women experienced, to some extent, the tension of balancing the needs of home with the demand that they be exposed to the academic world outside of UWI, and be able to network with others working in the field. As one woman expressed it, she needed to "broaden her perspective beyond UWI" and "guard against insularity", but she also felt a strong sense of responsibility for her children's development.

The experiences of the five women differed in terms of their career progress. Three of the women felt that the criteria for promotion and tenure were fairly objectively applied, that the procedures worked and they were not aware of any difficulties in their implementation and administration. Although in one case there had been a refusal of an application, the reason was communicated to her by the Dean, and she accepted this and worked harder in order to satisfy the required criteria. One woman said she never consciously plotted her professional development; she merely worked as hard as she could wherever she was placed, and in all instances, the suggestion that she seek advancement came from a colleague. In two cases, however, there were charges of discrimination and inequity, there was obvious suspicion of the system and its operation, as well as the possibility of manipulation. For one woman, the process of obtaining tenure and promotion in the university is flawed and very much affected by the perceptions and influence exerted by those in "power positions." She still harbours some resentment about her treatment – she felt that essential information was shared selectively, and discovered only by accident by persons who did not fraternize with the "in-group" and who tried to play by the rules. She was twice refused tenure and a committee member told her that the official reason communicated was not the reason advanced in the meeting for that decision. Another woman resents the fact that a deliberate attempt was made by colleagues to block her promotion, and it was only when a very senior faculty member posed pertinent questions that the initial lack of support changed. One woman was told by her Head of Department that she was too young to be considered for promotion to Senior Lecturer although she satisfied the objective criteria, but her application was supported by the Dean and she was promoted. Another heard that at the Appointments Committee meeting where her case for promotion was being heard, the comment was made that her promotion could wait, as she was "not yet forty"!

### **The value of mentors and friends**

All the women identified at least three persons who had been vital influences in their career growth and development, and noted that although one or two remained constant across the years, some were intermittent mentors, providing the necessary support and guidance at crucial points along the career path. Although they may have started off as mentors, in most instances these person became friends, and for three of the women, friendship and mentoring were so intertwined that it was difficult to separate them. Demystifying the process of publishing an article, and emphasizing the importance of publications was an invaluable role played by one mentor, while one woman commented on the absence of mentoring when she thought this was sorely needed; her head of department who worked in a similar research area did nothing to nurture her as she carried out her research and did not even respond to her request to provide feedback on an article she had written. She retrieved the article from his office ten months after handing it to him, from the same position on his shelf where he had put it on receipt. One of the women mentioned the frequency with which multi-authored publications emerged from certain universities, and noted that at UWI, collaboration tended to be among colleagues who were also friends, rather than from initiatives to assist in the development of junior staff, and to guide them in the identification and pursuit of their own research focus. UWI senior faculty were considered to be very selfish in this regard, and two of the women expressed their continuing concern about this and mentioned their own efforts to improve the situation. Both women who pursued their doctoral research abroad spoke of the collegial relationships and support obtained from faculty members and others in those settings and one commented on the difference in the culture of the overseas

institution where there was an obvious desire to assist and nurture the young academic, while at Mona, it was a “sink or swim” type of culture.

### **The academic work site: challenges of being female**

These challenges did not become evident for most of the women until they assumed administrative roles, and they had the effect of destroying many of their illusions about human behaviour. Two of the women expressed distaste for conflict and tried to avoid confrontation as much as possible. Both agreed that they avoided persons who seemed to thrive on manipulating situations for their own objectives and advantage. One, however, felt that she had to confront a particular instance of what she called “intellectual deficiency” on the part of a colleague, and bemoaned the fact that male colleagues, although recognizing this deficiency, tended to remain “detached” and in a safe zone, rather than confront the issue. This she feels is a type of intellectual dishonesty. The disillusion experienced by one woman who said that she always believed the best of individuals, materialized when the ugly side of some people's characters became evident. This disillusion was shared by another woman who spoke of her disbelief when she realized that a female colleague had taken steps to undermine her and make her lose an opportunity which was particularly important given her field of research. One of the women who interacted a great deal with male colleagues noted that her opinions and views were often ignored by them, and that she seemed to need more energy and resources to sustain the struggle to accomplish certain tasks than they did. She was also expected to carry out the “social” tasks, and she was included as “one of the boys” when it suited the “boys”, but she was isolated at other times; another expressed the certainty that male faculty members tried to set her up for failure as Head of Department and were somewhat resentful of her success in certain areas. The disappointment expressed by one woman came from her observation of the changed attitudes of the new generation of women, their aggressiveness in pursuing career development and their self-absorption and focus on “getting ahead.” She expressed the view that the level of competitiveness this generated made them uncaring; she noted the near absence of the values of service, loyalty and other characteristics that would be expected to bring about changed perspectives and build a nurturing culture within the academy.

### **The influence of the feminist movement**

Persons retiring in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had their adult expectations and identities framed in the questioning and social turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s. An important component of this was the questioning of gender roles, which led to a burgeoning feminist discourse. Interestingly, none of the women felt that the feminist movement had made a significant impact on their self identity; in the words of two of the women: “I had always felt independent, never subordinate in any way” and another “I was always confident, and resourceful.” Two felt that their identities were probably too well established to be significantly changed, although they admitted to some shifts in perspective. All the women were affected to some extent by this movement; it sensitized them to the many ways in which gender influenced social life and interaction, and it affected their child rearing strategies, for example. For three of the women who were particularly involved, the movement had profound effects on their professional lives. The impact for these women was expressed mainly in an expansion of focus of their research and academic work, as well as, in two instances, their involvement in outreach activities; one noted in particular how much it sensitized her to the gender differentials in many areas at UWI. In another case, the community work in which the woman had been

involved in her early career years prepared her for the highly political and vibrant nature of involvement in the Women's Movement. Another woman expressed her admiration for the gains achieved by the movement but said that her work and the other demands on her time were particularly great when the Women's groups were set up on Campus and she did not see the possibility of being involved. She also felt that her life long resistance to doctrines of any sort, made her unwilling to publicly embrace this new "cause", and although she recognized the value of the work, she was content to let others take the lead.

### **Satisfactions and disappointments**

When this question was raised all the women spoke first of the satisfactions they had experienced in their academic careers. Job satisfaction was evident in all the responses; the opportunity to teach, counsel and otherwise influence the lives of students; for one woman it was the thrill of being able to follow a research path which was of deep interest to her and to be part of an intellectual community; for another the work itself was the satisfaction, the variety of tasks made it "invigorating." One woman treasured especially the opportunity to work closely with a small group of colleagues who had a sense of commitment, who shared a vision and who were not necessarily seeking financial rewards. There was also the satisfaction of knowing that one's work and worth were recognized, through being asked to make a contribution to initiatives and activities, not merely in the university, but nationally, regionally and in some cases, internationally. One woman commented, "It has been an amazing learning experience."

However, despite obvious satisfaction, there were disappointments as well. For one woman, there were the tensions and unnecessary conflict in her interactions with others at times; these were not always overt, but subtle and undermining, and very difficult to deal with. For another, there was ongoing resentment of what she considered to be the hostility of "powerful persons" towards her, and the lack of transparency in the university's processes. Although some barriers to their progress had been identified, all felt that they had also been facilitated in their career development. Other disappointments related to the development of the university; the slow pace of change, the constraints imposed by the lack of financial and human resources, and the frustrations of having a vision yet being unable to implement and see this through because of these constraints.

### **Implications for women academics**

These women's lives and careers, spanning decades, although captured in vignette form, point to some of the very special experiences of women who pursue academic careers, and the implications are important as, despite change, women still face many of the challenges they identified. The major pressures exerted at different career and family life stages, for example, and the necessity for priority decisions relating to career and professional development or demands of spouses, children and home, probably also apply today to a number of women, in academic as well as other demanding careers.

The experiences of combining family and career support the view that homes are work sites for women, who carry the major responsibility for domestic work, even when there is domestic help available. There is also the expectation, certainly of one husband, that the career of the woman should be secondary to his, and its progress should not interfere too much with her responsibility for the care of the home and family. This view is often mirrored by family and friends, and their disapproval creates guilt feelings which generate stress. Miriam Erez (1996), an Israeli academic, expresses the tension, the expectations of women, and the attitudinal views of friends very well. She recounts:

*The sabbaticals that played a crucial role in my career development required us to spend a great deal of time apart, as my husband needed to stay in Israel to run his construction company. I recall our friends saying that he deserved a great deal of respect for letting me go. They considered our arrangement a real sacrifice for him in particular. The challenges I had to face – going to a new place, always with our two children, and having to cope with both the career goals I wanted to accomplish on my sabbatical and the family responsibilities I bore alone – were somehow less significant in their eyes than his agreement to let me go by myself (p. 24).*

This combination of roles as wives, mothers, housekeepers and workers does take its toll on women's health and the quality of their lives. The world has changed since the women in this study started their careers, however, and hopefully younger women are more aware of the need to pursue a wellness life style and will schedule leisure in order to maintain a healthy balance between work and non-work activities. This plan should include spouses and fathers taking more active roles in the domestic life of the family. Anne Sigismund Huff (1996) reflects on how easily professional life can crowd out one's personal life. She comments:

An opportunity to present a paper, a grading deadline that suddenly looms, an important committee assignment – all can lure us away from simpler pleasures that have no inherent deadlines. Many professional demands are so tangible, their cost/benefit trade offs so clear, that they seem to overrule taking the time to read to a child or trying to capture the late afternoon light (p. 434).

Expansion of the self to accommodate new roles was particularly challenging to the women and is an experience shared by other female academics. Crary (1996) notes that:

In getting married and having a child, I experienced a whole new set of vulnerabilities as I faced a new and larger constellation of roles and identities (p. 214).

This expansion, which must accommodate new roles and identities within each of the women's work sites, can result in considerable stress when the identities remain separate and fragmented, and there is internal conflict generated by resentment, anger or guilt, rather than an integration which leads to a sense of wholeness and well being. Very often, women are able to facilitate this integration by making use of their close associates and friends in communal relationships (Rawlins, 1992). Communal relationships provide non-career as well as career support, and assist individuals in coping with difficulties that affect their personal and professional lives. Rawlins contrasts communal with agentic relationships, which are restricted to the work place and work related issues, such as assistance in obtaining resources to help in academic work. Women, she says, have more communal relationships than men, while men tend to have more agentic relationships than women. The women interviewed all spoke of the crossover between mentoring and friendship and the value of these relationships in their lives.

Meryl Louis (1996) used the opportunity of a sabbatical to conduct what she termed a "life audit" where she explored her past experiences, came to terms with herself, and plotted her future path while away from the everyday demands of her academic post. She speaks of the personal and professional renewal which resulted from this exercise, and possibly each person ought to engage in this type of reflection periodically, so as to assess one's direction in the face of strengths, weaknesses, demands and constraints, opportunities and threats.

### **Implications for the University**

The major implications for policy and administration which emerge from these narratives relate to the need for development of a culture within the university in which the orientation, mentoring and support of academics, and particularly female academics, in their careers is made an important priority.

The absence of family-friendly policies such as provision of childcare facilities means that women have to make a separation between home and work, when in reality both these areas constantly occupy their thoughts and concerns. For most men this separation is easy as they rely on the women in their lives to take care of the matters at home. This expectation is often implicit in the household arrangements, but was made explicit in one instance in this study. It is interesting that although male and female faculty were employed to the university almost from its inception, no provision was made for maternity leave until this became a legal requirement almost thirty years later, when one of the women interviewed was the first academic woman to benefit from the provision.

The expectations of an academic career are often not known, as teaching is the most visible task and aspiring academics often assume this is the only or major task. One of the women confessed her ignorance of the requirements of an academic career when she accepted the post of lecturer. Although this was several years ago, ignorance of the central role of research and publications in the life of the academic still persists. Identifying a research focus, locating resources, selecting the journals to target, understanding how to prepare a good article and the stages of having it published, are all standard advice given to graduate students and junior faculty elsewhere. Collaborative research and publications are commonplace in certain universities, but senior UWI academics in the faculties from which the sample came, were considered very selfish in this regard and contrasted negatively with academics in other settings.

The accounts also highlight the importance of mentors, but this mentoring ought not to take place by chance; it ought to be a planned programme to orient and assist in the development of junior faculty and to ensure that they are aware of the availability of resources to assist in professional growth and development. Such programmes include opportunities for academic collaboration, the nature of which would differ at various stages of the academic's personal and professional careers.

Issues of equity in treatment and the possibility of the system being used to block or undermine the progress of others were raised. The processes used in carrying out major decisions must be truly transparent, so that individuals do not perceive personal preference and discriminatory practices as the means whereby advancement is attained within the university. For one woman, there is the strong belief that the "in-group/out-group" philosophy is entrenched at UWI and needs to be changed, and from certain incidents recounted, it would seem that the patriarchal, hierarchical, power dynamic is still very much alive and sustained, rather than changed, by some women.

### **Conclusion**

The narratives provided by the five women examine issues of occupational choice, aspiration and motivation, the factors which facilitated and/or constrained them, as well as the sexual division of labour in the home as well as at work. The location of that work in the academy has made life both satisfying and challenging, and the satisfactions and challenges have varied with the seasons of change, growth and development. For these women, the challenges are multiplied by the societal expectation that they retain full responsibility for home and family, yet meet the same criteria for promotion and tenure as men, often more stringently applied in their case. Attention, by women, to the multiple

roles associated with each of their work sites – home and the academy – are vital to ensure that the expectations of homemaker, wife and mother as well as those of scholar are all satisfactorily met. The need for support in this endeavour is obvious, and the implications of this for women in academia include seeking and planning for such support, while for the university, mechanisms should be put in place to facilitate the development, not only of female, but all fledgling academics and scholars.

*I acknowledge with sincere thanks the richness of the exchanges with the five women who willingly shared with me their recollections as well as details of their personal and professional lives.*

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# The 'Total Character' of Incarceration in Jamaica

Mary P. Clarke and Aldrie Henry-Lee

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## ABSTRACT

The term *total institution* was developed by Goffman in 1968. In a 'total institution' all aspects of life (work, play, sleep) are carried out in one place. Departure is inhibited by the presence of locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, water, forests, etc.

This paper examines the extent to which Goffman's theory is applicable to the discussion on the processing, incarceration and release of persons in Jamaica. When one becomes an inmate, physical and social barriers are erected that impede normal social intercourse with the rest of society. The *total* character of the institutionalization affects inmates as well as warders.

The paper concludes that in some aspects, even after release the inmates are still a part of the *total institution* that characterizes incarceration in Jamaica.

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## Introduction

This paper was inspired by work done by Mrs. Hermione McKenzie on an enquiry of the prison disturbances (1999–2000) and by a study of incarcerated women undertaken by Dr. Henry-Lee on behalf of the Planning Institute of Jamaica (2003). It acknowledges the contribution of the Department of Correctional Services in the provision of information. However, the views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not represent the official positions of the institutions where they work. It focuses on life in the correctional facilities, in Jamaica with particular focus on the Fort Augusta Adult Correctional Centre for Women and the South Camp Adult Correctional Centre. This paper serves to enhance the literature on the incarcerated populace in Jamaica. Policy recommendations are provided in order to improve the quality of life of the incarcerated and those who guard them.

The methods of data collection that informed the analysis were mainly qualitative. They included the reviews of existing literature on the subject, in-depth interviews with inmates, warders, a Superintendent and other staff of the Department of Correctional Services. Information was also obtained through observations and informal interviews carried out while visiting the institutions, as the lead researcher is a member of the Board of Visitors to the South Camp Rehabilitation Centre. This paper examines the extent to which incarceration in Jamaica has a *total character*. The relevance of Goffman's theory on total institutions to an examination of the *totality of the character* of incarceration is explored.

*IDEAZ* Vol. 4 No. 1-2/2005, pp. 50–60  
ISSN 0799-1401. © University of the West Indies,  
Dept of Sociology, Psychology & Social Work

### **Total Institutions**

Goffman (1961) in his study on institutional life and its impact on the institutionalized, establishes five types of institutions:

1. Institutions established to care for persons felt to be both incapable and harmless, e.g. homes for the visually impaired, the aged, the orphaned, and the indigent;
2. Establishments to care for persons felt to be incapable of looking after themselves and are deemed as a threat, albeit unintentional, to the community: TB sanatoria, mental hospitals, and leprosaria;
3. Institutions organized to protect the community against what are felt to be intentional dangers to it, with the welfare of the persons thus sequestered not the immediate issue: jails, penitentiaries, P.O.W. camps, and concentration camps;
4. Institutions purportedly established to pursue some work-like tasks, e.g. army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, colonial compounds, and large mansions from the point of view of those who live in the servants' quarters;
5. Establishments designed as retreats from the world, even while often serving also as training stations for the religious, e.g. abbeys, monasteries, convents, and other cloisters.

Goffman (1961) highlights some basic characteristics of these institutions, which include the following:

- Activities are brought together in a rational plan to fulfill the cause of the institution
- Activities are done in one place under one authority
- Activities are planned and imposed from above
- There is an absence of privacy and activities are carried out where they can be viewed by others. All are treated alike and required to do the same activities.

These activities are mandated by the institution with seemingly little thought given to the personal desires or wishes of the inmates. Inmates have limited contact with the outside world and are constantly under surveillance to ensure that they conform to established rules and regulations to facilitate the smooth running of the institution.

Goffman (1961) also explores the relationship between the staff of the institutions and its inmates. He found that the groups tend to conceive of each other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes, with staff viewing inmates as bitter, secretive, and untrustworthy, while inmates often see staff as condescending, highhanded and mean. Staff tends to feel 'superior and righteous and inmates feel inferior, weak, blameworthy and guilty' (1961:8).

In the institution, there is of necessity some form of communication between inmates and staff. However, this is limited and talking 'across boundaries' being so restricted that there is little sharing of information. The inmate is only told what he needs to know and there is an irregular transmission of information, even of 'knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his fate' (Goffman 1961:9).

Upon admission to the institution, inmates go through a process of mortification or the stripping of the self. This includes being provided with uniforms which helps to cement their break with the outside world and places everyone on an even footing regardless of former socio-economic status and family background. They have to surrender almost all personal possessions and are faced with the challenge of 'forced deference' (1961:31) having to refer to the staff with utmost respect and to beg for privileges such as permission to use the telephone, something which outside the institution

was considered their right to have. Other admission procedures of photographing, fingerprinting and assignment of numbers strengthen this break with their past roles and life. The inmate loses all privacy and even personal mail is read and censored.

According to Goffman's theory, inmates often respond to this process of mortification in different ways (antagonism, affection, unconcern) in order to attempt to somewhat preserve themselves and to maintain a certain level of self-determination. This stripping of the self and the socialization is in keeping with the norms of the institution and is partly responsible for the inmates' difficulty in reintegrating in the society subsequent to incarceration. Goffman (1961) theorizes that there is a 'release anxiety' which inmates face on their impending departure from an institution. This may motivate him/her to commit an infraction such that his/her stay at the facility is extended, and consequently his reintegration with the wider society postponed.

However, it is not only the inmates who are affected by life in a total institution. Members of staff are also affected and are similarly challenged by the need to conform to its rules and regulations, while simultaneously maintaining the humane standards of treatment of inmates required in modern societies. Since staff members must interact with inmates, visitors and others, including human rights groups, they operate with a certain level of anxiety. Such anxiety manifests itself in a mode of behaviour that is seemingly always ready 'for organized efforts at escape and must constantly deal with attempts to bait them, frame them, and otherwise get them into trouble' (Goffman 1961:81). Staff also undergoes the 'stripping and leveling processes' as they learn to accept life in the institution. New norms and values are relearned, while others are surrendered in this 'stripping and leveling process.'

### **The Jamaican Context**

The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) in Jamaica is the legal entity mandated with the custody of inmates. A close examination of the adult institutions of the DCS would reveal a similarity with the total institution paradigm as advanced by Goffman (1961).

The mission of the DCS is as follows:

'To contribute to the safety and protection of our society by keeping offenders secure and facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration as law-abiding citizens, while developing a professional and committed staff.

The department's Vision Statement reads as follows:

'We are serving the needs of all our clients by creating and facilitating opportunities for their empowerment and rehabilitation, resulting in a more peaceful, caring, and productive society'

An initial reading of these statements seemingly places the welfare of the inmates high on the agenda as the institution is aimed at their 'empowerment.' Based on the vision statement, this is not only being done as an end in itself, but as a means to having a 'more peaceful, caring and productive society.'

The DCS is responsible for seven adult correctional centres, one adult remand centre, three juvenile correctional centres, one juvenile remand centre and sixteen probation offices island-wide. At the end of 2003, there were marginally over four thousand inmates in adult correctional facilities across the island distributed across centres as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Adult Correctional Centres Population Figures – December 31, 2003**

Institutions	Population Figures
Tower Street	1749
St. Catherine	1279
Fort Augusta	302
Richmond Farm	199
Tamarind Farm	219
South Camp	243
New Broughton	20
Total	4011

Source: Department of Correctional Services, adapted from *Economic and Social Survey*, Jamaica 2003.

The Corrections Act, 1991<sup>1</sup> governs all aspects of life in the institutions including dress code and activities of staff, treatment of inmates, including their education, religious instruction, accommodation, health, food, clothing, employment, and visitors. These are informed by international standards in the treatment of prisoners such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rules 46 (2), 48. Although the Act ensures that the inmates lose some of their rights, it ensures that basic human rights are upheld. Such rights include proper medical attention, bedding, food and exercise.

As stated in the Act:

Every member of staff shall treat inmates with kindness and humanity and shall listen patiently to and report, their complaints and grievances, at the same time being firm in maintaining order and discipline and enforcing observance of the rules.

### The Total Character of Incarceration in Jamaica

In this paper, we focus on two correctional centers, Fort Augusta and the South Camp Adult Correctional Centre. Fort Augusta is located off the Port Henderson Road in Portmore in the parish of St. Catherine with its eastern, northern and southern ends bordering the sea. The facility has several dormitories with an ideal capacity of two hundred and fifty inmates. The facility is the only female penal institution in the island. Its population is comprised of inmates serving short and long-term sentences for a multiplicity of offences, including capital and non-capital murder and drug trafficking. Non-Jamaican female inmates are also incarcerated at this prison.

The South Camp Adult Correctional Centre is a medium security institution, located on South Camp Road, which houses persons convicted of the use or possession of illegal guns and ammunition as well as other major crimes.<sup>2</sup>

A distinguishing feature of these high or medium security institutions is their high walls or fences with security and guard posts. Both entry and exit security checkpoints are heavily gridded. The medium security institutions are more open and less fenced. Fort Augusta, surrounded by the sea, is more isolated.

On receiving custodial sentence, a male convict has to undergo a process of assessment and categorization for further placement to a low, medium or high security

institution. There is no such process for the female as there is only one female institution islandwide.

The admission procedure to a correctional centre marks the beginning of the process of mortification described by Goffman (1961) and which exists for the duration of their stay in the institution. The inmate is normally stripped of his clothes, personal items, such as money, jewelry, phones, radios and is put in uniforms for easy identification. The Corrections Act states:

All money, clothing or other effects belonging to an inmate which he is not allowed to retain, shall be placed in the custody of the superintendent who shall keep a list thereof in a book kept for that purpose which shall be signed by the inmate ... (on admission and on discharge or removal). Further an inmate may not, save in exceptional circumstances, deliver into the custody of the superintendent more than one outfit of clothing; any other clothing which he brings to the adult correctional centre shall be returned to the inmate's home or to such other place as the inmate may request. Where any clothing in excess of one outfit is received by the superintendent, such clothing shall be kept at the inmate's risk.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, there are several institutions where inmates wear their own clothes due to resource constraints facing DCS. Shortly after the commencement of their incarceration, inmates quickly learn both the formal and non-formal rules of the institution.

Inmates are given a number not necessarily for identification but for filing purposes and they are subsequently assigned to a cellblock where limited space must be shared. They have little choice but to eat, sleep, dress, work etc in the company of others, while following a designated daily schedule<sup>4</sup>. The schedule, which is established by the institution in its own interest, without any input from inmates, can also be unilaterally modified, again without consultation.

Inmates virtually have no privacy. At one institution for example, inmates could be seen bathing in a shower block with partitions only reaching a little above the waist to give limited privacy. Inmates are fully occupied and may be involved in cultural activities, skills training, remedial education, basketry, carpentry, tailoring, farming, poultry rearing, shoe or craft making, dressmaking, cosmetology (Fort Augusta) or sporting activities. These are undertaken during the 6-8 hours spent outside of the cells. Once again, resource constraints, mainly the availability of staff supervision, often limit the amount and consistency of rehabilitation procedures.

Those who work on productive enterprises under the COSPROD project become a part of an earning scheme and earn a small stipend when products are sold. This may be used in the tuck shops, for the support of dependents or saved until the inmate is released from the institution. The work programme presents an opportunity for inmate to learn skills that serve as a basis for gainful employment subsequent to release. All of these activities intensify the process of mortification as each "individual is required to undertake a daily round of life that he considers alien to him – to take on a dis-identifying role" (Goffmann 1961:23).

There are instances, though, when these rehabilitation activities, important as they are, may be suspended or modified due to abuses. Frequent reference is made to an innovative work release programme in which inmates with particular skills and who were assessed as being of low risk would be released to do work outside of the institution. Work being done included, but was not limited to, construction of schools, work on

housing sites and beautification projects. The programme remained operational for at least six years, before being abandoned due to abuse.

Staffs of the institutions are also institutionalized in a sense and have to obey strict regulations. They have to wear uniforms, are also screened at the entrance on entering and leaving the institution, can have no personal items such as cell phones and radios, and are confined to the centre within working hours. They also cannot receive visitors without permission and are subject to be searched. Their activities are linked to those of the inmate and even their eating time is scheduled based on the activities of the inmate. This is outlined in the Corrections Act (1991) which states:

Every member of staff shall pay strict attention to cleanliness of person and dress and shall at all times when on duty wear the uniform provided. No member of staff shall be permitted to receive any visitors in the interior of the adult correctional centre without the authority of the superintendent. Every member of staff shall submit himself to be searched in the adult correctional centre if called upon to do so by the superintendent.<sup>5</sup>

They have no control over the choice of inmates to be supervised and they are aware that even as they scrutinize the inmates, they themselves are being scrutinized by the inmates themselves, relatives of the inmates, visitors and human rights groups.

As coping strategies, both staff and inmates go through a process of reorganization and adaptation in keeping with Goffman's theory. For the inmates, they can react in one or more of the following:

- Withdrawal
- Rebellion
- Colonization
- Conversion

Those who have **withdrawn** are very obvious as they can be seen, silent, sitting in a corner or by the side of a cell, refusing to take part in activities and at times seeming a little lost and fearful.

**Rebellion** as a strategy used by inmates can take one or more of the following forms:

- Breaking the formal rules;
- Keeping contraband in the prison;
- Hunger strike;
- Fighting;
- Passive resistance/withdrawal;
- Attempted and successful escape;
- Contact with the outside world;
- Feigning illness; and
- Creating makeshift weapons.

Several reports appearing in the daily newspapers bear evidence of these types of adaptive resistance and featured headlines such as:

“Prisoner killed another charged for murder”;

“Prison protest ends”;

“26 cell phones found in prison search”; and

“Makeshift weapons increasing prison deaths”.<sup>6</sup>

Warders were at times alleged to be involved in the acts of resistance by their covert and even overt encouragement. Examples include allowing inmates to stock up on food in their cells or smuggling in contraband for the inmates. There are also news headlines and articles focusing on this aspect of the behaviour of wardens.

“Prison officials yesterday accused some warders of encouraging inmates at the General Penitentiary in downtown Kingston to again go on hunger strike.”

“Police investigating Saturday’s explosion at the General Penitentiary in downtown Kingston are likely to question warders about possible involvement in the failed bid by inmates.”

“For several months now a loophole in the administration of the DCS has allowed foreign national... to be released from prisons on compassionate on the pretext of being terminally ill.”

“Four Correctional officers have been sent on leave following investigations into reports that a small group was trafficking contraband into the Tower Street maximum security prison downtown Kingston.”<sup>7</sup>

**Rebellion** also involves the inmates taking the ‘intransigent line’ (Goffman 1961:62). This involves challenging the institution by their refusal to cooperate with staff. Such behaviour though, may result in punishment being meted out to the inmate. Punishment may include the loss of privileges, internal transfer to another cellblock or even transfer to another institution.

Many inmates also adapt by colonizing, that is, trying to create a home away from home. At the female prison, one can see improvised curtains in front of cells, made to maintain some kind of privacy. There are photographs of family members on their walls as inmates attempt to maintain some connection with them. Bibles and other books are very popular. Through the gifts of a local charity, there are also fans and televisions that are shared communally.

In one particular cellblock, shoes are lined up outside the door as no one dared to wear any form of footwear onto the beautifully cleaned and shiny floor of the cellblock. An old piece of canvas was placed at the doorway for feet to be cleaned before entering.

Laundered clothes hang anywhere that is deemed convenient and the laundry area with clothes blowing in the wind is always nearby to the cells. There are those who will capture non-human visitors to the centres such as pigeons and birds and make pets of them. Inmates will also adapt through forming themselves into cliques and groups often around an assumed leader who may have been a leader on the outside. These leaders are sought for solace and other forms of support.

According to the inmates, they provide emotional support and/or mutual encouragement. They express their dreams, aspirations and experiences with each other and share activities such as football, dominoes and cards. These activities help to relieve them of boredom. ‘Seasoned prisoners’ also teach the newcomers in an effort to help them cope.

In order to assist the inmates in adapting, the DCS allows the inmates to have family and fun days. On a family day children and relatives visit and are provided with food and play activities for the children. Entertainment is usually provided by the inmates.

One report in a daily newspaper <sup>8</sup> discussed in details of a girl’s party in prison. It read:

imagine a swinging birthday party in a Jamaican prison, with girls galore from all across the globe... Think of a guest list of over 300, mostly women, including prison staffers who made no secrecy of their involvement. And while the authority have details on the incident, absolutely no move has so far been made to get to the bottom of the matter, save for a request of an official to account for this most unusual activity. So exciting was the occasion that some inmates actually abandoned their regular meals at the time in favour of the ample supply of goodies brought in for the unusual merrymaking... a whole van load of drinks and food was consumed amidst high spirits, over a period of about two hours.<sup>9</sup>

There are other reports of visits, family and fun days. *All Woman*<sup>10</sup> shared the feelings of a teenaged girl who visited her father on family day...

It is the first time in eight years that 17 year old Althea,<sup>11</sup> is seeing her father. While expressions of joy, sorrow and pain fitted across her face, she told all woman how happy she was to get the opportunity to see her dad, who has been in prison for a while. Althea and her sisters were part of thousands who got a chance to see their loved ones at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre. For her, the 15 minutes she spent with her dad were precious and went much too soon. It was good to see him was all she could say, as she, her younger sisters and uncles overcame with emotions and pain, watched the warders led their father and brother away.

The relatively new programme which was in its second year is dubbed 'family week' and during that time inmates get a chance to see their younger children<sup>12</sup> and relatives – an opportunity that comes once a year. Family day, although attempting to bring families together is closely monitored and every activity is supervised.

There are those who will *convert* and attempt to become close to the staff ready to obey at every behest and become subdued to life in the institution. These are often given privileges and responsibilities in the institution.

"A small number of clearly defined rewards or privileges are held out in exchange for obedience to staff in action or spirit" (Goffman 1991:70). These privileges are often quickly suspended at the least attempt by anyone to break the rules or abuse the system. One such privilege is parole, which may be extended to inmates who are deemed to have been sufficiently rehabilitated to be placed in a job, can function in civil society or allowed to complete his/her sentence in the general community under the supervision of a probation officer.

Goffman (1991) further notes that once the inmate has adapted and become colonized, he may find it difficult to reintegrate with outside society. This is particularly so if the period of institutionalization was lengthy and if the inmate in the institution had received certain privileges or status that will be lost upon release. The inmates may have also formed associations in the institutions and they may have developed reputations to which they have become accustomed.

Qualitative data from recently released inmates from Fort Augusta found that so *total* was the character of the incarceration that reintegration into the wider society was extremely difficult. The former inmates found that members of the society were unwelcoming. They former depression and lack of jobs and sometimes loss of family support. The label 'ex-convict' was a major impediment in securing gainful employment, especially in a comparatively small country, where one may be easily known.

Thus the rehabilitation programmes designed to prepare inmates for the outside world may also act as a barrier to reintegration. The inmate for example, who studies and is successful in external examinations while in the institution or who leaves with a skill may be willing and able to pursue that occupations/work upon reentry into the society. On the outside world however, this is often not taken into consideration as the 'ex-convict' may be viewed with fear and suspicion and persons who have never been institutionalized may be reluctant to associate with those who have been.

### **Conclusions**

This paper sought to examine the character of incarceration in Jamaica. The framework utilized was that provided by Goffman in 1961. To a large extent, Goffman's description of life in a total institution is relevant in the Jamaican context. The experience is so *complete*, that inmates throw parties, have fun days, go on conditional day releases and colonize their dormitories. As they would in the outside world, they attempt to fulfill most of their needs, disallowing the restriction of their physical movement to impede them.

The inmate maintains some privileges but in a restricted environment. His entire life operates on a routine and he is expected to conform to all the rules and regulations. Failure to do this will result in withdrawal of privileges and punishment.

However, this adaptation is what the authors want to term *resistant adaptation* – an adaptation that sees spurts of rebellion amidst the seemingly passive acceptance of one's fate. Both staff and inmates experience this resistant adaptation as evident in the uprisings by both inmates and warders. Despite the resistant ebbs of the adaptation, though, the totality of the experience is so absolute that upon release, the ex-convict finds it extremely difficult to adapt to life outside the total institution.

Perhaps, that could be one explanation for the rate of recidivism in Jamaica. The Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 2003 reported that of 2331 males admitted to the institutions for the year, 498 or 21.4 per cent were recidivists with 271, or marginally in excess of 54 per cent of the recidivists being admitted for the third time. A study done on recidivism by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice also reported that over two-thirds of released prisoners in a 15 state study, were rearrested within three years of their release.<sup>13</sup> Living in a total institution has indelible impact on the lives of the inmates and their guards. One is never the same upon release.

### **Policy Directions**

This paper ends with some policy recommendations some of which are already being discussed with the Department of Correctional Services. Among the recommendations emanating from this study are:

- Provide specialized counseling services in the institutions to assist inmates to adapt. The institutions are in dire need of some form of therapeutic intervention for the preservation of good mental health. Those whom have withdrawn should be targeted for this service.
- For the inmates who are colonizing, to the extent of resource availability, effort should be made to assist them in this regard. One example of this assistance could be the accommodation of shelves, hanging space or the alternative accommodation for those who are allowed their own clothes in the institutions.
- Some privacy could be maintained by putting some form of partition in the shower stalls.

- The response of inmates to fun/family days indicates that it is to the advantage of the DCS to allow such days as it offers a positive step in the process of rehabilitation. One inmate states:  
*“Family days take off some of the stress and makes us think positive. A man won’t keep up any almshouse or violence if him have family to think about.”*
- Rehabilitation programmes could be improved to ensure every inmate is usefully occupied during the hours spent out of the cell and modern technologies could be used to instruct and teach during the very long hours spent by inmates in ‘lock down,’ especially during the summer months.
- Inmates need to be more adequately prepared for release. Again counseling and orientation sessions could assist in this regard and in after care programmes. For example, if an inmate is returning to village or community, or a family which has undergone changes since he left it, should be prepared for these changes to ease his adaptation in his free life.
- Public education and sensitization programmes could be used to deal with the issues of stigma and enhanced after care programmes could be used to help reduce the rate of recidivism.
- A study needs to be done on the warders in the institutions and their process of adaptation.
- Programmes for productive enterprises such as COPSPROD should be encouraged and fully supported especially since they provide earning possibilities for inmates.
- Inmates should be treated as individuals each with his own needs/skills, knowledge and ability. Every effort should be made to provide them with skills training that would enhance their ability to secure lucrative employment subsequent to release.
- Incentives and compensation for the wardens should be commensurate with their working conditions.
- Leaders and potential leaders, normally easily identified in a total institution, should be targeted for special interventions that could benefit the institution.

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### Notes

1. The *Jamaica Gazette Supplement* Proclamations, Rules and Regulations Vol. CXIV 1991.
2. Major crimes include murder, shooting, rape carnal abuse and robbery.
3. Corrections Act 1991: p.287 section 122.
4. While the daily schedule varies across institutions, it involves set times for waking up, undertaking activities ranging from eating to rehabilitation to recreation and finally 'lock-down'.
5. Corrections Act 1991: sections 97, 100 and 117.
6. *Daily Gleaner* July 8, 2002, p.3. March 19, 2004. *Sunday Gleaner* February 8, 2004 A4.
7. *Daily Observer* May 7, 2002, p.3; *Daily Gleaner* September 29, 2003, p.1; March 26, 2004, p.1; *Daily Gleaner* April 26, 2004.
8. *Daily Observer*, July 9, 2001.
9. The birthday that was being celebrated was that of a baby born inside the prison.
10. A magazine insert in the *Daily Observer*.
11. Not her real name.
12. Children under 18 years are not allowed into the Correctional Centres for general visiting.
13. Bureau of Justice, Re-entry trends in the U.S.: Recidivism. US State Department of Justice, October 2002. <http://www.Ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/recidivism.html>.

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# Creaming and Social Segregation in the Jamaican School System

Corin Bailey

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines crime in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) in the context of social exclusion. In this paper I examine the manner in which the education system excludes. The research employed methodological triangulation (questionnaire survey and focus group interviews) and was conducted in four areas of differing social status in the KMA. The paper is divided into three sections: In the first, I use secondary sources to analyse attempts to reform the system in the past, focusing specifically on the dual nature of the education system; I then examine the characteristics and achievements of Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) entrants in 2001 at two schools which fall within my study areas – one school at the upper and the other at the lower end of the performance scale. I demonstrate that the system of selection encourages ‘creaming’ and social segregation.

Finally, I refer to the debate on ‘creaming’ and segregation in the British system an argument which suggests that while selection and ‘creaming’ ensure good results for top schools, it contributes to underachievement in communities as a whole. Education reform is needed but the actual form that it takes will depend on the role that the society would like education to play. The fundamental question is whether a society that is divided socially and spatially along class lines will ‘buy into’ an education project that promotes high performance secondary education in schools committed to social integration and comprising pupils of mixed abilities.

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## Introduction

The performance of Jamaican school children in regional examinations and the wide range of attainment among schools have been stimulating a healthy debate over the type of changes that are necessary to develop the quality of teaching and learning strategies, and raise standards of achievement for all students (*The Gleaner*, October 29, 2003). Academic results achieved by pupils vary according to the type of high schools which they attend and a recent assessment gave the vast majority of high schools in the country a ‘failing’ grade based on their performance in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) examinations (*Daily Observer*, May 17, 2004).

This paper is based on a PhD thesis which examined crime in the context of social exclusion. Social exclusion has been defined as a process which excludes people from activities which determine whether they are integrated into the society. The research was carried out in four communities of differing socio-economic status in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) and employed a mixed methodology – questionnaire surveys

and focus group discussions with two age cohorts as well as the police. In this paper the focus is on education which is one of the main avenues of upward mobility and which is organised in such a way as to deny a large segment of the society access to the type of education that would allow such mobility. The paper is divided into three parts. The first is an examination of past attempts to reform the system. Then, selected characteristics of Grade Six Achievement Test entrants in 2001 to two schools that fell in the study areas are discussed. The central thesis is that the education system encourages 'creaming' and social segregation and there is need for a wider debate on the role of education and the manner in which the system can be reorganised to serve the desired end.

The decisions that a country makes about the type of education that is to be provided and who is to be allowed access are influenced by the type of society that is wanted and so education is regarded as a powerful tool in social engineering (McNeil, 1986). While some sociologists stress the role of education in establishing standards by which all are measured, others argue that the meritocratic society is a myth as it disguises the fact that the children of the rich have greater access to opportunities and rewards than those of the poor, irrespective of innate abilities. That schools reproduce inequalities in the society (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) has been a persistent theme of research on the education system in the Caribbean beginning in the immediate pre-emancipation period (Bacchus, 2001) and extending into the post-emancipation (Turner, 2001) as well as the modern periods (Nunes, 1976; Miller, 1983; Poplin, 1988; Allen, 1991).

### **'Posh' and 'Poor'**

Miller (1983) labeled the system of education as it evolved in Jamaica as 'posh and poor' and the dual system begins with early childhood education where, in the main, the children of the poor attend infant schools or infant departments of primary schools or basic schools, most of which are unrecognized and offer unacceptable levels of care (UNICEF/PIOJ, 1991). Only a small percentage has access to the more stimulating environment of the kindergartens of independent preparatory schools. Similarly, at the primary level, the fee structure of the preparatory schools excludes the children of the poor who are educated in the publicly financed primary system.

Until 1967, secondary schools in Jamaica conducted their own entrance examinations to select students for entry into a fee paying system. In 1962, with 22 per cent of the school population preparatory schools received 51 per cent of the places (Poplin, 1988). Education reform in independent Jamaica closely followed the pattern that had been established in Britain by the Education Act of 1944. The Act established free secondary education in Britain and encouraged the creation of a tripartite system of secondary education, dividing this level into grammar, secondary modern and technical schools but stressed that there was to be parity of esteem. However, there was a competitive system of selection for secondary schools (the 11-plus examinations) and based on the results, the more academic were channeled into grammar and since there were few technical schools, the secondary moderns catered for most of the rest (Halsey et al., 1961; Douglas, 1964).

This was the model adopted in the Education Act of 1969 in Jamaica and here too equality of opportunity was the stated goal (Poplin, 1988). With the eventual introduction of free education for all, financial barriers to access were removed. Moreover, there was discrimination in favour of children from primary schools through a scheme that reserved 70 per cent of the places in secondary schools for them (Hamilton, 2001). Yet, in 1971, just 12 per cent of the children entering high schools came from poor homes and the scheme was abandoned. Middle class parents had used several ruses to get around this scheme and it was they, in effect, who had benefited from the system of free

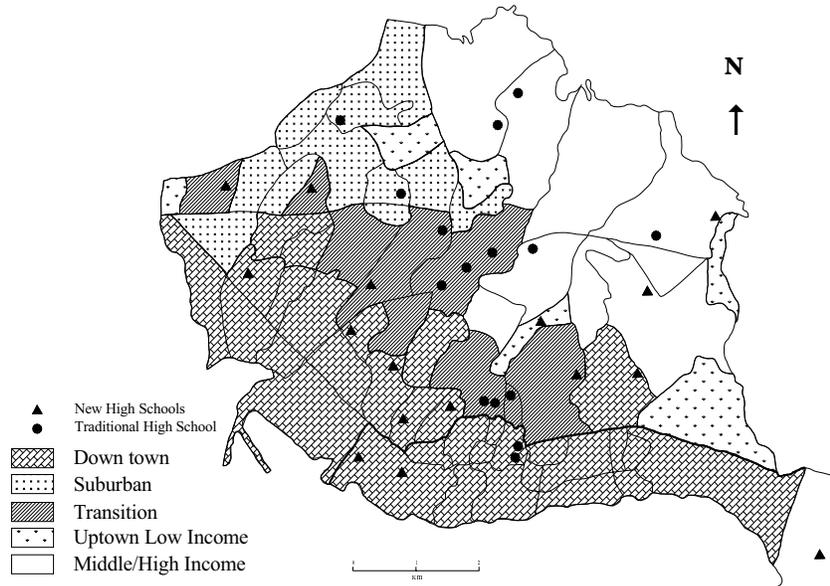
education (Hamilton, 1979). Miller (1983) argues that the scheme was fundamentally flawed. If financial assistance was intended to ensure access by children from the lower strata then it should have been awarded on the basis of ability to pay rather than on performance. However, this would not have addressed a selection process that was, in effect, a system of rationing:

Even if all the children who sat the examination were geniuses, some means would have to be found of 'failing' about 90 per cent of them – the excess of the number of candidates over the number of places available in the schools... (Allen, 1991: 72).

So the vast majority was labeled failure and the small percentage that had passed channeled into two types of schools. The traditional high schools some of which had originally catered to children of the planter class, and denominational schools of the same mould accepted the high fliers. The alternative to these prestige schools for those who had passed were the comprehensive schools and here, too, we looked to Britain for inspiration. Comprehensive schools had been in existence in Britain from 1945 but were adopted as policy in the 1960s by the British government. Schools were organised on a community basis to offer a full range of subjects to children of all levels of ability and the selective entrance system was dropped. Proponents argued that it would remove the stigma of failure, allow social mixing, reduce the likelihood of disadvantage on the basis of class and improve the performance of children of low and middling abilities. Today, about 96 per cent of children in the state system in England attend non selective comprehensive schools (Jesson, 2001).

In Jamaica, the comprehensive system was adopted in name only. It was introduced as part of the government's plan to expand secondary education and not as a radical experiment with mixing to improve the performance of low and middling achievers. In a sense, there was some mixing of abilities since they accepted those who had passed – though not at a level that would secure their entry to the prestige schools – as well as some who entered on a non-exam basis from 'feeder schools'. They did increase the numbers having access to some form of secondary education for by 1996 the 'failure' rate had fallen to 60 per cent (PIOJ/STATIN, 1996). But they provided little in the way of preparation for work or further study. Many who enter do not complete their education partly for economic reasons but also because they know that extending their stay would bring neither educational nor occupational reward. The majority of the patrons of these 'dead end' schools, wrote Allen (1991), "remained trapped in cycle of intergenerational poverty". Figure 1 shows the location of these comprehensive schools in relation to the social areas of the KMA (essentially an updated version of that presented by Knight and Davies in 1970). The comprehensives were placed in the heart of the inner city – in Denham Town, Tivoli Gardens, Greenwich Town, Trench Town, Penwood. It is obvious that these large schools were seen as the solution to the products of inner-city primary schools.

If this was the experience of those who had passed the CEE, what was the fate of those who had supposedly failed? They either remained in the All-Age schools or were transferred to the New Secondary schools created in 1974 by the amalgamation of Junior and Senior Secondary schools. Miller (1983) reported that the main purpose of these schools, as set out by the Ministry of Education, was to provide a practical education that would steer students through apprenticeship in trade, industry, commerce and agriculture. However, his research showed that the pupils at these schools placed a high value on academic and not on the type offered.

**Figure 1: Location of Schools**

### The 1997 Education Reform

In 1997 a programme was initiated to streamline the education system, to remove the distinction among different types of secondary schools by upgrading the new secondary and comprehensive schools to high schools. The upgrading programme was completed in 2000 giving all students access to a High school education. This development, it was said, would remove the stigma of failure (PIOJ/STATIN, 2000) presumably because association between structures and prior grades would. Plans have been announced for the introduction of a common curriculum between grades 7 and 9, for teacher and facility upgrading (PIOJ/STATIN, 2001). These initiatives should not be understood to signal the end of the selective examination system because the GSAT replaced the CEE. Students taking the GSAT are required to select five schools in any part of the island that they would like to attend and indicate their order of preference. The most highly rated schools are the first to be listed and these schools are in a position to select the brightest and best.

A debate has been taking place in education in England over the past decade over parental choice or the right of parents to choose a school. This simply means expressing a preference for a school or selecting a particular feeder primary school (Gewirtz et al., 1995). Supporters of parental choice believe that this would encourage schools to compete, to make provisions that match parental wishes and strive to achieve excellence (Baker, 2004). This, they argue, would have a ripple effect throughout the system as all schools would be forced to raise standards in order to compete for bright students (Brown and Lauder, 1997). Those who oppose giving parents limited right to choose do so because they fear that it would lead to the emergence of the same situation that obtains in Jamaica. Freedom to choose, Ranson (1997) suggests, puts schools in a position to control the market as those that are favoured are in a position to select the students they

wish. Hierarchies of schools develop and only those with the necessary social capital are able to benefit. There is a shift in emphasis from the needs of the student to student performance. There is a shift from what the schools can do for students to what students can do to improve the reputation and the ranking of the school (Ball et al., 1994). Critics who lean towards the subcultural thesis believe that hierarchies in education contribute to the development of distinct subcultures, the academic and the delinquent or conformist and non conformist (O'Donnell, 1992). But even those who do not work in the subcultural tradition see the development of such hierarchies as a form of labelling of whole groups or banding which can affect the progress of pupils. It is against this background that placement in two schools as a result of the performance in the 2002 GSAT examinations and under a new system that was supposed to remove the stigma of failure is examined.

### 'Creaming' and Social Segregation

In the recent ranking of high schools in Jamaica, one of the schools which will be called Uptown High, was ranked among the top performing schools in the island (*Daily Observer*, May 17, 2004). The other, Downtown High, was upgraded from Junior High to New Secondary, Comprehensive and finally to High School. Table 2 shows the average scores and standard deviation for students entering Uptown High in four subjects. The lowest percentage received by any student was 82 and no student had more than two marks below 90.

**Table 2: GSAT grades, Uptown High School**

	Maths	Science	Social Studies	Language Arts
Mean	96.2	93.0	89.3	93.0
Std Dev	2.3	3.3	3.1	2.5

*Source:* Ministry of Education, Jamaica

The table also shows the small standard deviation. This was the cream. The picture was very different in Downtown High (Table 3).

**Table 3: GSAT grades, Downtown High School**

	Maths	Science	Social Studies	Language Arts
Mean	53.4	55.2	57.1	54.3
Std. Dev.	10.9	10.2	10.2	10.1

*Source:* Ministry of Education, Jamaica

The grades in Downtown High ranged from as low as 33 per cent and with the exception of one student who obtained 87 per cent in Mathematics, the highest grade for a student entering Downtown High was lower than the lowest grade for Uptown High. The standard deviation was also much larger. Judging by formal qualifications, the teachers in Downtown High may have been less equipped to meet the twin challenges of a lower and wider range of attainment (Table 4).

**Table 4: Qualifications of teachers**

Qualifications	Uptown High	Downtown High
Trained graduate	51	27
Untrained graduate	20	5
Diplomas and certificates	18	63
Other	11	5

Source: Ministry of Education, Jamaica

In essence, nothing has really changed. The fact that all schools are now high schools will not rob the traditional high schools of their high status or remove the stigma of attending those schools now referred to as New or Upgraded High schools.

Of the 184 students who gained admission to Uptown High, 127 came from preparatory schools, mainly, but not exclusively in the KMA. Fifty per cent of those entering from primary schools came from three schools in Upper St. Andrew that have earned a reputation for high academic standards. Uptown High was able to cream off high performers from all schools and from parishes as far away as St. James. By contrast, 98 per cent of the students accepted in Downtown High had been educated in primary, all-age and junior high schools. Two per cent had attended five preparatory schools, none of which had supplied students to Uptown High.

Of those entering Uptown High, 75 per cent had addresses within the KMA. Their home addresses were mapped on the basis of the five social areas and the result is shown in Figure 2. The high income zone, with 7 per cent of the 10 to 14 year-old population supplied 52 per cent of the intake of Uptown High. Suburban housing scheme areas accounted for just under 11 per cent of the population but supplied nearly 25 per cent of the intake. Together, these two residential zones supplied 77 per cent of the students who entered Uptown High in 2002. Some of these middle and upper income zones contained pockets of poverty but very few were selected from these areas. The pattern was dominated by Barbican, Cherry Gardens and Constant Spring.

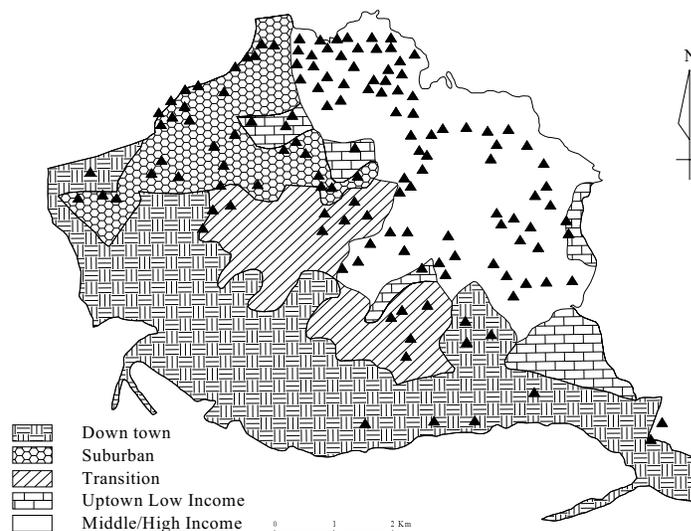
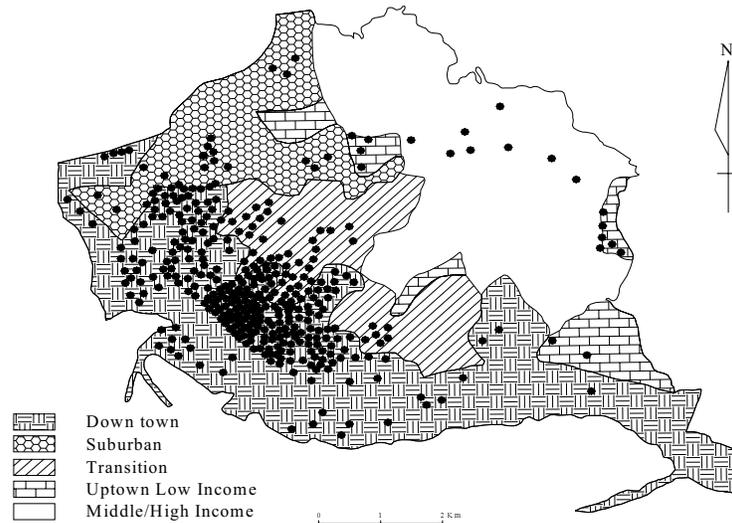
**Figure 2: Home addresses of students entering Uptown High School**

Figure 3 shows the home addresses of students gaining admission to Downtown High. Seventy-two per cent gave addresses in the inner city, 3 per cent from uptown low-income areas and just under 1 per cent from low-income pockets in middle and high-income areas such as Sandy Park and Barbican Road. The students at Downtown High were drawn predominantly from Delacree, Cockburn Gardens, Whitfield and Trench Town.

**Figure 3: Home addresses of students entering Downtown High School**



Up to 2002, parents met the cost of the Caribbean Examination Council's (CXC) examinations taken at the end of the five years in secondary school. The number of subjects taken depended on the resources of the parents and many students from poor families who were eligible in the sense that they had reached Grade 11 and who had passed the selection tests, were often unable to sit as many of the exams as they wished. The results of the 2001 examinations were analysed by the National Council on Education on the basis of the type of school on entry. The results for Mathematics and English for the country as well as for Uptown and Downtown High are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: CXC results 2001**

Schools	Eligible cohort	Entries	Awards (% Gds. 1-3)
<b>Mathematics</b>			
Secondary High	12 322	9 103	40
Upgraded High	20 303	5 201	11
Technical	3 393	2 072	26
<i>Downtown High</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Uptown High</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>205</i>	<i>98</i>

Schools	Eligible cohort	Entries	Awards (% Gds. 1-3)
<b>English</b>			
Secondary High	12 324	9 835	74
Upgraded High	20 315	5 385	38
Technical	3 933	2 769	40
<b><i>Downtown High</i></b>	<b><i>348</i></b>	<b><i>204</i></b>	<b><i>20</i></b>
<b><i>Uptown High</i></b>	<b><i>208</i></b>	<b><i>205</i></b>	<b><i>100</i></b>

Source: National Council on Education, Jamaica, 2001

The disparities among the types of schools and between Uptown and Downtown High were the same for all the 16 subjects examined. The disparities are bad enough. What is particularly unfortunate is the wastage at Grade 11. Seventy-seven per cent of those eligible to take the mathematics examination at Downtown High did not take the exam.

The point that must be made very forcefully is that those who are creamed off for high prestige schools are not necessarily those of the highest intelligence. Children living in this narrow geographical area are not specially endowed. Since the system does not start from a base of equality it segregates levels of attainment and this is based on privilege. Neither should it be assumed that the children in the inner city have different aspirations. Focus group discussions with the 8 to 10 age cohort in the inner city and upper income areas revealed that the aspirations of the two groups were the same. They all had what are considered to be middle class aspirations. However, at a similar age, primary school children were already behind their more privileged counterparts. What was significant was that when asked about their aspirations for their children, not one of these young boys mentioned a primary school education:

“Basic, prep, college.”

Inner city boys put a high premium on academic achievement which they saw as a means of upward mobility and they were not convinced that a primary school education gave adequate preparation. Indeed, the older men in the focus group discussions in the inner city, were bitter because their experiences in dead end schools were no preparation for further study or the world of work. They felt they were stigmatised and locked out of the labour market not only because of their lack of qualifications, but also because of the reputation of their neighbourhood. But there was no real evidence among the young men of the emergence of the ‘oppositional identity’ (Massey and Denton, 1993) or the rejection of the aspirations of mainstream society. They still had very conventional hopes and dreams and spoke of the impact that the realization of these aspirations could have on their lives as well as the organizational life of their community. They felt that it was absolutely vital that they keep their hopes of moving upwards alive lest they do:

“...even darker things.”

If it is accepted that the system of privilege and structured inequality excludes young men and women of intelligence, then it should be no surprise that they turn this intelligence to the construction of alternative careers. They do so not always because the benefits to be gained are so great that employment ceases to be an attractive alternative. Sometimes, the young men said, one operation brings only “one food money”. Many follow these alternative paths because:

“We don’t have a whole heap of choice down here.”

### Radical Reform

Recently the Minister of Education spoke of the need to address issues of quality and equity in education (*Daily Observer*, February 22, 2003). The upgrading of physical facilities and teacher training were some of the ways by which the Minister proposed to tackle the problem of inequity. The Minister also pointed to the fact that those schools in the inner city that did well had a “mixed socio-economic student profile”. It is not clear which schools the Minister had in mind for the society is very loose in its definition of the inner city, using the term more in a generic than in an ecological sense. The Minister also stated that she was seriously considering the long-term benefits of ‘scattering’ those students who had performed well in the GSAT examinations throughout the system – comments that provoked instant and vigorous opposition (*Gleaner*, September 5, 2003). Parental concern is understandable in view of the present gap in performance between traditional and upgraded high schools.

There might be much for the country to learn from the debate that is taking place in England at the moment over the future of selective schools. The majority of the remaining grammar schools to which entry is fully selective is concentrated in 15 of the 150 local education authorities (LEAs). In these LEAs, those selected as a result of examination results go to grammar schools while those who fail to gain entry attend secondary modern schools (Marks, 2000). Research suggests that while grammar schools, like Jamaica’s traditional high schools, obtain excellent results for the pupils they select, the results mask under-performance in the LEAs in question as a whole. When GCSE results of students classified as average ability in the National Curriculum Tests at the age of 14 were compared across the school systems, those in non-selective LEAs out performed those in selective. The performance of those students who were labelled failures by the grammar school system and were placed in secondary modern schools, depressed overall performance in the selective LEAs (Jesson, 2000). These conclusions appear to be supported by evidence from Scotland where all public schools are non selective/comprehensive and where there is a higher average attainment in the GCSE exams than in England and less variation between schools in average attainment (Jesson, 2000). The results from comprehensive schools are even more impressive when the new specialist comprehensive schools are considered, that is schools that have a special focus on a chosen subject area but nevertheless deliver a balanced education to all. These schools are doing well especially in socially deprived areas in England (BBC News, 5 March 2001). Thus, by focusing on the achievement of ‘high fliers’ in traditional high schools and by focusing national attention on the league tables for CXC, the country ignores the possibility of a damaging effect of ‘creaming’ and labelling on national performance.

A decision has to be made about the role of education and this will be based on the views held about the type of society that is needed. Teacher and facility upgrading in low income areas can produce schools with a good mix of abilities and, ultimately, better performance and participation in the workforce. For those who believe that education ought not to be a tool in social engineering, this ought to suffice. But will this be one of those rare examples of separate but equal? Moreover, will this suffice if one of the goals is a reduction in the level of social segregation. This is far more difficult in a society that is divided socially and spatially along class lines. Will middle class parents ‘buy into’ this objective and send their children to high performing schools in the inner city? Or, will improvements in the primary school system provide more ‘cream’ for traditional high schools? Alcock (1997) maintains that social exclusion is more than the distribution of resources and participation in working life. It includes relations between people and the dignity that derives from integration in a social network. The fundamental question is

what policy is needed to reduce the extreme variation in attainment among schools as well as social segregation?

Because of financial constraints a move to a more radical solution could begin on a pilot basis with the creation of a geographically based school catchment in one of the hybrid communities in St. Andrew. Resources, financial and manpower, could be poured into the primary and high schools in this area and the high schools could draw pupils on a non selective basis from the feeder primary/prep schools. The scheme will only work if all schools are committed to genuinely high performance education. If not, the policy could easily increase the attractiveness of private secondary schools. The success or failure of this initiative could determine what direction a comprehensive overhaul of the education system should take. The education system in Jamaica, as in the rest of the Caribbean, started from a base of inequality. There are compelling reasons why the system ought to be dismantled.

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# Rethinking Common-Law Unions: Toward a Critical Re-Evaluation of Caribbean Family Sociology

Rhoda Reddock

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## ABSTRACT

In 1998, the Cohabital Relationships Bill passed in Trinidad and Tobago. This Act for the first time in the history of the country, formally recognized the existence of intimate, consensual and heterosexual non-legal unions. It put forward mechanisms for registration of unions, the 'protection' of spouses or partners and the resolution of conflict or settlement of disputes, occasioned by the end of a union either by death, separation or other cause.

This paper is an early attempt to explore this phenomenon by asking new questions. In particular it will explore the meaning of these relationships to the women and men involved. In so doing it will review the theorizing of these relationships in Caribbean social science; and examine the contemporary situation and changes from the earlier part of the century. It will conclude by exploring the meaning of such relationships for the people involved.

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## Introduction

The history and tradition of common-law, consensual or concubinage relationships has been well studied and documented by social-anthropologists and historians on the Caribbean over this century. This was one of a range or typology of union-types identified by scholars of Caribbean family and kinship. This form of union however, although recognised by demographers by 1943 for the collection of fertility-related data on women, has remained unrecognised within the region despite its frequency.

It is interesting to note therefore that in the justification for the introduction of such legislation, the Green Paper on Cohabital Relationships noted that:

In jurisdictions like Canada, the United States and Australia cohabital arrangements are gaining social acceptance and are reportedly on the increase. Undoubtedly these arrangements represent the trend of modern day living (1996:2).

And in formulating the Bill, reference is made to relevant legislation in other jurisdictions in particular in Australia and New Zealand (1996:9).

Years ago, Lloyd Braithwaite in his analysis of Caribbean society argued in contrast to M.G. Smith that rather than a situation of cultural pluralism, Colonial Caribbean societal culture was characterised by one overriding feature – the acceptance of the

superiority of things European. Decades later, this is still true. The paradigm of modernisation and globalisation is simply another manifestation of this old observation. So it is with this legislation on common-law unions, it has come in the wake of an increase in such unions in Europe, North America and other countries and raises larger questions than were originally raised by Caribbeanist anthropologists and social scientists earlier in this century. Writing on Canada in the 1990s, Le Bourdais and Neill (1998:2) note that “57% of the Canadians who entered their first union between 1990 and 1994 chose cohabitation compared to 15% of those who did so in the early 1970s, and this proportion has reached 80% in Quebec.”

More recently Canadian statistics record that in Quebec only 26 per cent of women aged 30 to 39 expected to start their conjugal lives with a marriage. In contrast with the rest of Canada, 59 per cent of women expected to choose marriage as their first union. It is also estimated that 70 per cent of Quebecers will start their conjugal lives through a common-law union, compared with 34 per cent in the other provinces.

The Statistics Canada report on the survey noted that in Quebec common-law unions were accepted and adopted sooner in that province. The survey also shows generational differences in attitudes towards common-law relationships. For younger Canadians, a common-law union is a prelude or a substitute for a first marriage. For older people, it is a prelude or a substitute for a remarriage (CBC News, 11.7.2002).

### A Structure of Longue Duree

As noted by Hermoine McKenzie (1993), one of the most striking features of family forms in the Caribbean has been the relative lack of change over a long period of time during which many economic, political and other social changes have occurred. She cites George Roberts' observation that despite large immigration flows inward and outward, and the incorporation of new ethnic groups, these patterns have remained very much the same. R.T. Smith therefore identified the Caribbean family system as “a structure of longue duree”, a somewhat remarkable situation in a context where much effort at changing these patterns has taken place.

It should be noted however that although the structure may have remained the same, the meanings attached to these structures and the relationships therein may have changed. This paper is an early attempt to explore these changing meanings within a relatively consistent structure. In particular it will examine the phenomenon of common law unions, that unit usually seen as a transition from the early visiting union to the mature legal marriage.

The category ‘common law’ was introduced into British Caribbean censuses in 1943 for Jamaica and 1946 for the rest of the region. According to Lloyd Braithwaite:

This was a major step towards making possible a more meaningful analysis of the census material. It was the first recognition of the peculiar nature of family structure in the British West Indies (Braithwaite, 1957:528).

He noted however that:

The term ‘common-law union’ is itself unfortunate, and the description ‘non-legal union’ suggested by Dom Basil Matthews would appear to be superior in every respect... It is misleading because it tends to give the impression that the union has legal connotations, that it is merely the legal union without the legal sanction, while in point of fact there are important sociological differences (Braithwaite, 1957:528).

This term was added to this census at this time primarily out of an interest in fertility. Up to the present, data on union status are only collected from women of child-bearing age (14-44) in the fertility related section of the census. Similar data are not collected from men whose data are limited to the legal marital status information collected in the central body of the census.<sup>1</sup> The initial concern had been that the ‘instability’ of Caribbean family patterns could contribute to high fertility rates. In the 1940s concerns with fertility and family planning were high and it is in this context that the more detailed data were collected from women.

The 1980 Census of the Commonwealth Caribbean found that of all women ever in unions, 48 per cent were married, 20 per cent were in consensual unions with the remaining one-third almost equally divided between women in non-residential unions and women who have in the past been in married or consensual unions (McKenzie, 1993:76). This pattern has tended to vary from country to country with Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago having the highest number of married unions, due primarily to the large population of Indian descent and therefore influencing the overall figures for the region.

Figures for the predominantly African-descended population of Barbados, Grenada and St. Kitts/Nevis, however, show a slightly different picture in 1980.

**Table 1: Union Status of women 14–44, Barbados, Grenada and St. Kitts/Nevis, 1980**

Union Status	Barbados	Grenada	St. Kitts/Nevis
Married	24.0%	21.3%	17.7%
Common-law	14.0%	16.8%	11.8%
Visiting	5.8%	11.3%	10.6%
No longer living with husband or C-L partner	7.7%	6.3%	7.0%
Never lived with husband or C-L partner	48.2%	44.3%	52.8%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Hermoine McKenzie, “The Family, Class and Ethnicity in the Future of the Caribbean”, in J. Edward Greene (ed) *Race, Class and Gender in the Future of the Caribbean* (ISER, Mona, 1993).

In a 1995 survey of family in Trinidad and Tobago, Godfrey St. Bernard provides non-fertility related union status data. This study, for example, provides information on males and females 15 years and over and for different ethnic groups. Additionally, an ethnically disaggregated analysis showed that close to one-third of persons of African descent had experienced common-law unions. Interestingly 10-11 per cent of persons of Indian descent had experienced these unions, suggesting the development of a trend already identified by Braithwaite and Roberts in 1962.

**Table 2: Female Population 14 years and over by union status – Trinidad and Tobago, 1980 & 1990**

Union status	1980	1990
Married	45.7%	46.4%
Common-Law	12.6%	11.5%
Visiting	1.7%	1.6%
No Longer Living with husband	5.9%	8.5%
No Longer living with Common-Law partner	2.7%	4.0%
Never had Husband or Common-Law Partner	28.7%	23.9%
Not Stated	2.7%	4.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Linda Hewitt, *National Census Report, Trinidad and Tobago 1990-1991. Population and Housing Census*, p.32.

**Table 3: Respondents aged 15 and over, ever in common-law union by age, ethnic origin and sex, 1995**

Ethnic origin	All ages
<b>Male</b>	<b>21.8% (2138)</b>
African	34.4%
Indian	10.4%
Mixed	27.1%
Other	8.7%
<b>Female</b>	<b>20.8 (2433)</b>
African	33.7%
Indian	10.9%
Mixed	22.0%
Other	6.7%

Source: Godfrey St. Bernard, *The Family and Society in Trinidad and Tobago: The Findings of the National Survey of Family Life* (Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), St. Augustine and The Ministry of Social Development, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain, 1998).

As strongly identified in the early literature as we shall see later, the common-law union was often described as a transitional stage between early casual, visiting or 'keeper' unions and legal marriage. This was usually shown by reference to the changing figures especially between the 20-29 age group and the 30s and over. For example, Roman Catholic cleric, Dom Basil Matthews, writing in 1953, cited the 1931 census to show that "the largest age-group living the non-legal way is the group 20-30 years old as regards both men and women" (Matthews, 1953:4). He goes on to state that:

From calculations based upon the Trinidad Census for the normal year of 1931, nearly every second person between 40 and 50 was married whereas

only every fourth or fifth person between 20 and 30 was married. Thus the crude proportion of marriages amongst persons between 40 and 50 was slightly better than twice the proportion in the age group 20-30. (Matthews, 1953:4)

Similarly Hyman Rodman, writing in the 1960s found that “the median age of entry to marriage is considerably higher than the median age for entering a *friending* or *living* relationship. In County St. Andrew, the median age category for bridegrooms was 25-29 and for brides 20-24” (Rodman, 1971:65).

Writing in 1998, St. Bernard found a similar pattern. The proportions who had experienced legal marriage for males and females, increased significantly between the age-group 15-44 and 45 and over. The most significant difference however found by St. Bernard was that in the 1990s, the first union is more likely to be a common-law union than possibly a visiting union which it may have been earlier in the century. He concludes:

The findings also suggest that relatively more women aged 25-44 years first lived with someone in a union that took the form of a common-law relationship when compared with their counterparts aged 45 years and over. Such an observation supports the view that the older woman (aged 45 years and over) would have been less likely to have entered a common-law union when they first started living with a partner. *This was found to be the case whether the women were of Indian, African or Mixed origins.* With respect to ethnic origin, persons of African descent were more likely than their Indian or Mixed counterparts to have had a first union taking the form of a common-law relationship (St. Bernard, 1998:52-53, *emphasis added*).

## Understanding common-law unions: A review of the literature

### *Terminologies and typologies*

A typology of Afro-Caribbean family forms is usually first accredited to British Social Welfare Adviser T.S. Simey who in his 1946 publication, *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies* based on a study of 270 Jamaican families, developed the following schema: Christian families – patriarchal domestic units based on legal, Christian marriage; Faithful concubinage – patriarchal domestic units based upon a union which is neither legally nor religiously sanctioned; Companionate unions – cohabiting unions of less than three years duration; and Disintegrate families – households containing women, children and grandchildren (Simey, 1946:82-83, cited in Barrow, 1996:56). This schema was adapted by Henriques (1953) in his typology – Christian family; Faithful concubinage; Maternal or grandmother family; and Keeper family (Henriques, 1953:109, cited in Barrow, 1996:56).

Various other typologies have been developed by different scholars over the years resulting in the one currently used in Commonwealth Caribbean censuses. In 1959 Hyman Rodman referred to the existence of these competing typologies as a ‘language problem’ in that the observer sets up his own classification scheme for dealing with these unions. He surmises that “the... great variety of terms used by different observers for a marital union that is socially but not legally sanctioned and the reasons they give for a particular usage also suggest that the observer’s terms may not be the most satisfactory ones.” He continues:

Henriques... and R.T. Smith... use common-law marriage; Clarke ...rejects the term common-law because it suggests legal recognition and uses concubinage.; Stycos... rejects “concubinage” and uses consensual union: Matthews, more simply and perhaps more sensibly, uses non-legal union. Although all of these writers recognize the distinctions between legal and social aspects of the union they may be causing unnecessary confusion. Would it not make better sense to use the terms that are used by the lower class itself to refer to these unions? (Rodman, 1959:445).

Thus Rodman, based on his data in Coconut Village in Eastern Trinidad in 1956 and 1968 used the typology used among the villagers. These he identified as – *friending*, *living* and *married*. In *friending* relationships the partners do not live in the same household. With *living*, the couple live together but are not legally married. *Married* refers to those who live together in legal marriage. In all these cases the partners may be referred to as husband and wife by community members (Rodman, 1971:43). He noted that the term common-law was not a term used by villagers but primarily a census category. The word ‘keeper’ emerged in typologies in Jamaica (Henriques, 1953) and in Trinidad (Herskovits, 1947). In Jamaica, it referred to a woman in a visiting relationship; in Trinidad to “an unmarried wife” (Herskovits, 1947:94).

### Common-law unions and the life cycle

Common-law unions have seldom been studied on their own. They have traditionally been perceived as a transitional stage either symbolically or actually between visiting relationships and legal marriage. Scholars, dependent on their outlook as well as the research site, have described these unions as relatively structured, recognized and stable or alternatively as loose, unstructured and unstable.

Writing on Toco, in North Trinidad based on research in the late 1930s, Herskovits and Herskovits found that the “keepers type of mating” is really a trial period of living together which often precedes actual marriage. They noted that the trial period may result:

because the families of the parties to a match are not yet able to undertake the expense of a formal wedding; or because the young man has not yet demonstrated his ability to provide however simply, for a wife and children; or because the man on his part, wishes to be convinced, possibly because of some family history concerning the girl’s relatives, that she will not be barren or shiftless (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1947:95).

Additionally they note there are some keeper unions which are not seen as transitional but as permanent. This may be for a number of reasons including poverty, or non-attachment of importance to marriage. The largest of these groups however, are those from all classes involved in a second union, especially after an initial married union. These unions were said to “have the family behind them” (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1947:96). In Toco keeper unions, according to Herskovits and Herskovits, the man had an obligation to provide for his household equal to that of a married man. This includes a house for the woman and money for food and provisions for her and her children. If he cannot afford to clothe her then she is expected to supplement his contributions and provide this herself and her children. Food and shelter are the minimum requirement the man is supposed to provide.

Keepers were usually taken with the parents’ consent and most parents would actually perform private religious rituals, whether they had consented or not (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1947:97-98). Although they note that marriage and keeper unions have

different levels of prestige attached to them, they suggest that the latter are never seen as casual relationships and are sharply differentiated from promiscuity or prostitution on the part of women (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1947:101-102).

Hyman Rodman in his study *Lower-Class Families: The Culture of Poverty in Negro Trinidad*, sees *living* relationships as developing out of *friending* relationships. An examination of 600 friending relationship found that 27 per cent were transformed into living relationships, 4 per cent into marriage and 56 per cent were broken off. Rodman noted that feelings of impermanence were always expressed about living relationships but they were often of long duration and may precede marriage where marriage does take place.

The same financial responsibilities identified by Herskovits were noted by Rodman. He found that a woman would not agree to be “put in house” to live with a man even if they had a child if she felt he could not support them adequately. In return she was supposed to do household work like cooking, cleaning and washing [and] any deviation from this understanding endangers the relationship” (Rodman, 1971:57). Rodman notes that sexual privileges are not mentioned in the discussion on reciprocity between partners. He suggests this is due in part to the taboo in talking public about sexual matters but also to the availability of sexual intercourse in friending relationships or even outside of this especially for men. He noted also that although partners in a living relationship may have common goals there tends to be more separateness, especially in relation to economic goals. They may for example save separately and plan to build or buy a house of their own (Rodman, 1971:62).

Writing on Trinidad in 1953, Dom Basil Matthews noted that non-legal unions were usually referred to as “living in sin” (Matthews, 1953:2). Rodman however found no evidence of the use of this expression in his fieldwork. He concluded:

The report was evidently based upon Matthews’ work as a priest in the Benedictine Abbey of Mount St. Benedict in Trinidad, where many people undoubtedly said to him, ‘Father, I am living in sin’. Religious functionaries may not know what is appropriate in lower-class company, but lower-class people certainly know what is appropriate in a religious setting! (Rodman, 1971:63).

Buschken’s 1974 published study, *The Family System of the Paramaribo Creoles*, identifies a very similar pattern of family formation. He, however, describes a very structured traditional pattern of realization of common law unions and a highly formalised system where whether for legal or non-legal union a ritual of parents visits, teasing, etc. takes place between the families. After this the male usually purchases two engagement rings and they prepare to set up house for an engagement period lasting sometimes more than a year prior to consideration of marriage, usually only after the birth of the first child. The saying he noted was “build first, then get married” So marriage would come with the income to purchase furniture and most importantly a house. He noted that this pattern was scoffed at by upwardly mobile members of the younger generation in the 1970s who preferred to marry immediately without the benefit of an engagement period. These marriages he noted were usually unstable. While noting that the traditional structures have broken down, Buschken pointed to the continuation of the pattern of common law relations outside of the rituals and parental agreements.

Indeed so communally recognised were these ‘Surinamese-style marriages’ that in the 1940s there was a discourse, which sought recognition of these customary Creole unions in the same way as Javanese and Indian customary unions were made legal in January 1941. Buschken supports these sentiments by stating that:

...the Creoles are placed at an utter disadvantage vis a vis their Hindustani and Javanese compatriots, whose customary law the lawgiver has not ignored, incorporating their laws on marriage into the law of Surinam...The authorities have concentrated blindly since Emancipation on integrating the lower-class Creoles into the "Western"-type culture, and have thereby forced the legal system of the white colonists and the lighter-skinned creoles onto them. This attempt has been only partly successful, however, the Creole still living for the greater part within the context of his own distinctive culture, the pattern of norms and values of which definitely differs from the more Western oriented type of culture of the ruling classes (Buschkens, 1974:190).

Like Dom Basil Matthews, Judith Blake in her study *Family Structure in Jamaica* (1961), puts forward an extremely unsympathetic analysis of this phenomenon. She critiques Henriques and Kerr for suggesting that common law unions and the family system in general is evidence or a basis of women's independence. Rather she suggests that women want to be married into patriarchal Christian unions, and that common law unions are unstable, insecure and endanger the survival of the eventual marriage if it does actually take place.

Blake argued that both women and men were dissatisfied with concubinage but this was especially so for women who wanted to be 'respectable'. She stated:

Our respondents view concubinage as an inferior type of relationship because the partners to it are not bound by what *they themselves* consider to be obligations or common decency and humanity. For them, legal marriage is the only true union, the nonlegal unions conversely are felt to entail few obligations (Blake, 1961:122).

A number of reasons were suggested as to why then common law unions were so prevalent if they were so despised by women in particular and also men. For example, she argued, Jamaican lower-class males prove to be unable to protect their female relatives from early sexual activity. Thus "girls typically 'ruin their chances' at an early age by engaging in premarital liaisons, getting pregnant and finding themselves in a poor position to attract a permanent mate" (Blake, 1961:135).

Another reason she suggests is the stress on economic provision and stability which marriage represents. She noted for example that men are afraid of the financial obligations for improved living standards which marriage requires in a context of employment instability (Blake, 1961:141). A third reason she suggests is that unlike in "other more adequately functioning social structures", men suffer no deprivation by being unmarried, neither sexual nor social. So although marriage may be a long-term goal men do not suffer by being unmarried. Life is neither boring or lonely or statistically deviant enough to motivate the man into marriage.

A fourth reason she surmises is that although concubinage is seen as a precursor to marriage it is an ineffective one. Unlike other alternatives such as a matchmaker or romantic love, these unions offer the opportunity for ill feelings, antagonism to develop yet provides no institutional protection such as legal obligations. Therefore even when couples do marry after living together the unions often do not last (Blake, 1961:144-45).

Blake's study paints a sorry picture of women waiting for marriage from men unwilling to do so. It also suggests that left on their own men would not marry and Jamaican lower class society lacks the structures to force them to do so. These unions as suggested by Blake have no norms, values, community support, sanctions or controls and do not exist within any acknowledged community system.

One cannot help but note the difference in the quality of data on unions collected by Blake, using primarily the research interview over a short period – in comparison with the more ethnographic longer term studies carried out by other scholars. Braithwaite chastised the researchers of this study which was carried out over a few weeks using data derived exclusively from interviews and the limitations of its application to the entire island (Braithwaite, 1957:547-48).

In general therefore, most researchers earlier in the century saw common law unions as transitional unions leading to formal marriage either symbolically or actually. The reality is that in some societies this never came to pass while in others it did. The next section will explore the factors which contributed and continue to contribute to the legalisation of unions in the later years of the couple's life.

### **Respectability, religion and women**

In a long-standing debate in Caribbean scholarship, Peter Wilson (1973) put forward his dichotomy of respectability and reputation. Reputation was of particular concern to men while respectability was especially important to women. While there has been much critique of Wilson (Besson, 1993). His notions and this dichotomy although in revised forms continue to have significance. In particular feminists would argue that women's quest for respectability is not simply a left-over of colonial upper-class preoccupations, but part of the patriarchal construction of women's lives, based on control of their sexuality and male privilege.

Respectability has been especially important for poor black women, lacking the respectability which colour automatically gave in a colour-stratified social system. Whites were by definition respectable but blacks, especially black women had to earn respectability through behaviours, language, skills, practices and one might add family forms (Reddock, 1998:24).

Interestingly, although common law unions are viewed as a transitional form, most sources suggest that the move to marry is eventually precipitated by 1) religious reasons; 2) women's desire for respectability and economic security; and 3) adult children's insistence and assistance with the wedding. In other words the move to marriage usually has to be precipitated by some external social factor. Matthews (1953) identified the main reasons as follows: 1) the supernatural fear of approaching death and the sanctions to follow; 2) the relief of the socio-economic burdens available to older couples; and 3) loss of the haunting fear that marriage will cause a woman to become "too independent".

In particular, as noted in the case of Matthews (1953) and Blake (1961) before, it is usually the women who are seen as the ones desiring marriage and the respectability which it brings, and men as the ones opposing in a context where men are the ones who are supposed to ask.

Religion and Christianity in particular, has exerted a strong pressure on couples to marry, and while the sway of these ideals has varied over time it never totally goes away. The extreme concern expressed by Trinidadian Roman Catholic cleric Dom Basil Matthews in his publication *The Crisis of the West Indian Family* possibly gives some indication of the way in which this was perceived by religious leaders – leaders who would have laboured unceasingly to try to change this pattern which he saw located in the plantation system.

Matthews noted that in rural areas in Trinidad people saw no conflict between their Catholicism and their union status, and that a "consciousness of sin" was greater the closer one got to the cities and "Western contacts and education" and more so in Catholic than in non-Catholic communities (Matthews, 1953:52-53). He argued therefore that access to Christianity was one solution to this problem. He noted that:

Emancipation had, however, increased the opportunities for the Christian apostolate amongst the Negroes. The result of the good work is registered in the rise of marriages from 364 in 1848 to 632 in 1880. The phenomenal figure of 1625 marriages in the cholera epidemic year of 1854, together with the subsequent increasing marriage rate is crucial evidence of the receptivity and the sensitiveness to the Christian moral ideal developed by the Negro in two generations after slavery (Matthews, 1953:67-68).

The inculcation and acceptance of these ideals of Christian respectability, according to Judith Blake, has resulted in a situation where Jamaican working class women want a Christian marriage but are unable to get it. At the same time, Blake did admit that this situation is made worse by the “lack of institutionalised roles for women outside of marriage” (Blake, 1961:153). This theme is explored in a different and interesting way in the more recent ethnographic work of Diane Austin Broos in her article “Women and Jamaican Pentecostalism” (Austin Broos, 1998), part of a larger work on Pentecostalism in Jamaica.

Austin Broos notes that whereas during this century through the trade union movement and other development programmes such as land settlement schemes and agricultural extension services after the 1945 Moyne Commission were developed, social and economic alternatives for working-class women shifted little. The programmes which were instituted were programmes aimed at improving their “housewifely skills”, the establishment of hostels for working women, mainly domestics, in the town and of course the famous Mass Marriage campaign led by Lady Huggins, wife of the then governor of Jamaica (Austin Broos, 1998:165). In other words, all programmes – educational and otherwise – focussed women on only one occupation, that of being a wife.

It should not be surprising therefore that with the success of this early 20th century “housewifisation” project (Mies, 1982) this should be of paramount concern to working class women, bearing in mind the many ways in which middle and upper class structures and sensibilities have served to diminish the lives of the economically less secure.

Austin Broos reflects on the ways in which working class women have embraced U.S. based pentecostalism over this century. Following de Lisser, she notes that churches have been “institutional mainstays” for lower-class women and their immediate kin.

Pentecostalism she noted was attractive to working-class and peasant Jamaican women for a number of reasons. First of all it presented a challenge to the domination of the orthodox religions which had diminished them in the past; second, it was a popular religion, not based on the ancient ecclesiastical patterns of the mainstream churches; third, it allowed for enthusiastic rite and participation as was possible in some African-based religions traditions; fourth, in spite of this it was endorsed by powerful white America; fifth, it allowed women to be born again to a new life; sixth, it provided institutional support for women as mothers; and seventh, church leaders had the power to marry (Austin Broos, 1998:166). She notes:

As women moved into towns and away from the ritual milieux that harboured orthodox denominations and folk Revival with its balm yard traditions, this amalgam was attractive. In the older religious synthesis Zion Revival leaders were not licensed to marry and in the denominational churches those who had lived in concubinage often commanded lesser status. Pentecostalism’s powerful doctrine of the Christian ‘born again’ to a radically new life allowed believers to re-position themselves within this part of Jamaica’s status order (Austin Broos, 1998:166).

In a context where women's respectability has traditionally been dependent on getting her partner to 'ask', according to Austin Broos, pentecostalism allows women to redefine themselves without reliance on a man. The saved become brides of Christ and "as an embodied vessel for the Holy Ghost" have to be kept clean. Fornication therefore becomes a major sin – a key way through which the vessel becomes unclean.

In what Rodman would call a lower-class value stretch, Austin Broos describes the ways in which common Jamaican practice and ideology is combined with pentecostal morality. Being saved was therefore recommended mainly for women over forty years old who for the most part have passed their child bearing years (Austin Broos, 1996:170).

In 1992, Jamaican Baptist Minister, Vivian G. Panton, called for the Church to adopt a more sympathetic response to these unions. Tracing the changing attitudes from slavery to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Panton noted that in the immediate post-emancipation period these unions were accepted by the Church as long as they were stable and monogamous. With the introduction of marriage laws in the 1840s, the approach changed with a new emphasis on legal unions.

Thus the norm for acceptance into the Church was shifted from Stable Common-Law Union to Legal Union. This has been the position of the Church in its various denominations since then. In spite of this, however, the Jamaican peasants have remained firmly committed to common-law – at least as the preliminary stage of their marriage process (Panton, 1992: 31).

### **The meaning of common law relationship**

In the Green Paper justifying the introduction of the Cohabital Relations Bill, the first premise identified is that: "The common-law union in Trinidad and Tobago is almost akin to a legal marriage" (1996:8). Speaking in defence of the Bill in Parliament, Senator Kenneth Ramchand noted that his parents lived in a common-law union until he was quite old before getting married, and that as far as he was concerned it was just like a marriage without the legal sanction (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Parliament, 22.8. 1996:829).

The question this paper seeks to ask therefore is if common law unions are just like marriages, then why do they exist? What exactly is the system of meaning underlying these unions? Vivienne Elizabeth, writing on Australia, notes the variable meanings attached to these unions. She notes for example that on the one hand they are perceived by some as a step towards marriage as we have also seen here, but for others it is an alternative to marriage. She stresses the need to distinguish between cohabitational arrangements and marriages – in contrast to others including feminist scholars who have tended to conflate them.

She notes in particular the efforts by women to "find new ways of living long-term heterosexual relationships that do not conform to the conventions of traditional marriage" (Elizabeth, 2000:88), noting that marriage resisters resist some if not all of the gendered precepts associated with traditional marriage discourse – for example in relation to financial and domestic practices (Elizabeth, 2000:88).

As we have seen earlier in this paper, the structure of Caribbean families has been extremely consistent over this century. If we were to rely only on census statistics, however, a closer examination of the data, a more qualitative examination of the data might suggest that the meanings underlying these unions may have changed over time.

For example, some sources suggest that in the immediate post-emancipation period, the guilt surrounding non-legal unions and respectability concerns were less than during the early to middle 20th century when religious and class sanctions became more pronounced. Similarly today, in a climate influenced by the women's movement

and the challenge to traditional patriarchal arrangements, it no doubt will have a different meaning. The study by Neill and Le Bourdais for example in Canada found that the loss of the “protection effect” of marriage through the recognition of common-law unions, has had a direct effect on behaviours of people involved in unions. Recent research in Canada also suggests that unlike previously, cohabiting unions are tending to be more enduring – suggesting that new conjugal trajectories are taking place (Le Bourdais and Neill, 1998:18).

Recent interviews with women currently in or in the past involved in common law unions suggest that in the end they see the best solution as an independent domicile with a visiting partner and companion. When one woman was asked whether marriage and common law unions were the same she said no. One of her reasons was that common-law spouses have no status – i.e. in spite of the long existence of such unions, no suitable name has been identified to refer to partners in these unions. She reported on the partner of a government minister who on his attaining office stopped accompanying him to functions as there was no suitable way in which she could be introduced. A man in such a union noted that initially he used to refer to his partner as his ‘child mother’ but she quite rightly objected to this. Subsequently the term ‘girlfriend’ was used which was really problematic for a relationship which has lasted over 15 years. While he initially objected when people referred to her as his wife, he has recently come to accept it as there is no suitable alternative. In other words, the problem for persons in common-law unions is how to maintain that distance from ‘wifeness’ and ‘husbandhood’ which one initially desired as the system eventually forces one to conform.

Another difference suggested by one respondent is the freedom to have separate financial arrangements, not having to share assets. While some couples do amalgamate their finances, she notes that such a union allows some control over one’s financial situation. It is left to be seen the extent to which this will be changed by the new Bill. A third difference is that no matter how long people live together there is a tendency to see them as unsettled. People will say to them – When do you plan to settle down? You haven’t made up your mind yet?

Looking at the recent Trinidad and Tobago data put forward by St. Bernard, a number of additional issues suggest further exploration. It was found for example that the common-law unions are starting quite early and may be the first union. Additionally for younger women of all ethnic groups, except ‘other’, common law unions were often the first living relationship with a partner. This, St. Bernard suggests, could be indicative of a trend in which younger women are becoming sceptical about their roles and prospective benefits associated with being in a first relationship assuming the form of formal marriage (St. Bernard, 1998:xxii).

This is supported by one respondent who stated the following:

*The idea of marriage is not so important for women any more. They are more interested in their independence. Able to take care of herself; they are willing to have companionship – the quality of the companionship common-law, marriage or alone is what is important.*

At the same time she did acknowledge the influence of U.S. based Pentecostal religions on 1) forcing young people to marry and 2) proclaiming the father as the head and leader of the home.

The research data highlighted another interesting fact related to the performance of home duties by men. The data suggest that the responsibilities/expectations of ‘wives’ and ‘husbands’ are somewhat different for partners in common-law unions. For example, according to data from the St. Bernard study, men in common law unions

perform more regular housework than their married and counterparts as shown in the following table:

**Table 4: Male respondents participation in selected home duties on a weekly basis**

Marital Status	Cooking	House Cleaning	Washing	Home Gardening	Ironing
Married	39.2%	33.9%	24.7%	75.6%	25.9%
Common Law	50.9%	47.7%	40.2%	75.7%	34.1%
Single	40.9%	49.9%	50.3%	71.1%	51.&%
Divorced/Separated	69.4%	74.2%	77.4%	80.6%	67.7%
Widowed	43.1%	49.0%	39.2%	64.7%	39.2%

Source: Godfrey St Bernard, *The Family and Society in Trinidad and Tobago: The Findings of the National Survey of Family Life* (ISER, St. Augustine and Ministry of Social Development, Port of Spain, 1998), p.114.

Clearly, from the above it appears that there must be more differences that previously assumed, differences in meaning about what it is to be a 'wife' and a 'husband', the expectations and the requirements are not exactly the same or they may be changing. There is obviously, a need for further exploration.

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#### **Notes**

1. When I asked a leading regional demographer some time ago why union status data on males were not collected, he responded that that would only be "minding men's business".

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# The Plasticity of Gender in Social Policy Formulation

Patricia Mohammed

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## ABSTRACT

Once we embrace 'gender' as embodying more than the situation of women in relation to men, and we begin to interpret gender equity and equality as being fundamental to the transformation of a society, then the concept and its application become very plastic in the writing of gender policies. Drawing primarily on the experience of assisting with the formulation of two national gender policies, that of the Cayman Islands and Trinidad and Tobago (Draft), this brief essay reflects on the application of the concept, and the limits and possibilities of this category of social analysis.

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## Introduction

From the time I was privileged to meet Hermione, at the first workshop of the Women in the Caribbean project convened in Barbados in 1979 (although my knowledge of her work had long preceded this meeting), it has been a pleasure to observe the way in which Hermione would think about thinking, peering into middle distance as she spoke, as if to catch a stray thought and pull it to her, producing incisive and insightful observations through a method which could be found in no textbook.

The treatment of gender in this presentation relates the concept of plasticity to gender in social policy formulation. Hermione has been one of the pioneers in academic teaching of gender and sociology in the region, and as such this is my own tribute to her free thinking process, itself the germ of the sociological imagination.

### **Plast: *Combining form* indicating a living cell or particle of living matter (Oxford English Dictionary)**

Marking an undergraduate student examination paper in the third level course *Sex, Gender and Society* at the end of a semester, I came across the phrase "the plasticity of gender". Coined by a younger and fresher scholar, this perception of gender was interesting. Plasticity was not a term that we had generally employed while trying to explain the malleability of gender identity or the non-static nature of the gender discourse. Nor had this interpretation been applied to describe the ways in which gender was so melded into other social categories that it was difficult to isolate it as a variable. Neither had I come across this sense of the concept in feminist literature which, over the last two decades, has become more and more nuanced, interdisciplinary and multi-faceted. As with all good theoretical ideas, the concept is simple, obvious, allowing a capacity for creative application. I contemplated its potential usefulness as a further way in which we might

think of gender and its continuously expanding and changing application, at times under different names in different spheres and with different meanings. This chameleon like quality of gender is perhaps even more appropriate as we continue to pull and stretch gender to fit the agenda of development and social policy.

There is as a beginning point, the understandable concern with etymology. My treatment in this paper allows for an elastic etymology emerging from idiosyncratic word association and perception, cobbled together with stricter scientific definition – in other words playing with similes and metaphors, with semantics, in order to visualize how gender works or may not work in society.

Traditionally, academic knowledge has privileged the natural sciences and social sciences positivist modes over the humanities. Gender thinking has forced us to reconsider these artificial knowledge divides. This experiment synthesizes different modes of thinking and draws some of its data from the experience of formulating two national gender policies, that of the Cayman Islands and of Trinidad and Tobago, over the last four years.

### **Plasticine**

The first word image which comes to my mind in relation to plasticity is the word plasticine, a substance made from clay and other inorganic materials provided for children's play. The idea of how children model their reality out of this substance, the childish imagination which could take green and red abstract lumps and pummel these together into shapes which represent, for them, a mother, a father, a cow, a house or a basket of fruit. Colour and texture are incidental to the sculptured whole. One is reminded of the ways in which we have continued to use gender; we are constantly moulding it to fashion an imagined reality. There is no defined equilibrium or blue print we have to draw on for creating gender identities or systems of gender justice – other than perhaps fictional works with happy endings. We cull ideas from bits of experience, tried and tested models which have flaws but offer possibilities, to create ideals which we hope are achievable.

At the same time, we locate such ideals in the specific circumstances in which gender policies are being framed. An illustration is useful here. While both gender policies in Cayman and Trinidad and Tobago are underpinned by development goals for these societies, the departure point for gender differs in each. Cayman Islands is a smaller, younger society in some ways, its history, founded upon the seas, has evolved with a notion of a distinctive sexual division of labour comprised of seafaring men and land bound women who laboured simultaneously in farming and domestic life. This has made for a femininity which is adept in matters domestic or in the public life of the island when men were at sea. In 2000 the Permanent Secretaries in several of the Ministries in Cayman were women and women were well represented in key sectors of the economy including education and publishing. There was a popular perception in the society, therefore, by the end of the twentieth century, that Caymanian women did not need empowerment and that there was no need for a national gender policy. Still a dependency of the United Kingdom, with a strong currency, its economy fuelled by offshore banking and financial services, the Cayman Islands are reliant on migrant labour at every level. Questions which concern gender practitioners are central to the ways in which Cayman Islands must continue to map its future. For example, Cayman Islanders depend on the migration of Jamaican female domestics who are employed to care and nurture the children of their employers, but who are actively discouraged from bringing their own families. Housing shortages on a small high cost of living island exacerbates this problem and justify the rules established by immigration authorities to limit the lifestyle and opportunities available to migrant workers. In a small very Christian

society as well, concerned with the respectability and reputation and control of its 'native' women folk, other migrant women from neighbouring Central and South America who are brought in to work in bars and clubs, are perceived as temptation to Caymanian men, and reports are often made by fearful women to have them deported. Apart from the traditional issues such as the under performance of boys in education and the ubiquitous challenges associated with domestic violence, issues of gender here were also closely tied up with issues of defining and preserving an identity which is perceived to be Caymanian as defined by its first peoples and for safeguarding its national boundaries and wealth for those who are Caymanian born or those who have been accepted by Caymanians either through marriage or longevity of service on the islands.

Trinidad and Tobago has a different history, of large migration waves beginning from the eighteenth century, of a nation identity still being formulated through divided ethnic lines, and of uniquely different cultures of European, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern, mixing and blending gender belief systems and religions over the last two hundred years. There are persistent differences in gender belief systems, due to varied religious and cultural practices. At the same time, as in Jamaica, gender awareness has been heightened in this society as a result of decades of activism. Women of all ethnic groups have had access to primary, secondary and to tertiary level education from the sixties onwards such that female labour force participation in areas such as Teaching and in the public and private sector has continuously expanded from this time onwards. By 1977/78 females already comprised 43.9 per cent of total graduates in all faculties at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.<sup>1</sup> Legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act (1987), the Domestic Violence Act (1991) became highly contested and politicised documents as a result of gender and feminist consciousness and activism by the decade of the eighties and nineties. With the turn of the century, progressive initiatives such as the recent official collection of statistics for unpaid housework and other activities establishing time spent by both sexes in unremunerated work signal a greater sophistication of ideas in relation to gender equality and social policy. Nonetheless, other salient issues remain unaddressed. With increasing wage or salaried work for both men and women outside of the home, childrearing has become more and more incompatible with employment. Public and private sectors must respond to the problems of after school childcare which beset the majority of working peoples, whether in white collar or blue collar occupations. While culture and religion provide a backdrop against which gender norms navigate, the society must view gender roles as constantly shifting and changing, requiring new mechanisms for dealing with the challenges to gender relations in the home and workplace.

Gender policies must be tailored to fit the concerns and specific needs of each society in terms of its own history, economic and social status and means of production. This observation may indubitably be made of all social policy. In the engineering of gender relations, however, which aims to bring public into awareness with the private and intimate components of life, there is a need for a heightened sensibility and a configuration of the gender problem to suit the moment.

### **Pleistocene**

I pondered for a while on another word, the similar sounding scientific and archaeological one of Pleistocene, and found this an equally insightful concept for excavating the understanding of gender. A number of authors have advanced the argument that the onset of Pleistocene ice age, that is the deterioration of the earth's climate during the last two million years, was responsible for the evolution of human anatomy and cognition. This viewpoint contrasts with the common idea that the human specie represents a

revolutionary breakthrough rather than a conventional adaptation to a particular ecological niche. What the Pleistocene adherents argue is that human culture is nothing more than a straight-forward adaptation to climatic deterioration or put another way, our survival depends on our capacity to adapt to environments via cultural traditions.

Gender cannot be disassociated from scientific discourses of human evolution and cultural adaptation. We need to read the data from our fossilized imprints to admit possibilities of drastic shifts in how we envisage gender, a shift that has already taken place from the classic anthropological “man the hunter and woman the gatherer” paradigm. In social policy formation, the mutual exchange between biological and social gender must underpin our arguments and policy choices. How must we conceive in gender policy terms of the open field of trans-gendered and trans-sexual identities, of the rights of individuals who do not adhere to an heterosexual norm established by church and society in the west,<sup>2</sup> of the not yet explored potential which each sex has for contribution to social betterment and to the mental and physical well being of human society.

What possibilities are there for an expanding female labour force within the public sphere and simultaneous expanding nurturing roles for men in households and other sectors such as nursing? These are questions being asked of our frail human mental capacities for accepting biological and cultural adaptation. What tracks can a gender policy now lay down for reconfiguring futures. The core role of governments and other development actors is to endow citizens with the required conditions for actualizing human functioning, in other words, to provide them with necessary capacities and opportunities, what Martha Nussbaum, building on Amartya Sen’s work, refers to as ‘central human capabilities’.<sup>3</sup> Economic, political, legal, and other social arrangements should be evaluated according to how they expand people’s capabilities or valuable freedoms, freedoms which are interpreted as being outside of a normative goal which society has thus far prescribed for reproduction and survival. Even while at the same time, it envisions overlapping consensus among people with different conceptions of what is good for a society.

### Plastic

Let us look at plasticity through its direct stem, plastic. Artists use plastic in reference to those arts in which something was made, three dimensionally formed, such as sculpture, artifacts and carnival costumes, rather than the two dimensional graphic or fine arts. In the same breath, the plastic arts for a fine artist is always lower down the evolutionary scale of art, not real, but contrived, verisimilitude rather than truth – in fact closer to what we consider to be plastic as for instance plastic knives and forks, plastic flowers – not the real thing. Plastic refers to things made with synthetic materials that have a polymeric structure which can be moulded when soft then set, much the way perhaps gender roles themselves were moulded, then became set. But, plastic has had its uses. Plastic goods and products could be lighter, more adaptive to fit many occasions, offering a constant array of new possible uses, including interestingly the universal way in which it has now been adapted to the currency market so that the word “plastic” is interchangeable for “money” as in “Can I pay with plastic?”

Analogous plastic processes occur in the growth of the gender industry. Add women and stir and create another synthesis, another vantage point from which we have begun to intervene in many social problems. A quote by Amina Mama is useful here:

Gender studies has grown, not so much because of the feminist challenges that the term implies, but because over twenty years of feminist intervention into the international development industry have created a

space for particular kinds of gender discourse – ...Women in Development, Gender and Development, Gender Mainstreaming – these have become such buzzwords that it is accommodated ...not the least because it sounds as if it might attract some funds.

Drawing on the contemporary idiom again, gender has become more plastic, good for credit. Plastic has other connotations and qualities which can be applied. A popular notion of plastic gave rise to the idiom “scandal” bag in Jamaica to refer to the see through synthetic bags in which items are packed at the store, transparent, for all the world to see. Gender, derived from a fierce feminist activism, aims like some plastic, to achieve this transparency and accountability in its transformational politics.

### Plasticity

This brings a stream of conscious logic to plasticity, this time again drawing again on its definition from the natural sciences. In physics, plasticity is a property of a material that undergoes plastic deformation in response to an applied force. Plastic deformation is a non-reversible change. This is unlike *elasticity*, a term which is used by economists to mean something that is highly responsive to changes in something else. For example, elastic demand means that the quantity demanded changes a lot when the price changes. Elasticity is therefore a measure of responsiveness. It tells how much one thing changes when you change something else that affects it. But it means that it can revert to a previous size, or length, or value.

Is gender in fact elastic or does it have the qualities which render it as plasticity? I am reminded again of thematic recurrences in gender policy formulation processes. In public consultations, gender issues stretch to embrace every ill or concern people have, whether it lack of potable water supplies, or lack of jobs for men and women. At the same time, there is an undercurrent threaded through this public debate, that the mass of problems in society are caused because of women’s “abdication from their natural roles”, a gem which was articulated by one gentleman in the Cayman Islands.<sup>4</sup> Gender is by no means elastic in this regard. While responsive to numerous conditions and issues, there is no automatic revert mechanism to some former situation where women are safely tucked away in their homes and men are engaged in running things. Nor is there a fixed paradigm of a normative sexual division of labour and equilibrium in gender relations two which the pendulum must swing. In this sense gender is defined by a plasticity, by a constant synthesis dependent on new materials and new cultural adaptations, such that eventually what is appears to be a synthetic product reconfigures itself as conventional and traditional again.

In conclusion, I think the term plasticity is a useful one, necessarily limited by some of the less complimentary connotations inherent in its stem – plastic. Nonetheless, the *plasticity of gender* speaks to its many meanings as developed above. One of these clearly is its linguistic nuances and shifts, such that sex and gender, although not interchangeable for the gender theorist, are both words which have undergone shifts in meanings and use in the twentieth century. Second is that it inherently allows us conceive of expanding the boundaries of what it is to be masculine or feminine. Third its malleability in relation to larger development issues, such that gender issues are not outside of all development issues, ensures that it remains as central to empirical investigations, to analysis and to policy intervention. Gender as a conceptual tool of analysis, has already proven itself in the classroom, in activism and in its continuously transformative activist arm – the feminist movement. Were it not thus proven, along with other crucial social concepts and categories such as ethnicity and class, to have value in organizing our knowledge of the complexity of human social relations, then the concept of gender, would become in time

another meaningless buzzword for the development industry. Even if the concept outgrows its present currency in academic thought, the ideas which gender scholarship from the mid-twentieth century onwards has brought to expand our ways of seeing and thinking about the world and each other, will have itself established for me the most fundamental characteristic of its plasticity – that of its adaptability, convenience, responsiveness, capacity for moulding and remodeling, adapting to different climates and taking on as many colours and shapes as there are peoples and societies.

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**Notes**

1. Central Statistical Office Statistics cited in Patricia Mohammed “Educational Attainment of Women in Trinidad and Tobago, 1946-1980” Vol 5, Women and Education, Women in the Caribbean Project, Research Papers, ISER, Cave Hill, 1982.
2. This is by no means a far fetched idea. Culture and society of the past and in the present have admitted variations in gender and sexuality. Relationships we would call homosexual, especially between men and youths, played an important role in Ancient Greek society. All distinctions of transgenderism: transexuals, transvestites, hermaphrodites, and intersexuals are drawn to a special role in India called hijras.
3. Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi, “Gender Justice, Development and Rights, Democracy, Governance and Human Rights”, *Programme Paper No 10* (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, January 2003).
4. See Critical Stakeholders Workshop Report, Cayman Islands, October 2001.