



# G . e . n . d . e . r . D I A L O G U E

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## The Invisible Majority: What Feminist Economics can offer

*Excerpts of a Paper delivered to the VII<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Association for Caribbean Economists, November 2001, by Peggy Antrobus*

Since the Decade for Women, feminist scholarship has highlighted the ways in which development and social change affect women and men differently. The combination of the notion that women are best/normally "confined to the household" and that this domain is not as important as the public domain of the economy renders women's experience 'invisible' to those who operate in the public domain.

Feminist scholarship has argued that none of the dominant economic theories deal adequately with issues of women, or with the asymmetry of gender relations. Feminists have challenged these theories and rejected dualistic approaches that dichotomize relationships between private and public spheres, production and reproduction, the household and the economy, the personal and the political, the realms of feeling and intuition and those of reason.

In seeking a theory of women and development, feminist economists have focused on three areas in particular: the household; the measurement of women's work; and women's multiple roles.

### **The household**

A focus on poor households – and on women within those households – enables us not only to evaluate the extent to which development strategies benefit or harm the poorest, but also to judge their impact on a range of sectors and activities crucial to socio-economic development and human welfare.

Economists, neoclassical as well as marxist, have traditionally ignored the household or, alternatively, have tended to treat it as an undifferentiated unit, as if the efforts and interest of all members were the same. Both have maintained the 'traditional' myths of the separation of public/workplace (men's domain) and private/household (women's domain) and have tended to "treat the household as though it were an almost wholly cooperative, altruistic unit", allowing economic self-interest to operate upon, but not within it.

However empirical studies evidence a high degree of inequality between men and women within the household, particularly at the lowest income levels. For example, at the lowest levels of subsistence, women work longer hours, expend more effort, but receive fewer benefits for their labor, than men. While, in part, this is a reflection of class imbalances in relation to the distribution of resources from the larger structures of the society, there is evidence of the existence of gender and age-based hierarchies within households at every socio-economic level.

### **The Measurement of Women's Work**

Most labor force and national income statistics reflect a gross underestimation of women's participation in economic activity'. Since a large proportion of women's work is unpaid and associated with women's subordination in the household, there is a tendency to evaluate women's work as non-productive and, therefore, non-economic.

Lack of a clear conceptualization of the value of women's work to the economy leads to problems of definition of concepts such as "work", "active labor force", and "unpaid family labor". The emphasis on these concepts as a measure of the level of "economic" activity derives from: a) the centrality of the market as symbolic of the economy; b) the focus on commodity production; and c) production for exchange rather than production for use. Calculations of the national product are based on these concepts.

In order to take account of the significant proportion of non-market production which enters into the economies of most Third World countries, efforts have been made by national and international agencies to include non-market subsistence production in the calculations of GNP, and subsistence workers as "active labor". The result of all this is that official data on female labor force participation is notoriously inaccurate, and is particularly so for Third World countries, where non-market production, mostly carried out by women, is often more prevalent than production for the market.

An adequate representation of the value of women's work for the economy must take into account domestic work – social production/reproduction, or production for use – since it is this work which often enables the poor to survive. Indeed, it must be clear to all that if the "formal" private sector and the State were really the only economic institutions whereby essential goods and services (basic needs) were produced and delivered, the human species would never have survived. The validation, and more accurate valuation of women's domestic work is therefore of critical importance, if it is not to be subjected to 'superexploitation' - as it was under the austerity measures imposed by structural adjustment policies.

### **Women's roles, gender roles**

In relation to planning for low-income communities, despite evidence to the contrary, there is "an almost universal tendency" to assume that the household consists of a nuclear family of husband, wife and two or three children, and that within the household there is a clear sexual division of labor in which the man of the family as the 'breadwinner' is primarily involved in the productive world outside the home, while the woman as the housewife and 'homemaker' takes overall responsibility for the reproductive and domestic work involved in the organization of the household. Implicit in this is the assumption that within the household there is an equal control over resources and power of decision-making between the man and the woman in matters affecting the household's livelihood.

In reality most low income women in Third World countries perform three roles – 1) their traditional 'reproductive' role in childbearing and rearing, and in the nurturance and maintenance of the household; 2) a significant role in food production, processing and marketing, and in the provision of foods and services particularly in the informal sector of the economy; and 3) an important role in "community management". However, because of the intertwining of these multiple roles, women's time is much more constrained than men's. In addition, because only work that is for exchange is valued, much of women's work is 'invisible' to planners. This means that women's specific needs tend to be overlooked by those who operate on 'gender neutral' assumptions.

All of this has special relevance for the Caribbean given the fact that a significant percentage of our populations have incomes that are below the poverty line, and operate in the informal sector. By failing to account for the work of women in the household, in subsistence agriculture and in the informal sector, economic assessments fail to reflect the true value of the production that enables Caribbean communities to survive with dignity.

### **The role and contribution of women to Caribbean economies**

Although Caribbean economies have been diversified by the growth of manufacturing, mining and tourism, agriculture continues to be the major source of income for the majority of Caribbean people. However, despite this and the growth of Caribbean economies over the years, the rural areas continue to be neglected in terms of services, even as they are exploited for the benefit of the urban areas (and the country). Life in rural communities, therefore, continues to be full of hardship, and especially for women who, in addition to the role as agriculture workers, also have responsibility for household maintenance and for the care of children, the elderly and the sick.

Also, because of the small size of plots (generally 1-3 acres), the poor quality of the soil and, often, its distance from the home, agriculture can seldom provide an adequate income for the family and most rural people (men as well as women) seek other sources of income to supplement the income derived from their farms. Some of the other occupations in which rural women can engage in the Caribbean include food preservation, handicrafts, sewing, shop-keeping and petty trading. They also try to grow enough food for themselves, and do their own sewing, baking, food preservation and health care (with the use of herbs and other home remedies) so that they at least are able to save money. They save money as well by bartering and by the reciprocal sharing of goods and services, including services related to farming and to the construction of homes. None of this is 'counted' by economists. This means that a significant amount of economic activity goes unrecorded in national income statistics.

While rural women have always been involved in the production of the main export crops, such as sugar and bananas, they predominate in the production of food crops for their own use as well as for the domestic and export markets. In the Caribbean the distinctions between 'use value' and 'exchange value' for food crops would be extremely difficult to maintain: it has been estimated that as much of 60% of the value of the food consumed by some farm families is produced by the household. Rural women in the Caribbean not only carry out the same tasks as men in agricultural production, along with their primary role in reproduction, but the tasks they perform in relation to agriculture are usually the most time consuming. While men can command the free services of their women and children on their farms, women often have difficulty in getting the men in their family to work on land that is owned by them.

Beyond agriculture, there is also a large informal sector in Caribbean economies. This sector, focused on petty commodity production and trading, including inter-island trading, is dominated by women and supported by networks generated by the relationships created by women through extended family and friendship. The importance of this trade to Caribbean economies cannot be overestimated, and yet it receives little attention and less support from policy makers and planners.

Finally, there are two other areas in which women (and a few men) make significant contributions to their countries' economies; one is in the 'gift economy' and the other the 'care economy'. The model for the gift economy is that of mothering without expectation of reward. But elements of this gift-giving can be seen in the remittances sent to families from overseas; the hospitality extended to neighbours, friends and family; the practices of assistance in reaping crops, constructing homes or taking care of children. In these ways the gift economy flourishes alongside the 'exchange economy', often serving as a subsidy to the exchange economy. The majority of Caribbean people survive through a combination of the gift economy and the exchange economy.

However, the gift economy remains unrecognized, unvalidated and, at worse, exploited. Without recognition and affirmation it could disappear. At the same time, with a minimum of support it's contribution to Caribbean economies could be greatly enhanced. Many of these survival strategies – remittances, swap labour, the extended family, the sharing of scarce resources – were developed to meet the specific needs of people lacking in material resources but rich in social and spiritual resources.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that a significant proportion of economic activity is not recorded. This has consequences for public policy as well as for the well-being of families and the society at large. The failure to count or value women's unwaged work in the household allows governments to impose cuts in the provision of public services in the area of health. Cuts in this area within the framework of structural adjustment policies have led to serious deterioration in the quality of these essential services. In addition, social policy, in general, is based on the assumption that women are fulltime housewives, leading to the serious neglect of the needs of vulnerable groups in the society.

The blurring of the distinction between use-values and exchange values has made it difficult to assess levels of poverty, or to understand how poor, rural households survive. The failure to appreciate the value of women's contribution to use-value production also limits the scope of poverty alleviation policies. Poverty alleviation policies that are gender-sensitive would have provided support for women's activities in the area of food production in poor rural communities.

The failure to recognize the links between economic production and reproduction has led to macroeconomic policies that have privileged economic growth over social development. However, since economic production is a function of the physical, intellectual and psychological capacities of the labour force, the undermining of these capacities can defeat the objective of higher productivity and economic growth, even in the short-run.

Unfortunately, the way in which gender issues are now articulated bears little relation to these problems, which should be a matter of major concern to policy makers and planners. Indeed, far from leading to policies to redress the imbalances between women and men in our societies, the new gender policy has led to an intensification of the tensions in gender power relations as women are pitted against men in such a way as to suggest that every gain to women is at the expense of men.

An alternative approach would be to recognize that men and women are both affected by the crises we face as small dependent economies in today's world, and draw on the strengths that each has to offer in finding solutions. If Caribbean economists are to contribute to finding alternatives to an economic model that is fundamentally exploitative and pitted against the aspirations of the majority of Caribbean people, more attention needs to be given to this 'invisible' economy and its importance to Caribbean people as they try to find paths to making their way through the obstacles and challenges of this phase of globalisation.



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## *Retiring after 18 years in the United Nations System - Tributes to Sonia Cuales (Part 1)*

After eighteen years Sonia Cuales retired from the ECLAC Caribbean office in October 2001. During that time, as a Social Affairs Officer, Sonia worked on women and development and poverty issues. To honour her contribution, on 22nd October 2001, the Social Affairs Unit hosted a lunch time seminar. Presentations were made by Professor Rhoda Reddock and Dr. Pat Mohammed, Heads of the Centres of Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine and Mona Campus, respectively, and Dr. Keith Nurse of the Department of International Relations, St. Augustine. We offer excerpts from the presentations of Professor Reddock and Dr. Mohammed and include an interview with Dr. Nurse on issues which arose out of his presentation.

### A Woman of Many Parts

*Dr. Pat Mohammed*

**T**he world has increasingly become smaller and smaller. When we were younger, it seemed to hold a myriad of adventures and treasures, a wide expanse of sea, land, oceans and cultures which we would one day cross and experience. We did not realize at first that prominent among these adventures and treasures were the individuals one encountered and that their lives and ours would criss-cross and intersect in ways that have become important and signifying. It is good to have this occasion to summon up past images and to speak of one such intersection of a society with an individual to whom today we pay "nuff respect".

I sifted my memory to recall the way in which I was introduced to Sonia and could not; it just seems now that I have known her for a long, long time, the way someone becomes a familiar face and therefore the extended family we develop among colleagues and friends who have shared in our successes, and commiserated with us in times of distress. Sonia had come to Trinidad via Ecuador, I think, but having migrated from Curacao to The Netherlands where she had worked, studied, got married and lived for a considerable period before this. I can't remember how we were put in touch with each other, but very soon Sonia became one of the stalwart members of The Group – a feminist organization which I was involved in re-organizing as an outgrowth of the Concerned Women for Progress, the latter having suffered a major crisis along with the Left, in the wake of the Grenada revolution in 1983.



Sonia's work with UNECLAC has spanned a number of interests around gender and feminism. As I continue I would like to pay tribute to her as an intellectual, as an activist, as a friend and as a strong and resilient woman with a joie de vivre for cultural experiences – I ran into Sonia last December up in the wilds of a Maracas Valley community in upper St. Joseph where she had gone to hear the finals of the parang competition. Sonia has this quality to engage enthusiastically whether it is with Carnival or her work, with her enviously and fashionable lithe figure, superb bone structure and youthful dress and to keep one guessing at her actual age – which as every woman knows is a key dimension in the construction of femininity. She has managed to combine all of these components of life into a single unified whole, rarely compartmentalizing them within artificial boundaries. As an intellectual, Sonia's range is far broader than I can comment on here, so I will confine myself to those aspects I know best.

Sonia contributed essays to two volumes on feminism and gender studies which I have edited – the first comes out of her presentation in 1986 at the Inaugural Seminar in Women and Development Studies of the University of the West Indies. Sonia's essay in this book entitled "Theoretical Considerations on Social Class, Class Consciousness and Gender Consciousness" places Sonia among the pioneers in publishing in gender scholarship who were attempting to think through the issues of gender as they applied specifically to the Caribbean. Already, Sonia was prescient of the complicated and troubled relationship between regional differences, class position and gender issues as this would emerge in a different vocabulary over one decade later in the post modern discourse. She writes in this early essay that "Gender consciousness has often emerged from class consciousness, as we may deduce from the founding history of many feminist organizations in the world. As regards the Caribbean, it may be suggested that gender and class have at most established a "visiting relationship" that is a union without obligations or commitments such as those legalized by marriage. Considering the practice of gender relations in this region, perhaps this is the kind of relationship that some of us are most comfortable with".

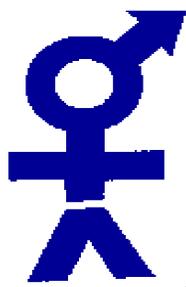
The second aspect of Sonia's work which I want to speak to deliberately, pertains to Sonia's origin from Curaçao. Because of her, the social presence of the Dutch Antilles and its organic link to the English- speaking Caribbean, has not been relegated to a footnote in our writing and understanding of Caribbean feminism. Sonia has published in a Puerto Rican Caribbean Studies magazine in Spanish, an essay which dealt with the challenges of gender studies and gender relations themselves as a result of the specific histories of the Netherlands Antilles.

Her essay, contained in a special edition of *Feminist Review*, Routledge Journals, UK, (No 59, 1998) "In search of Our Memory: Gender in the Netherlands Antilles" again demonstrates the interconnectedness of our journeys past and present in the region. "It has been suggested that the Netherlands Antilles possess a limited capacity to undertake research and publications. There is no indigenous academic tradition and most of those who have had academic training, live abroad. The small size of the islands has implications for professionals; either they are said to be overburdened, or since they are in great demand, they may select more lucrative jobs. ... There is no major body of work on the subjects of either history or gender relations. The dearth of documented sources also propels me to oral history and memory, for our history". In writing this essay, Sonia inscribes on our memory the need for continuing this work with our sister islands. Perhaps more than this, at such an occasion in her career, it also highlights the challenges which Sonia herself faced as a young woman and from her own history, to offer our congratulations on the ways in which she has transcended the limits of her island home.

The last academic reference I want to dwell on briefly is the way in which Sonia's feminism has grown organically to embrace other theoretical dimensions of the study of gender. By the mid-1990s it was clear to those of us engaged in teaching and researching gender that the dialectic of feminist thought was already emerging both in the classroom, with the informed or not so informed responses from our male colleagues. While feminism may have centered on women and femininity, this is also inseparable from its alter ego, that of men and masculinity. Arising out of a symposium on masculinity at the St. Augustine Campus, through the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, a network on masculinity began to be formed bringing together interested men and women in a face to face and internet network to stimulate research and thought on masculinity. Sonia joined whole heartedly in this Network. I had somehow imagined that this was in tandem with her work at UN/ECLAC which I know had begun to treat with this issue. However, I have subsequently found out that Sonia's participation in this network, was also based on her own profound interest in developing the ideas which must have been fertilized from a long association between feminism and activism.

Finally, I want to bring this exploration and tribute to Sonia to a more contemplative end. Sonia has posed an enigmatic presence at times, her linguistic strengths bridging major gaps but also, as with any multi-faceted personality, while posing limits, also brings with it a dimensionality of interests and characteristics which are not easily pinned down. This is by no means a criticism, it is in fact a great strength, as it allows her to remain both the insider and outsider in any one culture. Since the spoken language is the medium through which we communicate, then in this sense, while I, unfortunately will remain forever imprisoned by my tongue and love affair with the English language, (despite efforts to bridge this gap) I have found in Sonia someone who has been able to transcend these linguistic boundaries, to find the delight in each culture through its language, as expressed through its musical lyrics, its idiom and its personality. In this sense, it makes her a truer Caribbean person, the capacity to move from small island to larger continent, from one culture to another, to be able to speak to people in their own tongue, and therefore the means by which to really inhabit many different cultures. While this may be a taken for granted phenomena in the select world of the United Nations and diplomatic services, it is not as common outside of these circles.

In that sense Sonia, I can only salute you in my own way, and convey with the limits of the English language only a small proportion of how your work and life has affected some of us in the region and in Trinidad in particular. We look forward to a continued celebration of this work in your "life after UNECLAC".



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## *Retiring after 18 years in the United Nations System - Tributes to Sonia Cuales (Part 2)*

### IN HONOUR OF SONIA CUALES

*Professor Rhoda Reddock*

**N**ot long after I arrived in The Hague to pursue a Masters In

Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, I heard of a Sonia Cuales, of Curacao, now pursuing her doctorandus at Leiden University in a strange sounding degree - Non-Western Sociology, which I later understood was more or less social and cultural anthropology. As Caribbean scholars we struck up an immediate friendship.

But being Caribbean scholars was not the only thing we had in common. We shared an interest in socialist politics, as well as a commitment to feminism, issues which were often the subject of hot and animated debate, at that time the ISS, and more generally in progressive circles in The Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam. We were involved in the debates with male colleagues on, for example, Marx's theory of value and its significance for valuing women's domestic work, and we followed the anti-imperialist struggles then taking place in Southern Africa, Latin America and South-east Asia.

While still in The Hague, Sonia and I were able to meet on a number of occasions in the region. For example, we met in 1984 or 1985 in Barbados at a small meeting called by Peggy Antrobus to bring to fruition at last, the establishment and launch of CAFRA. At that meeting we held debates about whether CAFRA should include the entire region or only the Anglophone Caribbean. The fact that the former won out in the end was partly due to her efforts. Sonia returned to the region before me, entering through her work at UNICEF, Colombia. We kept in touch as she explored the realities of actually working in a development-oriented bureaucracy.



#### **Display of Sonia's work at a symposium in her honour**

We met again at the actual launch of CAFRA which took place in Barbados on 1 April, 1985, the day after the Caribbean Celebration to mark the end of the UN Decade of Women. This event had been sponsored by WAND, UNECLAC and the CARICOM Women's Desk. This was followed by our participation in the historic End of Decade Conference in Nairobi in July 1985. Sonia in her UNECLAC capacity, had participated in the regional governmental processes leading up to the conference. We were proud of the video - Ten Years is Not Enough which she had produced in collaboration with UNIFEM and we viewed it at the Conference venue. This indeed became the slogan of this conference resulting in the agreement to meet once again after ten years to review progress in implementing the Forward Looking Strategies which came out of the Nairobi deliberations. The Nairobi conference was an extremely empowering one for those of us fortunate to attend.

In her capacity as Social Affairs Officer at UNECLAC, Port of Spain office, she pioneered work on what would today be referred to as gender budgets, pre-dating the work currently being carried out by UNIFEM and UNECLAC. In that regard, she built a good relationship with Joaquin St. Cyr, then of the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Planning and Development. In introducing the pilot study carried out on Trinidad and Tobago, it was suggested that the parameters and indicators developed could inform:

“guidelines for planners and administrators to develop programmes and projects for women in other Caribbean territories which are consistent with the needs and aspirations of women and with national planning objectives. It should be feasible [it argued] to apply these guidelines within existing national budgetary frameworks. (UNECLAC, 1983:5)”

Similar studies were carried out in other parts of the region but the above-mentioned aim never really came to pass. It would be interesting to examine the extent to which this earlier work has informed the current work on gender budgets and the mechanisms being put in place to ensure that they have more success in influencing planning processes than earlier efforts.

Her research programme on Women Traders in the Caribbean, ably supported by Monique Lagro, provided rich data on what is now recognized as a significant area of economic activity in the region. This research brought to light, the details of one of the significant areas of the intra-regional trade, adding to our understanding of one aspect of the informal economy and its gendered dimensions. This research elicited the following insights:

- Where women predominate in informal sector trading activities the trade is generally in: a) wearing apparel and light goods, popularly referred to as “the suitcase trade”; and b) fresh agricultural produce;
- Data, especially hard data, which would allow serious analysis on the situation of women engaged in this sector, are practically non-existent or inaccessible;
- Hard data on traders who travel within the region to sell agricultural produce - the so-called “inter-island traders” - are more accessible than data on ‘suitcase traders’; and
- The trading activity of the “inter-island traders” is confronting critical problems. Without remedial action it is threatened with disintegration. The implications of this might be:

(a) Loss of a vital service in the food supply for the region, and

(b) Loss of income for a large group of women in the sub-region who are sole providers for their households.

One of my greatest disappointments however, was that this collection of studies was never published together in a volume for sale and wider distribution although, the video - God Give Us the Talent - is a lasting and useful reminder of that work.

I have always wondered to what extent these findings were seriously integrated into the trade programme of UNECLAC, especially in the context of the changes in the international and regional trade regime, with particular reference to agricultural produce. It is interesting that the themes identified close to 20 years ago continue to be relevant for UNECLAC and the region today. I would still be interested to know whether integration of women's and gender concerns into the overall work programmes of other units within this UNECLAC system has improved over this time, as we increasingly understand the implications of gender analysis and knowledge for all members of society and indeed for the region as a whole.

By the end of her responsibility for Women and Development, the work which had taken place in questioning femininity had had the almost inevitable impact of challenging masculinity. No longer was this the model to which women should aspire in a quest for equality seen as acceptable. Rather the failure of hegemonic notions of masculinity to meet the needs of not only women but also of men was increasingly becoming evident. Additionally, the autonomy now being claimed by women, placed severe strains on their relationships with men. It was in this context, that by the 1990s, her programme responded to regional concerns with a workshop on the young male in the Caribbean.

The shift in programme focus to poverty, poverty measurement and poverty eradication in many ways can be seen as a continuation of the work which Sonia had begun in the Social Affairs Division. It allowed for collaboration with new actors and for attention to new concerns, but her background in gender analysis ensured that these earlier concerns were not absent from this new area of work.

As a scholar and activist, the United Nations ECLAC was an important avenue for the scholarship, analysis, and organizational energy for close to 20 years. For Sonia I know it was an honour, although sometimes a challenging one, to serve a region for which she cared so much. This was especially so as the CDCC covers all the linguistic and cultural groups of the region. Sonia is truly a Caribbean person, who speaks virtually all the official Caribbean languages, we outside of ECLAC, look forward to her continuing her work with us, now that she has more time and one less important thing to do.

Well done Sonia, we thank you for everything you have done and will continue to do. But we know that your work, in a way, has just begun.



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## CARICOM'S APPROACH TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gemma Tang-Nian

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action explicitly called on governments to mainstream gender in policies and programmes as a strategy for the achievement of gender equality. However, despite its adoption in the CARICOM Post-Beijing Regional Plan of Action to 2000 and the popular use of the term by many persons working in the area of gender and development, it has been difficult to find evidence of successful gender mainstreaming initiatives. In fact, a study conducted by UNECLAC in 2000 found that the continuing rhetoric around gender and gender mainstreaming in the absence of a sufficient understanding of the concepts may be contributing to a certain regression in the commitment to gender equity.

It was against this background that a CARICOM Secretariat meeting of Directors of Women's/Gender Bureaux, gender experts and relevant agencies in December 2000 agreed to adopt a new approach with the focus, in the first instance, on the regional level. The meeting reviewed the six priority areas in which the CARICOM region had been working since the Beijing Conference and agreed that the Secretariat would focus on three - Poverty and the Economy, Health HIV/AIDS and Education - since these areas already constitute priority areas of work for the CARICOM Secretariat. The point was also made that, at the national level, work will continue on the six priority areas with support from the various agencies working in these areas

Working with a Task Force, the Secretariat's Gender and Development Unit was able to prepare a framework for mainstreaming gender in key CARICOM programmes for presentation to a Ministerial Policy Roundtable on gender and development.

In the background and rationale, the framework traced the evolution from women in development to gender and development and highlighted the emergence of gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy.

In its application, the framework utilized the model of material and ideological relations of gender developed by Dr. Eudine Barriteau of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies and attempted to fulfill the following objectives: to identify the functioning of these relations of gender in the private and public spheres in relation to each priority area; to evaluate the differential impact of these relations on women and men; and to suggest indicative policy and programme options for the priority areas.

On Education, it was suggested that the interaction of the ideological and material relations of gender produced high female participation at all levels and a corresponding high drop-out rate for some groups of males, though access and positioning within the labour market did not necessarily correlate with qualification and certification. Another impact highlighted was the devaluing and feminization of teaching and, by extension, education.

With regard to Health HIV/AIDS, the immediate impact was increased vulnerability of Caribbean women and men to infection, resulting in this region having the second highest rate of infection in the world. Even more disturbing, was the extremely high vulnerability of girls in the 10-19 age group. The high rates of infection among female sex workers and men who have sex with men were also highlighted.

In the area of Poverty and the Economy, the framework limited itself to a discussion of Labour in the Social Dialogue and noted that because only waged and organized labour is represented in the dialogue, it excludes several categories of workers including non-unionized labour in the formal sector, workers in the growing informal sector, domestic workers, and housewives and other unwaged workers.

Various policy and programme options were proposed to the Ministerial Policy Roundtable which, in accepting the framework, recommended some changes to the suggested options. The framework, with the endorsement of the Ministers, was then presented to the fifth meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) in October 2001. The Council, too, accepted the framework and proposed additional amendments to the policy and programme options.

Among the policy and programme options adopted by the COHSOD were:

- improvement in the conditions of service and opportunities for mobility in the teaching and nursing professions as a means of revaluing and raising the status of these professions and, also, to attract more men into these areas;
- the inclusion of gender training as a mandatory component of teacher education for teachers at all levels;
- adequate resourcing of schools to minimize sex-segregation of the curriculum and the elimination of gender stereotypes in educational materials;
- the conduct of research on factors related to gender differentials in participation and performance at primary, secondary and tertiary levels as well as on the impact of the social environment on early childhood development;
- a multi-sectoral approach to addressing HIV/AIDS, in particular, poverty alleviation among high risk groups of women, and recognition of formal and informal groups of sex workers and men who have sex with men to facilitate their access to services which could help to minimize the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- specific targeting of girls in the 10-19 age group for sex education, negotiation skills and self esteem programmes;
- the promotion of gender-sensitive campaigns and non-formal education programmes for the 15-24 age group, female sex workers, men who have sex with men and persons with sexually transmitted infections; and
- identification of ways and means to bring the concerns and experiences of sectors not organized in unions into the social dialogue;

The expected outcome of utilizing this framework is a more strategic approach to pursuing gender equality as a critical element in human resource development which, at the national level, should lead to the involvement of Ministers responsible for women's/gender affairs in discussions related to broader macro-economic and social issues and, at the regional level, to the positioning of the regional gender desk in the mainstream of strategic areas of the Secretariat's work.



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## The Gendered Man

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**At the Seminar held in honour of Sonia Cuales, you said that you had an understanding of yourself as a gendered being. How did this come about?**

My self-consciousness about my maleness arose out of my involvement with my first wife. If I recall correctly, she was doing a course on feminism and reading a book entitled "The Bridge that is my Back". I read it out of curiosity and it was at that point that I realised that gender was an identity marker in much the same way as I understood race and class as identity markers. My own upbringing was not very macho. My mother and aunts have had a critical role in shaping my identity but not in a feminist sense. In my family we are open to new ideas. We are not strident or dogmatic about things. I started to review my own life history, not in a deliberate way, but being aware that I am male and maleness occupies a certain ideological space, both the upside and the downside.

**Were you aware of male privilege?**

I did not feel privileged although all my experience said that men were privileged. But I did realise that the space that women occupied was more constrained than for men.

**How has this understanding affected your interactions with other men?**

My dialogue has been mostly with women and mostly feminists. There is a public persona and a private persona. There is a way in which men talk about women, about sexuality etc., in the public domain, but dialogue about the private space is constrained. Men do not talk about the private space as much. For women, talking is part of a survival strategy, part of the female bonding experience. For men, there is a restriction on opportunities for emotional interactions. I remember once being in Saint Lucia and having a discussion with a group of young men on gender. We were talking about ourselves. We looked at the existing gender script in relation to accessibility to women. We agreed that a lot of men's resources go into things to increase their access to women.

**Is this not a rather cynical way of viewing women?**

Relationships on the Caribbean have a strong economic dimension and this is a sad commentary on relationships but it seems to be the reality. In the Caribbean we are very conservative people, we do not talk about gender issues openly enough, especially how sexuality and economics intersect. There is a practice which is very different from the ideal and that is in many respects the missing link in the gender discourse in the Caribbean, especially in relation to femininity. I would say that the bawdy side of femininity is still to be uncovered.

One of the problems of social science research, and in particular, that research which is not in the mainstream, is that we have constructed notions of structures, which seem immutable or static. One such construct is the juxtaposition of male privilege against female subordination. There is a lot of truth here but not the whole truth. One of the things I learned from feminist scholarship is that our identities are not purely shaped by institutional structures but also from the ways in which identity and self-esteem are shaped by our dreams and desires for career, a good life and being sexually attractive.

There is a norm and then there is an ideal, which are at odds. The norm is the extended family but the ideal is the nuclear family. The norm is multiple partners but the ideal is monogamy. The norm for women enjoys approval from society and is consistent with the sought after ideal but men's norms (of fluid relationships) are subject to societal sanction and hence the mistrust and lack of honesty between women and men.

**How has your understanding affected your professional life?**

The way in which I try to teach is to recognise that my classes are made up of people with different identities and try to process this through different angles. In my experience I have observed that men would claim to know even when they don't know and that women will claim not to know even when they do know. Even though women outnumber men in the classroom, men still contribute a larger share in the discussion. For example, if there are 10 people raising questions, more than half of these interventions tend to come from the men. I have tried to interrogate this. One of my female tutorial assistants once said to me that the women don't speak up in a class because they do not want to appear aggressive to the men. The women may also be responding to me as a threat, so sometimes, I get my female Ph.D students to take over the class and lead the discussions and they sometimes get more women to participate. I have found that when I get really bright male students, they are more prepared to challenge me. Female students conform more, do really well but are less likely to be path breakers than the men.

When I reflect on male marginalisation and female success in education, I think you may well have more women topping the class but when it comes to the world of work, the really bright men are far better prepared because they have developed a range of skills outside of the curriculum. Women may have surged ahead in education because of the fact that women have been going through a gender revolution, working their way out of the 'underdog' position with clear goals in mind, supported by other women, institutions and the ideologies of feminism.

**Do we know why boys are not in school?**

We do not have a good handle on it. But doing well in school has always been considered nerdy and as girls have gained success in school, 'nerdiness' may have become feminized. Also I don't think that traditional schooling is creating the opportunities that we anticipated. I think the current generation is having a different experience with schooling than earlier generations. Also the world economy and Caribbean economies have shifted towards the service economy (tourism, banking, insurance etc) and Caribbean men are not socialized to be in offices and to be service representatives in the same way as women who are trained and socialized to do that. The expansion in the service sector over manufacturing and agriculture has meant that men are not moving into the new sectors as quickly as women. Men are avoiding these jobs, which are perceived as being subservient and feminized, partly because they do not pay well.

Those who see themselves as the underdog have a need to achieve, but that can create conservatism about options. Girls are going into the traditional occupations and professions that are now saturated. The brighter young men spotting the shifts in the world economy are moving into new areas. Boys are more risk taking by socialisation and that is in fact what is attractive about men to many women.

**Do you understand that boys are in crisis?**

Yes, I see that in part. However, I do not see it as a crisis as much as I see it as a transition which is being reconfigured right before us. I think it is the uncertainty that scares us into making pronouncements about crisis. This is not to say that crises are bad. Crisis can be very productive if it galvanizes action.

tion. In this regard, I think men are now beginning to see themselves as gendered, but still this is a minority. The evidence out there is of how women have surged ahead. There are an increasing number of images of successful women, powerful women. Men are seeing this and internalizing it. However masculinity is still perceived as an order of privilege. So although male power has eroded, the concept of privilege is still paramount in the minds of men, in that they are entitled to a paramount space, a notion not eroded despite the reality.

**Where is this space?**

Everywhere. In the household, in the workplace, in the bedroom. There has been an erosion of male privilege in the school sphere and the data is glaring, but a lot of that has to do with the fact that schooling is not responding to the changing identity of men, not that men understand that changing identity either.

**How do you understand this changing identity?**

Young men are spending more time and resources on beautifying self. The male body is becoming as commodified like the female resulting in increased male insecurity much along the same lines that women have been suffering. Men are becoming feminized in a negative way, not on the the caring side which is the positive side. The negative side is the way in which women are overly self-conscious about their bodies and often can find nothing good to say about themselves. Women can always find fault with themselves. On the other hand, there is a way in which men, with their big belly, fat selves do not have a problem with it, but this is changing. Men are increasingly being valued for their physique and being put under the gaze of women and men.

**Is feminism still relevant?**

Male privilege and power has been brought up for discussion and that has been a major achievement of the feminist movement. But maybe that is phase two of a longer-term project. Phase one was about ensuring that women could vote, enter the work-place, etc. Phase two is about women being further unshackled and, to some extent, men and patriarchy being disarmed. Phase three is about broadening the gender discourse. We need to get closer to the root of our identities as men and women and critically engage with gender representation.

The feminisation of poverty is still a reality. Women still account for a large share of the poor. I used to go to school in Port of Spain and I have observed that this space has become more and more female over time. But what are the jobs that these women are doing? Most of it is service jobs that are low skilled and low value-added. What are the men doing? We don't know for sure. In the offices they are either the bosses or the messengers. I also see them on the highway driving back and forth, driving taxis, transport vehicles, as travelling salesmen all of which fits into the traditional male socialization model of freedom and flexibility. But what is a successful man? Is it still a man with a car and a tie and an office with a carpet and air conditioning? I think that this is shifting because men are doing so many kinds of jobs. There is greater diversity of opportunities. Many men are not going to take banking jobs when they can make more money hustling.

**You spoke of masculinisation of poverty. What do you mean?**

Where as in the past there was a proliferation of working class jobs requiring brawn, today these jobs are disappearing or are faced with declining real wages. Take a simple mechanic's work. This is being eroded by the fact that the new vehicles have computers in them and require specialized knowledge and equipment to service them. An old mechanic learned by hit and miss, he can't do that anymore. If men do not have the knowledge and the wherewithal to move up the technology scale, they will be left behind. But to do this they need to stay in school or find alternative education.

Men's declining participation in the work place limits their participation in the home. When there is less 'bacon' to bring home, many men prefer to opt out of the traditional relationship for more fluid ones which do not tie them down, because they can't provide. One of the consequences of this is an increase in female-headed households. This is where the masculinization of poverty meets its female counterpart. The two phenomena are intertwined.

**Do you think that historically men in the Caribbean have been more responsible in meeting their family obligations than now?**

This is very difficult to measure. What has changed is the perception and the popular discourse about male irresponsibility. The feminist project has brought this to the fore. But this is also problematic because it pathologises male behaviour. A lot of research has focused on men as delinquents, the fact that they are not going to school, not fulfilling their traditional roles in the family, not getting married. These are the three key institutions for socialising men: the workplace, school and marriage.

One of the things not interrogated is how the male breadwinner concept ensnares men into a form of gender oppression. So when the man loses his job and engages in a host of dysfunctional behaviors -- he gets drunk, beats his wife, commits suicide -- we comment on the domestic violence and the direct violence but not on the tremendous pressure men are put under to be breadwinners. Is it possible that we are demanding too much of our men? I know this is a dangerous argument to make as a man (and I am being cautious about putting across the argument). In the mainstream feminist discourse the male breadwinner is equated with male privilege. Thus, it is the tendency to critique male privilege and disregard male burden. To do otherwise would be to betray the goals of the movement. As such, I am arguing that there is a way in which we have not allowed the gendered male subject to be brought out of the closet.

**And whose responsibility is this?**

It should be men to interrogate this but women play a vital role. What is expected from a 'real man' and a 'good man' is in related to the breadwinner concept. As a result any man who questions the burden of this concept is opening himself to be a laughing stock among other men and possibly to be criticized by conservative feminists because the argument could be used as justifying an abdication of men's responsibilities.

Historically, social transformations come from those who see themselves as disadvantaged and although there is a lot of evidence to show that men are not doing as well as they used to (at home, work and in the family), the male breadwinner concept still seems untouchable and that, for example, is why I argue that we need to interrogate the representational economy. The reality of the male breadwinner is not as powerful as the myth, but it is still the dominant framework within which masculinities and femininities are understood. I think that the only way we will advance the gender project is if we create space for men to recognise themselves as gendered beings and to do so requires untangling and unmasking some of the unmentionable about masculinity as well as femininity.

One of the challenges facing the feminist movement is how to communicate the goals of the movement without narrowing the message to the lowest common denominator. It may be strategic to argue that the problem is male privilege and female subordination and the main goal is to change this structure. However, this is not the full sum of the project. The problem is not just about where men and women are positioned in existing hierarchies it is also about the gendered ideologies that are validated in society. One of the challenges facing all social movements is the need to adjust and update the communication strategy to take account of the new modalities. In the feminist movement the new modalities are the significant advances made in a generation. The advances have been stupendous. We need to celebrate these advances. However, there is a lot of work to be done. But the work now to be done is not the same as 20 years ago. In the contemporary scenario we need to deal with the politics of representation. If the feminist discourse is not up to this task, to meeting new challenges in the shifting terrain, it can be viewed as passe and that is a real threat. I think that the primary challenge to Caribbean development now is understanding the meaning and consequences of changing gender relations.