



*Gender*  
*in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

*Caribbean Perspectives,  
Visions and Possibilities*

EDITED BY

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*Feminist Scholarship and Society*

## Feminist Scholarship and Society

### Abstract

*The Gender and Development (GAD) strategy adopted both in academia and among governments of the Caribbean has served to highlight the societal dimensions of gender and the consequential multifaceted policy responses required to address gender issues. But the GAD strategy has also unintentionally contributed to a decline in policy attention to women's issues as concern for the contrapuntal 'male marginalisation' has emerged. This has led to a worsening of women's situation in some Caribbean societies, though not necessarily to an improvement in men's situation. Influenced by the international development agenda, feminist scholarship in the region has adopted the GAD approach in its teaching, research, advocacy and activism. It has succeeded in improving understanding of gender among governments and NGOs; influencing some government policymaking; isolating the infrastructural requirements for successful gendered policymaking; and identifying newly emerging development challenges, which need to be addressed from a gender perspective. Among the latter are included the HIV/AIDS pandemic, human rights abuses, poverty, governance and leadership. The continued weakness of government institutional machinery, the need for gender-sensitive policy reform and programme action and the limited development and use of measures to monitor government accountability represent the main contextual challenges. CGDS can, and must, provide leadership in both sets of challenges if the key ingredient, political will, is to be activated towards the attainment of gender justice and equality in the twenty-first century in this region.*

## Introduction

The very first word in the title of this conference – gender – presents us with a typically Caribbean conundrum. It is a word which generates all kinds of responses: scepticism, amusement, irritation, confusion, anger; all of these and more. Those who work in the area of gender studies or gender and development studies have been at pains to define precisely what they mean. Yet they are often accused of equating gender with women. Their accusers, by contrast, provide no definition but equate gender with men quite happily. Then there is the term feminist. That generates just as much diverse reaction. Combining it with the next word, scholarship, provides an aura of respectability, though not too much clarity, for those who are unfamiliar with the phrase.

Perhaps a useful way to begin might therefore be to clarify how I choose to interpret the phrase for this presentation and to point to some of the sources of my interpretation. Let me also say that I propose to deal with the Caribbean community and not to provide an overview of the development of feminist thought generally. That task has been very effectively done by more than one of our own feminist scholars and needs no repetition. As a general working definition, I use that offered by Professor Elsa Leo-Rhynie, for whom feminist scholarship seeks:

To identify the origins of power differences between the sexes, and the division of human characteristics along gender lines; arrive at an understanding of the world which takes women, their perceptions, their lives and achievements into account; formulate effective change strategies which would result in an acceptance of individuals as 'human'. This acceptance would be independent of gender and would reduce the power difference along gender lines (Leo-Rhynie 2002).

For the purposes of this presentation, I use the term 'feminist scholarship' to refer to that body of ideas and knowledge contained in published and unpublished material which is based on the premises contained in Leo-Rhynie's definition. In the Caribbean such scholarship, traditionally found in the social sciences, is now increasingly being found in history, law, literature and communication studies. Females connected with the University of the West Indies (UWI), either by training or employment, past or current, have been the primary producers. Most of the published material is to be found in a series of collections of essays

beginning with the publication of a selection of papers from the inaugural seminar of the then Women and Development Studies Group of the UWI (see Mohammed, Patricia and Catherine Shepherd, eds. 1988). This collection has been followed in the nineties by four others: Leo-Rhynie, Elsa, Barbara Bailey and Christine Barrow (eds.), 1997; Barrow, Christine, (ed.), 1998; Mohammed, Patricia, (ed.), 2002; and Barriteau, Eudine, (ed.). In Press. Also a special issue of the international journal *Feminist Review* which focused on the Caribbean was published in 1998.

In addition to these formal publications, there are also the Women and Development (WAND) Occasional Papers, now defunct, and the current Working Papers of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS), both coming out of the UWI. Then there is *CAFRA News*, the newsletter of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and the newsletter, *Gender Dialogue*, of the Port of Spain office of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC). Although both of these are newsletters, they do contain, from time to time, useful articles written from a feminist perspective.

Other very useful sources are three recent conferences at which cutting edge presentations were made. The CGDS St. Augustine *Symposium on Caribbean Masculinities*, 1996, broke new ground in that it took on the challenge of addressing a subject which had bedevilled the feminist movement throughout the nineties. The papers are currently in press. In 2000, the United Nations system in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, in collaboration with CAFRA and CGDS, Cave Hill, sponsored a *Symposium in Honour of the Work of Peggy Antrobus*. This symposium represented an opportunity to examine the state of the gender discourse in the region and to project the future in terms of research, strategic planning, models for programme and project development and methodologies for implementation. A publication from that symposium is expected. In 2002, CGDS, Cave Hill, sponsored a workshop entitled *Recentring Caribbean Feminisms* which is slated as the first in a series concerned with reviewing and assessing the state of feminism in the region. Papers from that gathering are expected in January 2004.

Taken together, these essays provide a representative statement on the current status of feminist scholarship in the region. However, there also

exists other published material which appears in books and academic journals outside of the region. In addition, there is a wealth of unpublished material in the form of conference and seminar papers, theses, reports, addresses, some of them readily available, some not. So that the Caribbean may rightly claim that it has entered the global stream of literature which is probing for a better understanding of gender justice and what it entails.

For the purposes of this event, I have drawn on the published material and such of the unpublished material as came to hand during my stint at the Caribbean office of the United Nations Development for Women (UNIFEM). There I had the opportunity and the privilege of working with some of the outstanding feminist thinkers in the region. I have chosen to focus on the work of those who have tried to enhance our understanding of the nature and content of feminist thought and of those who have been trying to apply that thinking to specific aspects of development policy and planning. This is not to deny the validity of the contributions of work in other areas, it is simply in response to the stated goal of this conference to focus on 'informing policy formulation and/or revision'.

Where are feminist scholars to be found in the region? For the most part they are located within the universities, and within a growing community of independent gender consultants. But they may also be found in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in government ministries and departments, in regional and international agencies. In those latter locations, they may not be engaged in academic type research and publication, but they do seek to apply the ideas contained in material produced by academics as well as their own feminist perspectives to the reports, plans, projects and programmes in which they are engaged. To the extent that this effort is successful, there tends to be a blurring of the lines between the academy and its clientele. An important caveat is the need to recognise that feminism and feminist thought are neither static nor isolated. Reddock's work clearly shows that changes have taken place over time both in the content and context of feminist thought in the region (Reddock 1988). Barriteau has pointed the direction in which it should go (Barriteau 2002, 2003). Yet another caveat is the growing understanding that the theories being developed in the North do not necessarily apply here and that it is important to develop a theory which

speaks directly to the realities of the Caribbean situation. Barrow states that categorically:

Imported theories, archaic, patriarchal assumptions, gender stereotypes and misconceived policies have been problematised and challenged and the process of reinterpretation and rejection through the lens of engendered indigenous knowledge is well underway (Barrow 1998, p. xii).

Barriteau's work is unyielding on the point (Barriteau 1994, 1995, 1998, 2002).

For purposes of analysis, the available material may be divided into three main groups, roughly corresponding to the location of those identified as feminist scholars, but there is some overlap between the groups. There are those works which speak essentially to general theoretical issues. The work of Eudine Barriteau, Patricia Mohammed and Rhoda Reddock falls into this group. Then there are those which seek to explain the link between gender and specific themes. They further seek ways of assisting states to address the particular issue with appropriate policies and programmes. The works of Roberta Clarke, Tracy Robinson and others on gender-based violence, of Mariana Williams on globalisation and trade liberalisation, Barbara Bailey on education, Linnette Vassell on political participation and Sonja Harris on institutional mechanisms are some examples. Then there are those concerned with activism and here the work of Peggy Antrobus, Andaiye and Honor Ford-Smith are examples.

The overarching theme of this presentation is therefore that feminist scholarship is not limited to the academy, but follows a well-established tradition among Caribbean women for collective action towards improving the lives of women of the region. The presentation is guided by the signposts of perspectives, vision and possibilities provided in the title of the conference.

## Perspectives

### *The regional environment*

Reddock defines feminism as:

The awareness of the oppression, exploitation, and/or subordination of women within the society and the conscious action to change and transform this situation (Reddock 1998, 53).

This suggests that a feminist scholarship which merely reflects the awareness of subordination of women is not genuinely feminist. To be truly feminist, such scholarship cannot, and must not, be allowed to exist within the walls of academia or the confines of women's NGOs. If the work of feminist scholars is to be relevant to the interests and needs of the wider community, then that work must be directed to the social, economic and political issues in the region and not limited to what some have described as 'esoteric' matters. That work must also be used to define the role of gender in the formulation and execution of ameliorative policies and programmes. That feminist scholars in this region are making an effort to bridge this gap is to be commended. Whether their work is achieving the impact that it should is another matter.

But how has feminist scholarship in the region manifested itself and what have we learnt? For that, I identify three categories of feminist scholars and provide examples of their regional work to illustrate the first aspect of my perspectives.

Theorists/Academics are those in the group who engage in multidisciplinary research and teaching within the academy. This parallels the 'professional' feminists identified by Addelson and Potter in their categorisation of feminists (Addelson and Potter 1991). Work in this group has proceeded in two directions – theory building, including clarification of basic concepts, and empirical analysis of specific issues. Progress has occurred in phases. In the initial stages of the theory building phase, there was an attempt to locate the history of feminist thought and action in the region within the prevailing theoretical frameworks which dominated feminist theorising during the eighties and early nineties (Mohammed 1994). At that time, four strands of feminists were identified. The 'liberal feminists' adopted the goal of equal opportunity as a means of maximising available human resources. The 'radical feminists' were interested in the elimination of patriarchy and other hierarchical structures and the restructuring of society. The 'socialist feminists' attempted to blend the Marxist class analysis with the radical focus on patriarchy to explain the oppression of women and to call for a complete restructuring of society. 'Black feminists', and indeed feminists

throughout the developing world, insisted on the recognition of other sources of oppression affecting women, citing particularly differences of culture, race and class. They were particularly critical of the assumption of homogeneity among women taken by the various other strands of feminism.

The question of where to place the Caribbean in this categorisation has occupied the attention of several scholars. In an overview of feminism and feminist thought Reddock concluded that the socialist feminist theory has made the most significant contribution to the development of feminist theory as a whole (Reddock 1988). However, Barriteau contends that, apart from its inherent theoretical inconsistencies and limitations 'socialist feminist theory is inadequate to accommodate the multiple social relations of the Caribbean woman'. She argues that Caribbean feminists need to produce theory based on the 'particularities of our experiences' (Barriteau 1994).

Interestingly, this takes us back to the Women and the Caribbean Project (WICP) which did not assume a particular theoretical stance, but which sought to extract precisely those particularities as a precursor to theory building (Massiah 1986). Out of that project came different insights into recommended future theory-building initiatives, for example, Christine Barrow's work on independence versus interdependence, Patricia Anderson's extraction of some of the components of the gender ideology, my own work on the concepts of visibility versus invisibility, and my recategorisation of the concept of work as defined by women themselves are some of the earlier efforts.

Since then, attention has shifted from women to gender and with that shift has come an urgent need for clarifying the concept of gender and gender related concepts. Mohammed and Barriteau have been the prime movers here, but it is Barriteau who has gone beyond definitions to the creation of new explanatory categories. First, she develops a feminist theory based on post-modernist thought for use in Caribbean social science research. Her theory accepts the diversity of Caribbean societies in respect of race, class and sexual identity, and examines ways in which women are affected by these differences, in different places and at different times. Basic to the theory is the distinction between the ideological and

material relations of gender. The material dimension relates to how men and women gain access to and are allocated material and non-material resources within states and governments. The ideological dimension indicates how a society's ideas of masculinity and femininity are created and maintained. She argues that the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed reveal the belief systems about gender operating in the state and society.

Her distinction between the ideological and material relations of gender represents a critical step in the process of feminist theory building in the region. She has used this framework in her analysis of the root causes of violence against women and her examination of how women's economic relations are filtered through gender. It also marks a critical step in the process of taking Reddock's 'conscious action to change'. For it is this framework that has shaped the CARICOM Plan of Action to 2005 for mainstreaming gender into key CARICOM programmes in education, health, with particular reference to HIV/AIDS, and labour (CARICOM 2003).

While it would not be correct to affirm that a definitive Caribbean theory has emerged, it would be fair to say that the major contribution of the academics has been the clarification of the concept of gender and related terms such as gender relations, gender equity, gender justice, gender analysis, gender training, gender planning, gender mainstreaming. As used in feminist circles, gender is not about grammar; nor is it coterminous with sex. But it is about the social and power relationships between the two sexes. It therefore accommodates the need to examine the separate situations of women and men. This clarification encouraged a conceptual shift from a WID/WAD approach to research, programming and planning to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach. The advantage of this is that GAD allows a more holistic assessment of the gender situation in all of its manifestations and a more balanced approach to research, programming and planning. Significantly, it creates an opportunity for women and men to work together to facilitate a change in gender relations which can lead to the improvement of the lives of both women and men.

Unfortunately, the term is being used uncritically, particularly among males, male groups and policy-makers (male and female) concerned with

possible consequences of the so-called male marginalisation. This has had severe effects on progress with furthering the strategic interests of women. So, for example, we have had cases of significant whittling away of the resources and influence of the national governmental mechanisms. Their titles have been changed from Departments/Bureaux of Women's Affairs to Departments/Bureaux of Gender Affairs without a commensurate change in mandates, policies, or resources. We have seen strong lobbies against legal reform which seeks to provide protection for women in such areas as family law, sexual harassment and citizenship – all because popular perception is that gender means women, that enough has been done for women, so now it is the turn of the men. This is not a view restricted to the general public. Much of this has to do with lack of understanding, or maybe deliberate misunderstanding, of a relatively complex concept which challenges the fundamental structuring of society.

Academic theorists have now turned their attention to this phenomenon and are currently engaged in a major programme on masculinities. We await the published material coming out of this programme.

Gender specialists are the persons who have acquired expertise in ensuring a gender perspective in programmes and projects and whose services are engaged by NGOs, national, regional and international organisations. Some function independently; others are based within the academy. Their basic training is usually in one of the social sciences which they supplement with special training in gender. In the vast majority of cases they are highly skilled and qualified, highly regarded and highly sought after. At the regional level, they have been instrumental in assisting CARICOM, UNIFEM and UNECLAC in preparations for some of the major UN Conferences, notably the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Small Island Developing States Conference (SIDS), and the Fourth World Conference for Women (FWCW). In addition, they were involved in the five-year reviews of the ICPD and the FWCW. At the national level, their work tends to be focussed on training to facilitate empowerment, project design to ensure a gender perspective and project/programme assessment. This group is thus also engaged in the production of material which expands our knowledge and understanding of the operation of gender in Caribbean societies.

In this regard, the seven priority issues identified by the region both pre- and post-Beijing and at Beijing+5 assume prominence. In the FWCW preparations five priority areas were identified – human rights with particular reference to violence against women, poverty, health in particular HIV/AIDS, leadership and decision-making, institutional development. Following Beijing, a sixth – education – was added. Following Beijing+5, a seventh – gender and trade – was added. This constitutes the group of seven priority areas which are of concern to the majority of governments of the region and the areas in which feminist scholars need to focus their attention if they wish to continue to be relevant.

Gender specialists have been applying a gender analysis in their research in each of these areas and then using their findings to work with relevant agencies at national, regional and international levels to create new approaches to addressing the particular problems which affect women. Several examples of this extension work exist. I draw attention to three – an independent consultant working in the area of institutional mechanisms, a university researcher working in education and a programme officer in an international agency working on violence against women.

In response to the growing concern about the weakening of national institutional arrangements for addressing women's affairs, the Commonwealth Secretariat sought to develop a mechanism which would strengthen those entities as well as extend the scope and impact of their work. They invited Audrey Ingram Roberts, an independent consultant, to join a panel of three to develop an innovative concept. Using her basic discipline, management studies, grafting on to it her feminist perspective and drawing on her experience of working with national and regional agencies throughout the region, she produced the concept of a Gender Management Strategy (GMS) (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999). This system was designed as a network of structures, processes and mechanisms designed to mainstream gender within an organisation. Among its objectives are the strengthening of the national machinery and the creation of an enabling environment of gender aware plans and programmes. Its major strategy is networking among key stakeholders. Its guiding principles are empowerment, integration and accountability.

The GMS was adopted by Commonwealth Ministers of Women's Affairs at a meeting in Port of Spain in 1996 and was piloted in Malta, Uganda, Jamaica, St Kitt's/Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines.

In the area of education, public concern with the low achievement of boys in the school system extended into concern with UWI results which reflected a higher percentage of women graduating each year. For several years now, the Chancellor has alluded to this during his graduation ceremony address at each campus. Professor Barbara Bailey, Head, Regional Unit, CGDS, was invited to prepare a project proposal to examine the causes of this phenomenon and to recommend steps for redressing the balance. As part of the project, she spearheaded the production of a Gender and Education Training Manual for use in teacher training colleges across the region (Bailey 2000). As part of the CARICOM Plan of Action to 2005, this manual will be used in a series of workshops for teacher educators and training at the in-service level. She is also working with CARICOM to produce a regional digest of Statistics on Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Results to assist in the process of demystifying the discourse on male underachievement. She was a member of the CARICOM Gender Mainstreaming Task Force and is collaborating with CARICOM on the implementation of the education component of the programme. Here is an example of an academic feminist scholar pushing the boundaries of her research to find ways of influencing policy and programme change within a key regional institution.

In the area of Law, Roberta Clarke, Programme Officer, UNECLAC, has undertaken several initiatives in women's human rights, in particular in the area of violence against women. With UNIFEM she produced a critical assessment of the law in this regard, along with a compilation of agencies to which women can turn for help (Clarke 1998). With UNIFEM she has also worked with magistrates of the Eastern Caribbean towards a common strategy of dealing with such cases in their courts [UNIFEM, 2000]. In UNECLAC, she initiated a research project on the production of a protocol for data collection on violence against women for use by statistical authorities in the region (St Bernard 2001). She has undertaken an assessment of the implementation of Domestic Violence

Legislation in four countries in the region (ECLAC 2001). Building on that work, she has embarked on a research project which seeks to examine the relationship between gender socialisation and violence against women. Particular focus is being placed on the role of schools as socialisation agents and on state institutions which provide protective and social services. In collaboration with UNIFEM she is currently preparing an evaluation and assessment of the work on violence against women which has been undertaken in the region in the post-Beijing era. Here is an example of a gender specialist engaged in the production of knowledge in an area which the Caribbean had identified as its number one priority. She is continually trying to use that knowledge to enhance the programme of her own agency as well as to influence policy and programmes within the governments.

Each of these women has been actively involved in research and action from a feminist perspective for many years. They are excellent examples of the use of feminist scholarship to influence change in the structure of key institutions.

Activists are mostly based in NGOs, are often described as 'agitators', and are the ones who Peggy Antrobus has warned to 'be intellectually sound but be prepared to go out into the streets'.<sup>1</sup> CAFRA, which can be regarded as the umbrella of feminist organisations in the region, defines its role as follows:

We are committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society, and we are working actively for change (CAFRA Mission Statement).

Thus the role of activists was defined from early. There was the need for analysis and there was need for action. But the analysis had to come from the subjective experiences of women themselves, not from the objective analysis of statistical measurement of impact and monitoring and the like. The analysis had to be about what women's perspectives, ideas, advice on the major development issues, for example, globalisation, affecting their region. Clearly, that analysis had to be done either by the activists themselves or by those whose function is to research issues. So the link between activism and academia was apparent from the very creation of CAFRA.

Several examples of how this link has worked exist but I wish to highlight three.

The first example of this was in the preparation for the FWCW in Beijing. Discussions began with the naming of a core group – CARICOM, UNIFEM, UNECLAC, WAND and CAFRA – as the agencies charged with the responsibility for the preparations. The group developed a strategy using the principle of networking as the primary operational tool. The strategy was designed to assist the governments in the preparation of their reports, to develop a communication strategy around the 12 critical areas identified by the UN and to train delegates in conference diplomacy. A division of labour was worked out based on the principle of comparative advantage of the partners and the plan put into effect. The plan depended highly on collaboration and consensus building, involving governments, NGOs, members of the diplomatic community, universities and individual consultants. It embraced all language areas and all political ideologies of the region. It resulted in a highly cohesive presence at the conference and the inclusion of all Caribbean positions reflected in the final document.

Another example is the slogan of the UN Inter-Agency Women's Human Rights Campaign 'A Life Free of Violence: It is your Right'. The campaign was designed in response to the high levels of domestic and sexual violence against women and girls which was identified as a priority in both the pre- and post-Beijing periods. The Caribbean component, spearheaded by UNIFEM in collaboration with CAFRA, was designed and developed with a new set of partners – the Crisis Centres – and implemented in collaboration with women's NGOs and women's/gender bureaux. There were two components. A public education element consisting of a conference, schools poster competitions, schools elocution competitions, advertising slogans, campaign posters, commemoration postage stamps, radio panel discussions, newsletters, a regional tribunal on violence against women. The second component consisted of a police education programme in which a training manual was developed, a trainer of trainers workshop hosted and conducted under the leadership of CAFRA in police forces across the region. By the end of the campaign, public awareness of gender-based violence as a human rights issue was

considerably heightened, some policy action occurred, including legislative reform, the creation of shelters, and the upgrading of the ability of police to address such situations. It was crystal clear that it was the concerted work of women, using the principle of comparative advantage, across the region which had been responsible. Further, it was equally clear that women were prepared to take a strong stand against not only the practice, but also against the institutional weaknesses in confronting it.

By the end of the nineties, as the region began its preparations for the Beijing+5 Assembly, there was a deeper understanding of gender and its relationship to the ongoing and emerging developmental issues of the region. There was also a better understanding of the ways in which it may have been possible to work with governments in the task of changing institutions and structures to enable the achievement of gender justice. Much of this was due to the unflagging efforts of a few progressive women's NGOs working in collaboration with WAND which provided the intellectual leadership for their activities up to the early half of the nineties.

The story of WAND and such NGOs as Red Thread, Sistren, Women Working for Social Progress, CAFRA and others is the story of women's NGO's producing material based on feminist insights and theorising for the purpose of advocacy and activism. This is the group which made the connection between macro-level frameworks and micro-level realities, which insisted on the need to address differences other than gender, and for promoting the goal of social and gender justice for all. Their strategy was built on the concept of 'critical analysis' of global trends, regional developments and the nature of development itself. By the end of the nineties, this group, with its feminist analysis and Caribbean perspective, had made an impact at the international level on each of the major development issues of the decade – environment, human rights, population and development, social development and women.

With the decline of WAND, the links between CGDS, CARICOM and UNIFEM became more critical. Under their joint leadership, there grew greater confidence in calling the governments to account, as is reflected in the book that we will be launching later. This, the third example, constitutes the next landmark in the progress of feminist

scholarship in the region. The book, *Gender Equality in the Caribbean: Reality or Illusion*, was commissioned by CARICOM and UNIFEM and is co-edited by the CGDS.

This book contains seven papers, which not only analyse the situation in respect of specific thematic areas, but also chronicle the changes since Beijing, identify good practices, lessons learnt and critical gaps in achieving gender equality. The papers also examine the status of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) and identify indicators to monitor progress towards transforming gender inequities in the specific thematic areas. The book is unapologetic in its assertion that what is now needed is the political will to confront the prevailing gender ideology which fuels its institutions and structures and to make the necessary changes. Activists have therefore been provided with a powerful tool with which to further their activism.

### *The Feminist Environment*

In this section, I offer the second aspect of my perspectives which relates to what I call the feminist environment. Here my concern is with the debate on the current state of feminism in the region. Feminist scholarship in the region has moved through several stages. The WICP marked the initial stage which was one of stock taking and making women visible. That was in the late seventies and early eighties. The second stage was during the latter half of the eighties when concern was focussed on contextual issues, particularly the impact of structural adjustment policies on women and the emergence of the male marginalisation thesis. Since then there has been the move from WID/WAD to GAD, as well as tentative moves towards theory building. This, the third and current stage, has mainly been the work of the nineties.

But the weakening of the women's movement in the post-Beijing era, the emergence of the male marginalisation thesis and the deterioration in certain indicators of women's situation occasioned by the growing economic difficulties being experienced in the region have given cause for pause. The Peggy Antrobus symposium devoted considerable time to assessing the status of the movement. Their conclusion was that there is need to move away from what was described as the 'crisis of confidence'

and towards a strategy for re-mobilisation. That requires collective analysis of context, strategies, alliances and communication methods in order to arrive at a new vision and new goals. They call for a 'thinking core' for the revitalised movement. So, here as well, the need for intellectual clarity is recognised as being critical and the necessary cross fertilisation between academia and activism is highlighted.

In June of last year, the Cave Hill Unit of the CGDS sponsored a Workshop entitled 'Recentring Caribbean Feminisms'. In the keynote address of the opening ceremony, Eudine Barriteau issued 12 challenges facing future work. Among those challenges were included difficulties in confronting power and how it influences the choice of issues on which to work; confronting issues of race, ethnicity and class; addressing masculinities and the male marginalisation thesis; democratising the production of knowledge; and insufficient continuity between women leaders and the cadre of young new leaders (Barriteau 2002). Discussions at the workshop revealed a number of recurring concerns – difficulty in defining terms (feminist, feminism(s)), perceived disjuncture between academics and activists, an intergenerational divide and links with the state. No real solutions were offered, although a number of proposals were suggested for following up the initiative.

In her critique of feminist politics in the Caribbean, Andaiye identifies some of the weaknesses including the lack of inclusiveness, the failure to adequately address issues of race and class, the focus on analysis, limited advocacy and minimalist projects instead of emphasising the struggle against poverty. She has sounded a clear warning of the need to identify the kind of world in which we want to live, 'not in the language of isms', and rethink and revise past approaches. She proposes a global campaign 'led and waged in the interests of the poorest women, who bear the greatest burden of unwaged and low-waged caring labour which is the foundation of all economies' (Andaiye 2002).

In a recent keynote address to the opening of a summer institute on gender at the Cave Hill campus last month, I identified ten practical leadership lessons learnt which future leaders might wish to apply to the next stage. These ranged from knowing your context and drawing strength from it, through valuing the work of our predecessors, anticipating possible new issues and maintaining the vision of gender

justice, to recognising the power of strong and creative leadership (Massiah 2003). To these, Peggy Antrobus has added three others – trust your own experience; always link the national, regional and international; and feminist theory and conscious raising are key.

In effect, the current status of the feminist environment in the region is one of pausing to reflect, assess, revisit and revise before proceeding to the next stage. It is interesting that the recent reflections, although occurring in different places and involving different participants, do contain some common elements including the critical ones of analysis and the relations between academic and activist. And so the issue of what is the next stage, who and how this will be conducted becomes important for feminist scholars.

It seems to me that, despite the commendable progress made in terms of knowledge, skills at advocacy and collective action, there remains a sense in which not enough impact is evident at the policy and programme level of the state. Part of the difficulty seems to be continued uncertainty about some basic concepts, for example, the movement – is there one? What is it? A women's movement? A feminist movement? How well established is it? Does it touch women throughout the region? If so, how? If not, why not? These questions were being raised in the seventies, so why are we still debating them? There continues to be the confusion over the term gender and gender related concepts. Then there are such phrases as feminist politics, feminist methodology, and feminist bureaucracy. These are terms which feminist scholars discuss among themselves, and perhaps understand among themselves. But if the objective of their work is to achieve social transformation and gender justice, then these terms have to be clearly and creatively expressed and explained in fora with decision-makers in terms which they understand. Those explanations also have to resonate with the issues with which decision-makers are struggling. That is the major task which feminist scholars face if they wish to activate that political will to confront the gender ideologies, which obstruct the achievement of gender justice, of which Eudine Barriteau speaks so eloquently.

### *The Influence of the United Nations*

The third aspect of my perspectives relates to the link between the national, regional and international, in particular to the influence of the

United Nations (UN) system in fostering those links. Peggy Antrobus reminds that it was a 'particular kind of politics, feminist politics, [which] informed the establishment and shaped the programmes within institutions, such as the UN...' (Antrobus 2000). Indeed it was the series of world conferences on women beginning in 1975, which gave global prominence to the link between women and the major issues of equality, development and peace. In a series of thematic world conferences beginning in 1990, it became clear that, regardless of the particular focus, women were located at the epicentre of the quest for a just and sustainable development.

The efforts of the UN to promote and protect the human rights of women have taken place in four stages. The first, 1945-62, was concerned with securing women's legal equality. This period during which both the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed equal rights for men and women. It was also the period during which the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was created. During these years, women's organisations in the Caribbean were concerned primarily with charitable works, organising, maintaining contact with international developments and, towards the end of the period, ensuring recognition of women's rights in the proposed Federal arrangements. But although many of the leaders displayed a feminist consciousness, feminist scholarship as defined today had not yet appeared.

The second period, 1963-75, focused on women's development needs as expressed through the economic and social realities of their lives. In the Caribbean, this was the era marked by links with the New Left and social movements, and with the establishment of bureaux of women's affairs in two territories – Jamaica and Guyana – in response to urgings from the UN. The creation of the CSW had confirmed for Caribbean women that the issues of concern to them were also being discussed at the highest level of the UN. By the end of the period many countries had attained political independence, had joined the UN and were participating in its democratisation. They contributed to the discussion reviewing the first development decade and offered suggestions for the second. Some pioneer feminist scholars of the region contributed to the discussions. Lucille Mair, who was the Caribbean representative on the

Commission on Social Development, had pushed for greater consideration of women's issues in its deliberations. Gloria Scott gave to the world the phrase 'the full integration of women in the development effort', when she suggested an amendment to the resolution on the International Development Strategy for the Second Development Decade. This allowed women to introduce the notion of equity, which at that time was not on the development agenda. This period ended with the creation of International Women's Year in 1975 and the hosting of the first World Conference for Women in Mexico City.

The third period, 1976-85, was designated the International Decade for Women and it recognised that women were not only beneficiaries of, but also contributors to, the development process. This period witnessed the establishment, in 1979, of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the international Bill of Rights for women. Caribbean feminists have been members of the CEDAW committee from its inception. The second, the Mid-Decade Conference, was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The period ended with the Third World Conference for Women in Nairobi in 1985. The Nairobi conference produced the Forward Looking Strategies, detailing the constraints which continued to prevent the achievement of equality and setting out a framework for action requiring women's involvement at all levels from decision-making to implementation. For the first time, feminist scholars were invited to work with CARICOM to coordinate details on various national issues and to design a united CARICOM approach to negotiation at the conference.

The fourth period, 1986-2000, marks the period of the shift from WID/WAD to GAD and of efforts to mainstream gender. Related to the shift from WID/WAD to GAD has been the shift from integration to empowerment of women. The former was based on the acceptance of the basic status quo, the latter on a questioning of the unequal relations between men and women, government and people, developed and developing countries. Empowerment is about providing women with the skills, knowledge and ability to use their understanding of those unequal relations to improve both their practical and strategic interests. This approach was heavily promoted at the Fourth World Conference

for Women (FWCW) which was held in Beijing in 1995 and a Special Session of the General Assembly (familiarily called Beijing+5) held in 2000 to assess progress since the FWCW.

Each of the three groups of Caribbean feminist scholars played a key role in the preparations of both the FWCW and Beijing+5. It was their analyses which facilitated a regional position at the two gatherings, their understanding of the conference politics which catapulted the Caribbean into a leadership position, their advice which governments, both Caribbean and non-Caribbean, sought. So that, insofar as their impact on policy can be gauged from their influence on governments at global conferences, it may be said that feminist scholars are indeed using their consciousness to promote change.

Since Beijing+5, the UN has become intensely interested in the measurement of impact, the setting of targets and the monitoring of progress towards preset time-bound goals. The Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the UN member states in 2000, incorporates commitments made at each of the various World Conferences and reaffirmed at the five-year reviews. Among the eight goals set is one concerned with women's empowerment and gender equality which the Millennium Declaration identifies not only as a goal in its own right, but as an essential component in achieving all of the other goals. The question of whether the targets and proposed indicators are relevant to the Caribbean or whether the particular indicators are adequate to measure the Caribbean reality opens up a whole new space for Caribbean feminist scholars.

## Vision

I turn now to my vision for the future. A review of the work of feminists in the post-Beijing era suggests that there has been a growing sense of confidence as the three groups of scholars have begun to come to grips with the theoretical difficulties of both gender and women's gendered concerns and issues.

They have learnt how to work effectively together at several levels, in some cases creating strong bonds of unity and cooperation across the region. But there remains a sense in which there is need for closer

collaboration. They have learnt how to function at the international level. But there is a sense in which there is need to widen the group which is so engaged. They have begun to understand better the implications of some of the wider issues of the women at the individual and community level. But there is a sense that very difficult issues remain to be addressed. They have begun to see some positive results of the work in which they are engaged on the lives of women.

However, there is a real sense that the situation of women may not have changed very much. Foremost among these is the fact that the contradictory situation of Caribbean women noted in the WICP as far back as 1986, continues today. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has devised two measures, the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to indicate the level and extent of gender disparities. In the Caribbean, GDIs of over 0.50 suggest that women may not be doing too badly when compared to men in terms of achievement in levels of income, health and education. But the GEM shows that disparities between men and women in participation and access to professional opportunities, political decision-making and earning power are generally wide and widening. So how did this contradictory situation come about? This perception that all is well, is against the reality that all may not be so well at all.<sup>2</sup> Have Caribbean women confronted this contradiction? If not, how should they? Has the feminist scholarship of the region enabled women to understand their situation and to create strategies to deal with it? If they have adopted strategies what are they, how will they affect the next generation of children and with what impact on the wider society?

These are some of the unanswered questions and they go beyond simply meeting practical needs or addressing the material relations of gender.

The next wave will, I believe, be forced to concentrate on the strategic gender needs of women, or the ideological relations of gender. That is to say what can be done to change the attitudes of those in positions of power to make them willing to confront the prevailing gender ideology and to change the structures and institutions which maintain that

ideology. This will be the most difficult phase of all. For as Audrey Ingram Roberts puts it:

Practical gains are easily swept away and strategic interests take time and are not easily met because they challenge the very core of social systems as we know them (Ingram Roberts 1991).

But even as this is being promoted, it is important to acknowledge the place of the study of masculinities and the situation of men. It is only with this knowledge that a balanced view of the gender situation is possible, that a sensitive environment for dialogue between men and women can be created and that conditions for mutual agreement on changes in gender relations can be achieved. Only then can true gender justice prevail. It is to their credit that the CGDS has introduced this as a valid topic for teaching and research in the academic curricula.

As part of the new analysis, I would wish to see a critical assessment of the impact of feminist scholarship on society generally and young women in particular. Too often now are we seeing women, of all ages, misusing the tenets of feminism to exhibit exactly the type of behaviour which the movement had criticised among men. Too often are we seeing what UWI Vice Chancellor Nettleford describes as 'the coarseness of sensibility which has crept into society' reflected in young women. We see public displays of behaviour which are demeaning to women, disrespectful to their elders, degrading to their peers and destructive of their youth. What inspires them to such behaviour? Whatever it is, there can be no denying that one result is a slow and continuous undermining of the achievements of decades of feminist work. There is an urgent need to find out what part, if any, of the message of feminist scholarship has served to encourage this. We need to find out who is hearing the messages, how they are being used, whether new messages need to be developed. For example, what is there in the existing literature to encourage women to make a better environment for themselves and their children? How to get men to understand that by preying on young women they are helping to create the conditions for losing the next generation? How to get young women to accept that life is more than about getting as much as possible from men?

These issues are part of the everyday reality of the lives of young women who are saying in increasing numbers and in an endless variety of ways

that 'your issues are not ours'. In other words, while it is important to be analytical about the larger issues of theoretical constructs, institutional structures, regional development imperatives and the international development agenda, it is equally important to understand the attitudes and behaviours of our young women. And that is a task for each of the three groups of feminist scholars.

Although I have presented cases of links between the academy, activists and policy, I believe that not enough people are involved in that process; nor is enough use being made of feminist scholarship in policy making, programme development and implementation. Part of the problem is the artificial distinction made between academics and activists. Thus, even when activists are themselves engaged in research and analysis using their academic training, they refuse to admit that they are in fact being academics. And when academics use their own material as the basis for policy advice, they are reluctant to admit that they are, in fact, being activists. Another aspect of the problem is the limited involvement of policy makers in the gender discourse. There is an attitudinal aspect to this born of hundreds of years of adherence to patriarchal values. But there is also the reality of the development paradigm into which the region is tied and the resultant dependence on external agencies, policy prescriptions and development aid. There is much to be learnt by feminist scholars about how policy is made and about how and at what points it may be possible to exercise influence.

Another issue of the future has to do with the regional development thrust towards new instruments of integration. There is an urgency to these initiatives as the region races against time to ready itself for the establishment of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) scheduled for 2005. This, together with the struggles with the World Trade Organization and other mechanisms of globalisation, makes it imperative for feminist scholars to be a voice for women, bringing a feminist perspective to the ongoing discourse and to the relevant negotiations. Although research and some advocacy is being done in this area, notably by Mariana Williams and DAWN Caribbean, there would not appear to be that level of collaboration between the academy, gender specialists,

activists and CARICOM which obtains in other priority areas of the region. This needs to be corrected.

My vision is to see a strengthened network of links between the academy, the government and the NGO community across the region working together in a number of areas:

- A critical review of what has been achieved collaboratively, what are the lessons to be learnt and shared and how can those lessons be applied to assess where we are, determine where we would like to go and chart how we could get there.
- An institutionalised presence in the form of a Women's Commission located within CARICOM and entitled to a place on all of the structures created by that entity to take forward the development agenda of the region, for example, CSME, RNM, CARICOM Programme of Action etc. Perhaps the Task Force on Gender Mainstreaming could be the nucleus of a 'standing' not 'resident' entity. But whatever form it takes, there must be a mechanism within CARICOM charged with the responsibility of ensuring a gender perspective in all of the major regional programmes which the CARICOM is promoting on behalf of governments of the region.
- At the national level a mechanism with specialist planning capability which can support the work of the Gender Bureau throughout the public service. The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) represents a kind of prototype which provides assistance to the bureau through gender training, checklists, indicators, policy analysis which takes into account the changing social and economic scenario of each country and how gender fits.<sup>3</sup> This allows involvement of the political directorate in the dialogue.
- More research focussed on the priority areas of the Caribbean and more creative strategies to use that research to build awareness among policy makers and to encourage genuine efforts at change. Apart from the seven priority areas there are a number of other issues in our societies which we need to understand. Among the positive features are the increasing importance of sports and entertainment in the lives of young people and the impact of that on the economies.

Among the several negative features in Caribbean societies are rising crime and violence, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and increasing involvement in the illegal drug trade. We need to know how gender fits into all of this and how policy initiatives in these areas could be enhanced by a gender perspective.

- More work with the statistical authorities to design indicators of accountability in critical areas. But to be useful, these indicators must be developed in collaboration with gender specialists and end-users.
- More psychosocial analysis on the impact of a gender approach to development on the individual and the wider community. This is in effect a kind of self-assessment. We need to know what is right and what may be wrong about what we are doing.

My vision is based, not merely on the hope of reaching the goal of social and gender justice, but on my belief in the creativity and determination of Caribbean women.

## Possibilities

In deference to the tenth anniversary of CGDS, which this conference celebrates, I shall confine my comments on possibilities to those things which the centre might be minded to do as we move to Beijing +10. I believe that the centre has been a critical partner in the regional efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and to educate on the relevance of gender to the development agenda. This has been an important contribution since it shows that the centre, as part of a regional university which is committed to collective action with critical partners, understands the needs and is willing to work along with its partners. But I believe that there is a stronger and expanded role for the centre which is to take the lead in providing academic vitality and authority to the collective. This may be achieved through the three areas in which the CGDS has been involved: research, advocacy and technical assistance. In each of these areas it is possible to identify a number of actions which may be taken. But in seeking to identify those a few questions need to be posed.

The work of the centre has proceeded, understandably, according to the interests and skills of the leadership of each unit. However, there are some areas which have remained relatively untouched even though they are of critical importance to the region. At the political level, the current regional focus is on regional integration with particular reference to the Common Market and Single Economy (CSME) and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). Yet, although gender is an important component of both initiatives, there is no work in either area coming out of the centre, as far as I am aware. Similarly, there have been scattered efforts to produce social statistics for the region, including a long-standing and uncompleted effort to produce a gender-indicators publication. Yet there has not been an initiative from the centre to identify itself as the locus of statistical and other types of information about women and gender. I ask, further, why is it that greater attention has not been paid to others of the seven priority areas besides education and to a lesser extent leadership? Why is globalisation not on the agenda? Nor HIV/AIDS? And why has a human rights approach been limited only to legal issues?

In other words, I am suggesting that now may be an appropriate time for the centre to review and redesign its programme so that it may speak more directly to the concerns of the region. This is not to say that what it is doing is not relevant, far from it. It is merely seeking a broader base for the programme and a strategy for the centre to know and show the way forward. Against this background I would wish to suggest the following:

### *Research*

- Ongoing work should continue on the issues of education and transformational leadership.
- Establish projects on poverty, globalisation and trade liberalisation. These should be done in collaboration with DAWN Caribbean.
- Work should be initiated on gender and HIV/AIDS. This should be done in collaboration with the Caribbean Epidemiological Centre (CAREC) and should feed into the Pan Caribbean HIV/AIDS Programme in CARICOM.
- A major research programme on male issues should be undertaken as a follow up to the masculinities symposium.

### *Advocacy*

- Work with CARICOM and NGOs and international agencies to develop and implement a regional communication programme of public education on gender and development. A key component should be designed to address the male marginalisation thesis. This should be a major programme designed to capture public imagination and secure community support.
- Collaborate with CAFRA and NGOs to develop programmes to attract young women, to increase economic and legal literacy at the community level and to utilise material from thematic research to strengthen NGO action programmes.

### *Technical Assistance*

- Use the manual produced under the Regional Gender Training Programme to assist with institutional strengthening of Women's/Gender Bureaux.
- Recommend and assist with review and assessment of CARICOM Women's Desk and programme for mainstreaming gender in programmes of CARICOM Secretariat.
- Develop and implement strategy for participating in major meetings of CARICOM Ministers and for following up on decisions taken in respect of gender matters.

The goal of these proposals is to strengthen and expand the ability of the centre to work with its partners to reverse the apparent state retreat from policies and programmes centred on women. The strategy is to find alternative ways of working through the existing structures, without trying to usurp the functions of the partners. It calls for creativity, tact, determination and a genuine belief that feminist scholarship is not for bookshelves, but for committed action.

Management of a strategy for this purpose requires the kind of transformational leadership being promoted by the centre itself in one of its programmes. Now is the time for the centre to demonstrate that leadership. But the centre is not an autonomous unit. It is part of a regional university which prides itself on its ability to respond to the needs of its

constituents. I end with a call to the university to renew its commitment to the centre as it embarks on the next stage of its development.

## Notes

1. Comments made during symposium in her honour, 2000. This group equates to the 'political feminists' identified by Addelson and Potter as individuals who are members of an activist women's organisation.
2. Incidentally, it might be an apt reminder that even as the WICP had identified this contradictory situation as an inherent aspect of the gender situation of the region it had recommended 'the urgent need for a theoretical perspective for the study of women'.
3. PIOJ, in collaboration with UNDP, spearheaded the research and publication for the first Human Development Report Jamaica in 2000.

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## Feminist Activism

### The CARICOM Experience

#### Abstract

*The paper defines Caribbean feminism, its goals and objectives, and considers the impact of feminist activism on CARICOM society over the past 30 years. It begins with an account of the context in which feminist activism emerged in CARICOM countries in the 1970s, and tracks how this kind of politics had first to be legitimised within a framework of governance that was at least open to its contestations. The paper focuses on the author's own experience to consider feminism's influence on women in leadership positions and how this changed their politics and practice. From there, it seeks to address the ways in which this leadership sought to influence the politics and programmes of women's organisations and other NGOs, government policy, key institutions and, more broadly, societal attitudes to women, taking account of the resistance encountered and support received along the way.*

*Antrobus argues that feminist activism working from within and outside various institutions – among them political parties, the bureaucracy, the educational system (including the university), the church, legal system, trade unions, media and women's organisations – did indeed achieve some of its objectives, although not always in ways that were favourable to its cause.*

*This paper recognises feminism as an ongoing dialogic process of confrontations, resolution, contradictions, and contestation that nevertheless has the capacity to transform relationships and systems that are oppressive, and attempts to draw out the implications for feminist activism in the changing context of today.*