



Gendered Identity and the Lost Female

Hybridity as a Partial Experience in
the Anglophone Caribbean
Performances

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book, in its most succinct form, is an exploration of Postcolonial ‘hybrid’ experience in the late twentieth century Anglophone Caribbean performance from a feminist perspective. By performance, I mean theatre, calypso, carnival and chutney music, and how they represent the post-colonial ideation of a ‘hybrid’ performer. Besides looking into the works of playwrights like Derek Walcott, Errol John, Trevor Rhone, Mustapha Matura and Michael Gikes, the study also examines identity polemics in the works of performers like the female calypsonians, the skimpy *mas* dancers of Trinidad Carnival, and the Indo-Caribbean female singers of Chutney music.

The objectives of this book are to:

- Form a critical argument around the existing narrative of cultural hybrid experience in the Caribbean imaginary.
- Explore aesthetic representations of hybridity as a process of post-colonial identity construction of female participants in Caribbean performances.
- Comment on the nature of a gendered power equation in the hybrid experience of female characters in the plays, as well as female participants in the Anglophone Caribbean performances.
- Analyze certain theatrical texts, calypso and chutney lyrics of Caribbean Anglophone playwrights and performers, and also explore certain case studies, against particular cultural backdrops.

- Question the pertinence of the ongoing practice of connecting the poetics of hybridity to a poetics of equality—particularly focusing on various performance practices.
- Signal at the present nature of things, and a possible future of the hybrid identity narratives. Where is the postcolonial identity polemics headed to? What new grounds are possible in any further study of these narratives?

The book intends to address a few questions germane to the multicultural narrative of contemporary Caribbean imaginary: how does hybrid experience differ across race and gender in the Caribbean postcolonial discourse? In an attempt to create a pan-Caribbean multi-cultural identity, is there a forced assimilation, glossing over differences? Does the hybrid experience in the Caribbean performance have a bias against female narratives? To address these concerns, I am consulting works of Homi K. Bhabha, Nederveen Pieterse, Shalini Puri and others in an attempt to approximate different facets of the hybridity discourse. This gendered study of postcolonial hybrid experience would be a hitherto unexplored consideration of Caribbean theatre and performance.

CONTENTS

1	Independence and Oil Boom: Hybridity and the Changing Face of Caribbean Gender Identity	1
1.1	<i>Political and Economic Change</i>	3
1.2	<i>Socio-Cultural Change</i>	7
1.3	<i>Gender Politics in the Caribbean Before and Around 1972</i>	9
	<i>Works Cited</i>	25
2	Race, Performance, Identity, and the Possibility of an Incomplete Articulation of Hybridity	27
2.1	<i>Construction of Racial and Ethnic Identity in the Caribbean</i>	27
2.2	<i>Concept of Hybridity and Its Incomplete Articulation</i>	38
2.3	<i>The Interconnection of Drama, Calypso and Carnival</i>	50
	<i>Works Cited</i>	68
3	“To Put Two Cold Coins”: The Polarized Identities in Caribbean Drama	73
3.1	<i>Folklore, Rituals and Carnival: Many Faces of Caribbean Theatrical Performances</i>	74
3.2	<i>Dream on Monkey Mountain and Ti Jean and His Brothers: Walcott’s Myth of Masculine Hybridity</i>	82

3.3	<i>Internalized Hegemony and the Exaggeration of Complacency: Trevor D. Rhone's Old Story Time</i>	98
3.4	<i>Motley of Choice and Change: Errol John's Moon on a Rainbow Shawl</i>	109
3.5	<i>Rawle Gibbon's "I Lawah": The Canboulay in Theatre</i>	119
3.6	<i>"woman like you... like me": Pat Cumper's "The Rapist"</i>	126
	<i>Works Cited</i>	140
4	Carnival as a Partial Expression of Gendered Reality	143
4.1	<i>Carnival: Tradition or a Modern Bacchanalia</i>	146
4.2	<i>Bakhtin and the Idea of the Carnavalesque</i>	149
4.3	<i>Carnival as Ritual</i>	152
4.4	<i>Canboulay: Emergence of a Carnival of Color</i>	158
4.5	<i>Carnival and the Gender Equation</i>	162
4.6	<i>The Changing Face of the Carnival</i>	176
	<i>Works Cited</i>	185
5	"Instead of Having One Race, You Know I Got Two": Calypso and Chutney as Voices from the Fringe	187
5.1	<i>Calypso and the Absence of "Jean" and "Dinah"</i>	188
5.2	<i>Music Off the Jahaj: Music of the Indo-Caribbean</i>	207
	<i>Works Cited</i>	222
6	Conclusion	225
	<i>Works Cited</i>	231
	Bibliography	233
	Index	243

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CHAPTER 1

Independence and Oil Boom: Hybridity and the Changing Face of Caribbean Gender Identity

In the economic and sociopolitical upheaval following the Oil Boom, cultural practices changed from the colonial–colonized polarity of the post-independence Caribbean societies to an acknowledgment of the multiplicity of economic and hence societal nuances. These shifting cultural changes brought about some visible alterations in social life. These modifications were acknowledged and incorporated into the racial memory as a communal experience and were externalized in various art forms. As social experience clashed with the racio-communal memory, the cultural depiction of the lived experience became more complicated. Hence, while some opined that the male was an endangered species due to their increasing absence in the Caribbean social milieu, others noticed the increasing marginalization of women in cultural iconography and the postcolonial experience. This was more obvious in the performance practices, where the audience had participatory access to the event.

The present study is meant to explore the possibilities of a gendered argument regarding the experience of cultural hybridity. Though the focus will be culture specific—to be precise about hybridity being a predominantly masculine experience in the West Indian performance tradition referring to theater, calypso and carnival within a specific time-frame in the history of the Caribbean—the central argument has a wider applicability. The book intends to address a few questions germane to the multicultural narrative of contemporary Caribbean imaginary: how does

the hybrid experience differ across race and gender in the Caribbean post-colonial? In an attempt to create a pan-Caribbean multicultural identity, is there forced assimilation, glossing over differences? Does the hybrid experience in the Caribbean performance have a bias against female narratives? To address these concerns, the study will refer to the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Nederveen Pieterse, Shalini Puri and others in an attempt to approximate different facets of hybridity discourse.

Hybridity as a part of the multicultural discourse has a tendency of claiming an autonomy from prejudices and regression. However, if we follow the discursive trajectory of any sociopolitical experience, it becomes clearer that any claim of forbearance from prejudices or emancipatory polity can be something to be wary of. It has to be socially and culturally conditioned making it largely relative to spacio-cultural coordinates. Thus, the said polity is also liable to be governed by the socially constructed power relations making it subjective, in some ways partisan and in the context of this study, gendered. There is a practice of seeing art as a kind of transcendental autonomy, untouched by the humdrum business of everyday life. The artist, thus, is considered an individual who is alienated from society. S/he exists in a kind of bio-dome in which s/he is permitted the luxury of behavior usually considered unacceptable or subversive in others. This practice fortunately has become quite antiquated as we strive now to posit the artist in his/her time, analyzing the art form not unique and autonomous but as any social activity molded by time and space. The concerns gain a larger momentum in the Caribbean Anglophone society, where long traditions of migration, settlement, and reclamations create a deep heterogeneity. Historically, the acts of severe limitation and verbal silencing, had developed a practice of “performing” their concerns. Yet, while many have argued for a revaluing and legitimizing of our historical, cultural experience, few, if any, have been clear about the situation of women within cultural resistance and the specific cultural identity of Caribbean women within the movement of creative arts.

The objective of this monograph is to explore the performance tradition of Caribbean, especially Trinidad and Barbados, during and after the 1973 Oil Boom¹ and to investigate the changing terrain of cultural articulation of a hybrid individual, checking whether this articulation becomes gendered at any point. For the purpose of cohesion, there have been instances of extrapolation from the analyses of countries like Trinidad and

Tobago, Jamaica, and to a certain extent Barbados, to the wider Anglophone Caribbean. While there is considerable similarity in the historical experiences of the Anglophone Caribbean nations—British hegemony, indentureship, slavery—there is enough cultural diversity between and within the different national cultures, to make the cultural experiences unique. Hence, any generalizations based on the analysis of experiences for the above-mentioned countries in the wider Caribbean context should be considered with caution by the reader. It is, therefore, crucial to ground each of the ideas of exploration in this book in its sociohistorical context.

1.1 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Oil industry in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad, had been an important resource for the British colonizers around the middle of the nineteenth century when Merrimac, a United States-based organization had dug for oil in the Pitch lake area of La Brea or La Bray (not to be confused with the major oil fields of the same name in Los Angeles). Though the oil produce from La Brea had declined around the 1980s, at a time, the oil produce from Trinidad was the source of the majority of the petroleum and asphalt yield under British control:

Trinidad was a British colony from the year 1797 to 1962. During all those years, what really mattered to the British Government, of course, was not what the island could produce in a world context, but how important the island was, actual and potential, in a British Empire context. In 1938, for example, Trinidad was producing some 38% of the British Empire oil. In 1930 the percentage was even higher, over 40%. (Mulchasingh, 73)

Following the initial oil find, the oil industry at Trinidad had gradually established itself as a major economic source for the British colonial administration. With the appearance of the People's Nationalist Movement (PNM) party in 1956, there was an increased attempt to utilize the economic benefit of the oil industry for the nation. Incidentally, during the same year, Texaco had merged with, and effectively taken over Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd. leading to major investments. Niblett quotes James Millett:

The coming of the oil giant was to mark a decisive shift, not only towards big capital investment, but towards big United States investment in the country. It was the most significant step in the establishment of US hegemonic control of the country's economy even before British overlordship was terminated by the winning of independence in 1962. Immediately, Texaco upgraded the throughput capacity of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery from 75,000 to 124,000 barrels per day; and plans were laid for further expansion to 250,000 barrels, thereby making it one of the largest refineries under US control operating outside the continental USA. (29)

This also gave rise to an attempt of the then Prime Minister Eric Williams to nationalize the petroleum industry, even deferring his initial announcement of retirement. Post-1973, there was a new political rhetoric that endorsed the oil-oriented social changes and its effect on various identity politics, stressing the questions of entitlement and rights on one's own ecological resources (Niblett, 30). There was a question of infrastructural and developmental enterprises which rested on the utilization of oil rights. The Oil Boom, therefore, became associated with national renewal, progress, and economic advancement in political parlance. Promises were made based on the oil rights, and there were tangible objects of progress that became increasingly visible to the common population. This changed the earlier import-oriented national economy to a new export-oriented and apparently more robust economic policies. Williams pressed on the importance of Trinidad's entry into the progressive world of petrochemical modernity, thereby increasing the general level of education, opportunities, and thereby ambition of ordinary people.

Williams saw petroleum-based industrialization as the quickest way to remove Trinidad's stigma of slavery, indentured labour, and colonialism derived from its sugar industry. It was not by accident that Williams chose the Point Lisas estate, an old sugar plantation covering 672 hectares on the south-west coast of Trinidad. Point Lisas was to symbolise the creation of a new Trinidad that had overcome its woeful colonial past. The new industrialization was to bring racial harmony 'where sugar divided.' An industrialized Trinidad would be a wealthy, modern nation without ethnic and class conflict. (Holton, qtd in Niblett, 32)

As a result, there was a stress on a more inclusive creolization ethos in the social context, where the multiple ethnicities and cultures of the space had

to come together to preserve national identity. Both creolization and the oil industry were put forward as the new face of the island nations which guaranteed peace, progress, and racial harmony.² My purpose is not to look into the authenticity of such a claim, but to assess the changes that such a considerable degree of restructuring brought about.

In the economic and sociopolitical upheaval following the Oil Boom, cultural practices like dramatics, carnival and calypso changed from the typical rejoicing of independence in 1962 with articulations against colonial exploitation and inequality to a more problematic take on the changing tides of society. The colonial-colonized polarity gave way to an acknowledgment of the multiplicity of economic and hence societal nuances. The shifting cultural change brought about some visible changes in social life. The yard life of the recently independent Caribbean became more fluid as the social order changed according to the vagaries of time and space. The process of modernization following the Oil Boom changed the texture of the social order as values became more standardized and the communal spirit gave way to social experience. These visible social changes were acknowledged and incorporated into the racial memory as an experience and were duly rendered in art forms. As social experience clashed with the racio-communal memory, the cultural depiction of human perceptions regarding these changes became more complicated. With human perceptions becoming more astute, there is an enlarged access and addressing of the increasing variety of experiences and consequently, the portrayal of the changes became problematic as it was felt that it was partial to certain aspects of life without doing justice to the rest. Hence while some opined that the male was an endangered species due to their increasing absence in the Caribbean social milieu, some saw the increasing marginalization of women in cultural iconography and postcolonial experience. This was more obvious in the performance traditions, where the audience had participatory access to the event. This phenomenon was furthered by the visible socio-cultural changes all around.

The Caribbean society is often considered to be under *patriarchy in absentia*, affected by the matrilocal residential arrangements as well as gender-specific migration around the years of the Oil Boom. The house-yard residential unit embodies the traditional settlement pattern of the domestic sphere. More visible among the Afro-Caribbean communities, this yard unit is usually owned and headed by a woman, containing her own house and those of her adult children, who have separated from the

principal unit after marriage or with the increase in subsequent generations. Patterned after the conventional African round yards, the unit circle the matriarch, who is supposed to be leading the domestic activities within the space. Thus the yards become, in essence, women-centered spaces where the women are the principal dwellers in the daytime. Besides the day-to-day domestic arrangements, crucial activities like marriages and first confinements of women are conventionally planned in their mother's yard.

Despite significant departures from the conventional patterns of matrilocality, Caribbean ethnic or cultural settler communities, within the archipelago or other geographic locations overseas, are connected by intricately connected engagements of individuals, objects, money, and ideas. This arrangement stretches the spatial perceptions of the Caribbean societal form providing it with a cosmopolitan turn beyond the national or cultural boundaries. The expectations of the yard life have dissolved, and the power hierarchy within has changed to a different order. Thus, while certain inherently "Caribbean" locus have lasted, other economic and cultural layerization have replaced the conventional yard polity. Unlike the traditional economic dependence motif for the female populace, Caribbean women usually exhibit high economic autonomy. Legacy of slavery and male-centric expatriation often evolved into a social situation where women had to fend for the family and themselves, leading to equal land ownership with the male populace. This condition is the alleged factor behind women's wariness against patriarchal control, thus providing the practical basis of matrifocal³ society. Therefore, there has been a marked preference for education and economic autonomy among Caribbean women across class and race, with a partiality for vertical mobility.

However, around the 1980s, employment and regular wage paying jobs for women had a marked increase. Interestingly, this was also the time when due to the Oil fields and economic investments from the US-based companies there was a penchant for a Western family myth with a male breadwinner at the center. The destabilization deepened in the 1990s with the realignment of the idea of the superpowers with the end of the Cold War. Along with the global political reconstruction, there was a sharp reduction in development aid and a deduction of national exports (especially in the European blocs) with the implementation of the North American Free Trade. This sudden change from the growing industrialization led to the fragmentation of the family life in the Caribbean, as there

were frequent cases of the male bread earner either moving away from the family or abandoning them altogether. This shift with the overlapping case of growing economic autonomy of the women left the mother or wife of the house at the helm of the family. Readers are to note that neither were these conditions universally applicable in the Caribbean societies nor were the economic autonomy uniform within a particular class stratum. Regardless, these two parallel conditions lead to a paradoxical view of Caribbean women: on one hand they were portrayed as the overburdened miseries who strive in the absence of the menfolk; and on the other, they were the viragos who emasculate and incidentally evict their men folk from their rightful arena.

Within the Caribbean regional diversity of ethnicity, class, languages and religion there is an ideological unity of patriarchy, of female subordination and dependence. Yet there is also a vibrant living tradition of female economic autonomy, of female headed households and of a family structure in which men are often marginal and absentee. So, Caribbean gender relations are a double paradox: of patriarchy within a system of matrifocal and matrilocal families; and of domestic and state patriarchy coexisting with the economic independence of women. The roots of this contemporary paradoxical situation lie in colonialism. (Momsen, 45)

The segment quoted above comprises the view most popularly believed by critics on Caribbean gender politics. It is generally held that the Caribbean society is an example of matrifocality within patriarchy where the women are gradually earning social and economic prominence thereby rendering the male community invisible and marginalized. One of the objectives of this study is to seek the politics of gender relation in the Caribbeans based on this statement and to research the possibility of its validation or the lack of it.

1.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE

In Caribbean society, a certain degree of *gemeinschaften* can be seen in the yard life—a collective sense of loyalty towards each other. Though it changes after the Oil Boom, the communal basis of shared existence persists. Certain obvious changes are, however, perceived. Women coming out of the yard to replace the absent male in the social hemisphere; and yet as a communal being the female is still observed to be tied to the yard

while men go abroad, thereby achieving a hybrid status. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, emphasizing secondary relationships rather than familial or community ties was mostly absent in Caribbean social life till the Oil Boom. It outlines less individual loyalty to the social order, as there is a cohesion derived from the division of labor and is thus more prone to class conflicts. As society changes to accommodate its economic interest, men leave the Caribbean shores to work in the oil refineries in the Gulf. Hence women leave the yard to support the household. The community feeling is undermined except in several rituals and performances including plays, carnival and calypso. They become performances to celebrate the lost communal life through an established social network.

The fall of the nationalized economy and open market with steady inflation increased the migration of the populace (mainly male) to Europe and America. This further complicated the response to the growing idea of hybridity. Men, with their increased exposure to the Western ideologies became more vocal about it, while women were made busy at home and having minor jobs in the local towns. Although it somewhat increased female literacy and women holding jobs, the exposure to American and European philosophies was mostly limited to men. These topsy-turvy conditions, where men were largely absent from the low-income economic arena, yet were in control of the ideologies that guaranteed the striation of the economic groups, lead to certain shifts in the representative performances of the greater sociopolitical and economic environment of the Caribbean islands, particularly in Trinidad and Jamaica. Playwrights focused their themes on the male experiencing hybridity and imparting it to women with a messiah-like condescension. Calypsos changed their themes from banana boat songs of tired men to farewell to the Caribbean shores.⁴

There was a different version of a “good life” projected by the Williams government, with promises that money will not be a problem anymore. Very similar to the idea of an American dream, this assurance created an urban cultural politics, different from the sugarcane-centered plantation culture of the Caribbean before. Material vectors replaced the ecological ones, and the conventional yard culture came out as an uneasy and outmoded tie. Interestingly, this decline of the yard culture also took away the already fraying ties with the mythic “motherland” insistence of the Afro and the Indo-Caribbean individuals. Shalini Puri called this the creation of “a hybrid Trinidadian national subject” (48), whose principal loyalty was to the developing urban nation. Niblett quotes Eric

Williams' inaugural address after the 1962 Independence, where Williams anticipates such a "Trinidadian" individual:

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India [...]. There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin [...]. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties [...] There can be no Mother China [...] and there can be no Mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children. (Williams, qtd in Niblett, 31)

This new Trinidad was supposed to be a petroleum-led modern world, where the stigmas of slavery, indentureship, migrations, plantation-based retrograde divisiveness, and ethnic conflicts would be bygones. As the material urbanity kicked in, the ethnic culturalist ties and demarcations of the communities changed their intensity. With it, the matrifocal yard changed into the global patriarchal family unit; and the racially integrative function of the oil economy gave way to other social inequalities.

1.3 GENDER POLITICS IN THE CARIBBEAN BEFORE AND AROUND 1972

The construction of hegemonic gender politics cannot be grasped beyond the constant flux within the disparate racial and gender identities. In her contribution to *Engendering History*, Beckles traces the evolution of the representative Caribbean women from their legacy of being at the bottom of the power structure in the slavery era, reconciling the expectations of biological and economic production from them. In spite of the proposed economic autonomy earlier, this imposed political positioning authenticated the black woman's experience as an essential variation from the slave mode of production. Conversely, shifts in the construction of male gender identities also conditions the construction of femininity thereby affecting the gender dynamics. However, the construction of Caribbean femininity bears a departure from the same in other ethnocultural spaces, owing to the distinctive experience of Caribbean women.

Initiated readers would recognize the fact the basics of gynocriticism consider the autonomy of authentic female experiences as the foundation of female gender identity. It also behooves us to acknowledge that authentic experiences are such organic and disparate affairs that they

can vary across the ethnic, cultural, and social coordinates. Hence, one cannot assume an analysis of Caribbean women on extrapolations of any ideation of women experience elsewhere. In stressing the uniqueness of the experience of Afro-Caribbean women (and holding them as separate from the experiences of Indo-Caribbean women), we can argue that any feminist study of the Caribbean cultural coordinates should critically review representations of feminine realities against varied racial and cultural parameters. The range of factors conditioning the construct includes ethnic conventions, learned larger social expectations, environmental elements, economic scaffoldings as well as historically situated political determinants. Alternatively, we should also accept the possibility of socially produced historical accounts, colored by the interest and affiliations of those who either create them or authenticate their credibility. Thus, the texts and testimonies of the Caribbean female representations, may also be guilty of being derivative assessments of biased male scientific inquiry bereft of authentic documentary evidence.

The argument at hand also debates the possibility of the claim that in a targeted societal arena men are becoming increasingly vulnerable and at a threat of losing their agency. This supposed vulnerability of the Caribbean male populace,⁵ in particular, has been a central discourse in popular culture thus influencing the research works in social science. A popular “male in crisis” discourse posits Caribbean males as socially marginalized entities with few or no agency over domestic, educational, and occupational spheres. Benita Parry noticed an “emerging sympathy and support” for the marginalized Jamaican male in the June 1996 edition of *Daily Gleaner*, with loud media demands to “leave our men alone” and “let’s stop the male bashing” and through attempts to reconstruct a more constructive image of the Jamaican men as otherwise model spouses and parents (Parry, 85). It should be noticed that the concern about the then supposed plight of males has never been similarly expressed relating to the societal positions of women, particularly in the education field, regionally, or globally. Odette Parry in “Gendered Methodologies and Feminist Awakenings” hints that despite emerging feminist concerns, gender marginalization has never been a thematic concern in the larger non-social science research community as there has never been much funding either available or allocated on the issue. Her research developed around this topic unearthed a rather mundane and shallow reason behind this peripherality of women-centered research in the Caribbeans. According to her, the field of education is one area where the Caribbean

males were particularly felt to be underachievers and was made more important in its effort and incidental success of attracting more research funding. "The study on male educational underachievement was funded by UNICEF who had previously demonstrated commitment to the study of males by funding a large study of masculinity in the region" (Parry, 85).

Pedro Noguera in "The Crisis of the Black Male in Comparative Perspective" questions this discourse by pointing at words such as "crisis", "at risk", "marginal" and "endangered" which are used to describe the plight of male (particularly black) in America, Britain and the Anglo-phone Caribbean. Although he does not dispute the broad points which describe the condition of males in the socioeconomic stratum, he highlights the fact that in such stratum the women are thereby rendered invisible.⁶ Moreover, as he points out that the term "crisis" pertains to a temporary and recent urgency. He argues whether the "crisis" faced by the black men is any way different from those faced by black women in similar conditions or whether these are any way different or unconnected from those of the past. Noguera also argues that the concept of marginalized men is a construct making the overt conjecture that men experience similar conditions despite threats as white males and that the issues remain unchanged among any particular ethnic community.

The historical subordination of women to men within the limits of pervasive patriarchal order is an established fact, along with its hierarchical precedence of men's life taking potential over women's life-sustaining one. And yet, there is also a less researched scope of economic and sexual domination of one class of men over the other. Miller explains that the patriarchal order has historically been marked with an explicit "inability to deal humanely and equitably with men of rival groups or communities which present a real challenge or constitute meaningful opposition to one's group" (qtd in Lindsay, 58). Though the affiliations and allegiance of the wider gender groups may have switched from familial and kinship claims to city, nation, religion, class, or race, the inherent issue of patriarchy's inability to deal humanely the individuals of other lineages remains the same. Thus, those "alien men" stay marginalized and subdued through "remote manipulation" of their "access to commodities, services, capital and symbols of material progress" (qtd. in Lindsay, 58). Thus, any thesis on the marginalization of men, ultimately falls within the ambit of men's own fight for the ascendancy of economic and reproductive

resources, rather than any emasculating agenda or economic coup pulled by the women of any particular ethno-cultural community.

Patricia Mohammed in her 1998 paper hints at this complexity. According to Mohammed, the reassignment of the occupational roles of women as possible bread-earners, as well as the determining authority of their own capacity have challenged the conventional notions of Caribbean masculinity while stretching the concepts of femininity.⁷ This may be the result of the male fear of emasculation from the “God given and natural role of men.” Miller’s thesis on the marginalization of black men pertains to this emasculation thesis which extends the dominant colonial baggage of male victimization. Miller works within a paradigm of male dominance, assuming the validity and societal justification of this ideology, thereby consigning the culpability to the women. While Miller observes with reasonable accuracy that Jamaican women have understandably adapted to educational opportunities and achieved greater mobility than men, he fails to question the idea of “manhood” objectively and the way in which the construct may remain static, oblivious of the changing social requirements. L. Lewis similarly argues in “Caribbean Masculinity at the *Fin de Siecle*” (1996) that factors like race, class, age, and sexual orientation affects the degrees in which Caribbean men are marginalized. He also acknowledges that any such loss of agency might be the product of evolving socioeconomic and political determinations and not women’s abject attempt to subordinate men.

The legacy of prejudice conditioning the access to educational resources for men and women in the past continues. While positivists may quote examination results to establish that women are now outperforming men on several higher academic ambit, the statistics need to be treated with due caution:

Firstly, female students are still clustered in such subject areas which have traditionally been considered suitable for girls. Thus, women excel in humanities but men are still more visible and often have higher chances of doing better in science or technology-based subjects.

Secondly, although it can be argued that women often consider education as a tool for social mobility and utilize it more avidly than men, the occupational statistics glaringly remain in favor of men once they leave school. Furthermore, in most professions, men monopolize higher and better-paid jobs, with a marked sexual upper-hand at job places. Thus, although there is a significant number of women teachers, there are precious few women in positions of academic leadership. This disparity

becomes increasingly visible further up the academic scale, with negligible numbers of deans and masters at the University level.

Odette Parry raises two questions at this juncture: why is it that when Caribbean males appear to have many advantages in the occupational structure in spite of under-performing in school? Alternatively, despite the possibility of discriminatory professional practices, how do the Caribbean female students continue to perform well at school? Parry argues:

[I]n the Caribbean, male educational failure and female educational success have been understood in zero-sum terms. That is, followers of the 'male marginalization' thesis in education (developed by Miller 1986, 1989, 1991) feel that they represent two sides of the same equation. Built into this equation is a causal function, so that males are thought to be doing badly precisely because females are doing well. When the problem is conceived in this way it appears that there is a definitive amount of 'success' to be had, and if females have it males cannot. (88)

We discern that similar to every marginalization concept, this emasculation theory of the Caribbean male is also governed by biological determinism—the notion that the behavior of sexes is governed by biological limitations. Some marginal theorists refute the justification of this determinism. Miller argues in his *Men at Risk* asserting that the biological determination of sex, is in contrast to the social determination of gender. Patriarchy, according to him, has:

[A]scribed roles and stereotypes for succeeding generations of men and women...conditioned mentalities and mystiques surrounding maleness and femaleness...delayed women's efforts to come out from under its yoke. (Miller, qtd. in Lindsay, 73)

However, this supposedly anti-essentialist notion of masculinity and femininity is allegedly grounded on biological determinism. Keisha Lindsay argues in "Is the Caribbean Male an Endangered Species?" that Miller's work on the marginalization argument rests decisively on the presumption that women's biological capacity as life-givers is the source of their subordination, despite being the tool of their eventual empowerment. Lindsay also insists that Miller himself insists on his notion of womanhood certain deterministic characteristics as patience, passivity, and nonaggression:

Biology...pre-disposed that femininity...be defined as and females socialized in behaviors and habits like caring, nurturing, gentleness, kindness, tenderness, cooperation, accommodation of differences, longsuffering, patience, acquiescence and passivity. (Miller, qtd in Lindsay, 73)

Secondly, Lindsay argues that the marginalization thesis assumes that every individual is either liberated or subjugated depending on their innate biological capabilities. This also assumes a male individual's relatively greater biological capacity as a life-taker, thereby underlining certain traits like aggression and confrontation as innately masculine. It is these deterministic features in the alienated male that emphasizes their own marginalization and domination despite the edge that patriarchy supposedly invests them with.

It is generally argued by critics like Patricia Mohammed, that the Caribbean construct of masculine and feminine is riddled with an uncritical acceptance of biologically determined differences between the two gender forms. While the Caribbean male has emerged as the patriarch, the provider and the one who controls female sexuality, the Caribbean women have emerged as adaptable creatures deploying devious means to manipulate the social construct. Thus, any deviation from this norm creates the narrow idea of victimized men and demonized women. This idea can be posited in the marginalization thesis with utmost ease. The marginalization thesis subscribes to this mythologized Caribbean male, the protector, the provider, and the determiner. This approach also assumes that masculinity has a sexual responsibility, which once taken away entails subsequent victimization of the male. Thus, while it is suggested that Caribbean women have docilely bowed down to their male sponsorship, it is also hinted at that these supposedly meek women have deviously conspired to do one against their male folk consistently.

Keisha Lindsay maintains that both the empirical evidence and theoretical tenets applied by the marginalized theorists rest on a limited notion about power:

Implicit in the marginalization thesis is the presumption that power is wholly "concrete" or quantifiable—that power or the lack thereof can be measured according to aggregate statistics, be they literacy data or income levels. The thesis presumes power to be a fixed entity emanating from a series of specific points—specifically from the "institutions" of the family, the educational system, the workplace and labour force.

This dual notion of power as both fixed and quantitative is, however, flawed. To argue that women can overpower men simply on the basis of increased income or occupational status is to incorrectly presume that income or occupational dominance form the sole basis of men's control over women. Instead, there is a vast aspect of patriarchal power which is neither fixed nor quantifiable; an aspect which remains intact whether or not women increase their rates of literacy, university education or middle class status relative to their male counterparts. (75–76)

This argument reminds us of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* that women's advances in certain areas do not disrupt the overall patriarchal power which is not limited in being a structure or an institution.

Thus the highly controversial perception of the marginalization thesis concerning the authentic condition around gender relations in education, kinship, and the professional space suggests a flaw in objectively analyzing the full dimension of the available data:

[T]he failure of the thesis to explore the ways in which the head of household status is often economically *disempowering* (author's italics) to women; the continued occupational and educational sex-role stereotyping of girl's and women in teaching, nursing, home economics and other arenas traditionally deemed as "women's work"; and the continued low occupational status of women *vis-a-vis* men in management, agriculture and other major economic sectors. (Lindsay, 78)

The marginalization thesis thus marks a (wilful?) misrepresentation of the empirical gender reality in the socioeconomic fields presuming that social research should ideally be conducted through the recording and analyses of verifiable, objective facts, free of any biologically determined construct.

The feminist epistemological and operational venture in the Caribbean thus can be divided into three objectives:

First, as the downsides in the marginalization thesis hints at, there is an immediate need for objective interrogation of the authentic statistical frameworks which shape much of the established gender discourse in the region till now.

Second, following such an unbiased interrogation and possible objective criticism, there should be the provision of viable, alternative epistemologies, and procedures. To be precise, efforts at Caribbean feminist epistemology must strive to be territory centered i.e. purely based on Caribbean subjectivity.

Thirdly, the theories and knowledge systems that uncritically retrench ideas and models contributing little to either gynocritic scholarship or the authentic resources of women in the space should be carefully weeded away.

Early Caribbean history has largely been left out from serious gender-based research. The sources have been inadequate at best, and extremely ethno-biased in the few scanty that have been found. For instance, there is a dearth of sources on how gender operated in the pre-contact Amerindian societies or even in the post-contact indigenous communities which survived past the sixteenth century except in such records like Columbus' log between 1492 and 1493 and that of the French priests, with keen observations deeply entrenched in the colonial agenda. They are both ethnocentric (when the Caribbean women are seen in the eyes of European males) and also androcentric (the women are being subjected to the "male gaze"). We also lack knowledge of the gender relationships of any time before slave society had matured. Colonization and conquest were principally masculine enterprises, where the perpetrators were principally male carrying on policies decided upon in a deeply patriarchal society. As a result, the early frontier phase was often characterized by a predominantly male population (both white and black). Though there have been readings such as those made by Richard Dunn, Richard Sheridan, and the Bridenbaughs, not much has been done to understand women or gender within the contexts, with rare exceptions like Trevor Brunard's sociological ideation on colonial Jamaica which focuses on gender dynamics therein. Even the work on the slavery era⁸ becomes somewhat substantial and research worthy in the studies after 1770 with the increasing availability of raw data in the laterday slaving communities. However, those studies have also prioritized their focus against looking into the condition of Caucasian women or freed Amerindian or Afro-Caribbean women in slave society.⁹

Even in the post-emancipation nineteenth and twentieth centuries¹⁰ records, there are glaring gaps in any thesis regarding the conditions of women. Little has been recorded on the situation of freed women or in the gradual emergence of the middle-class, educated women of any ethnicity within the Caribbean communities. Though scholarship on the migration experiences of smaller ethnic or religious immigrant communities (Portuguese, Chinese, Jewish, and Syrian/Lebanese) are increasing, there is a need for more research on the Jahaji experiences of the indentured Indo-Caribbean women; on beliefs and practices as well as on