Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment

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Abstract

Masculinity has been under the academic microscope for some time now, and especially so in the Caribbean. The urgency of the need to examine the phenomenon is a result of not only feminist activism and the changing role of women globally, but also the dramatic social, economic and technological shifts occurring across the globe, and indeed the globalization of ideologies, attitudes and beliefs. In the region, discourse on the issue has reached the level of governments and CARICOM as societies grapple with seismic shudders in the world order, and patriarchy finds the ground moving beneath its feet. This paper reflects on how Caribbean men have traditionally communicated with teach other, directly and indirectly, and how the internal debate among themselves must take cognisance of women's rights to be treated equally before the law, in the workplace, and in the home. It notes the results of decades of feminist discourse and activism in the region, but sounds a warning that the increased participation of girls in the education system has not necessarily led to higher rates of employment for them. The author warns that these gains by women should not be sacrificed or begrudged because boys and young men are perceived as being marginalized, but that a new socialization of males must take place, one that gives them a reviewed sense of purpose and identity as men.

In grasping the full range of pressures and influences on Caribbean men's conception of what masculinity means in the region today, the author highlights issues of job insecurity, heterosexual male violence against women and homosexuals, and between men, as well as the need for sexual harassment legislation.

Introduction

Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment

The idea of man talk is rooted in two very famous pieces of work among others. First, the expression resonates with an article written by Gordon Rohlehr (1992) of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. Rohlehr has written extensively about the calypso, and the extent to which within that genre of music, men are essentially always talking to each other. Second, there is the very provocative play created by the late Earl Warner entitled *Man-Talk: Profiles of the lives of West Indian Men* (1995) in which male characters ruminate on a wide range of subjects. If as it is said in religious circles, in the beginning was the word, then we get a very clear sense of the importance of communication to our existence as human beings. The famed Martiniquan psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), spoke eloquently about the importance of language in the recovery of the psyche of the black man. Fanon notes for example: "The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to this mastery of the French language." Although Fanon is being sarcastic, the message is clear: being able to speak the language of their oppressor gave the black man living in a colony remarkable power. Paul Valéry knew this for he called language "the god gone astray in the flesh" (1967, 18).

The people of the Caribbean have, to a large extent, moved beyond the idea that language, as speech, will free them of notions of inferiority. It is through the language of discourse that men speak to each other in ways that are quite intriguing. So man talk is important, because men are constantly talking to each other, both verbally and non-verbally. Moreover, men claim the right to speak, and speak all the time, irrespective of whether or not they are knowledgeable about their choice of topic. Some men have knowledge claims that are essentially incredulous. Note the following claim of perspicacity by Mr. F [Man-Boy], a respondent in one of Erna Brodber's (2003, 104) portraits of Jamaican men:

> I was well versed in what I was looking for because I reach the stage where I could look on
> a young lady walking outside here and know whether she would make a good wife or no.
> A little psychology, you know.
>
> . . . as I was trying to tell you I could even look at the young lady walking out there and I
> could tell according to the movements of the body, if that person would be an active
> person to do service. According to how you handle you limbs, your hands – you see some
> young ladies, they walking, along but they trying to prevent the hand from going to the
> side and all like that. Those are actually invalids; they don't have any use, you know.
> Soldier-like women would make a good hustling wife.

So how do men speak to each other? In the Caribbean, men speak to each other directly, in terms of boasting, in terms of ridicule and insult. Men are usually comfortable discussing politics, sport and sex. Some men speak to each other in

religious terms. Religion in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, is often viewed as the site of authority of masculine roles, especially those in the realm of leadership. In the context of generational differences, sometimes older men offer advice to younger men. Men speak to each other in parables and in indirect form. Both men and women in the Caribbean have perfected the art of indirect speech. A couple of examples might suffice here. One of the boys in George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*, (1979, 175) Trumper, is observing the residence of the landlord from behind a wall that separates it, physically and metaphorically, from the rest of the community:

> 'When you up here,' said Trumper, 'on a night like tonight you see how it is nothin' could change in the village. Everything's sort of in order. Big life one side an' small life a next side, an' you get a kin' o' feelin' of you in your small corner an' I in mine. Everythin's kind of correct'

Above, Trumper is in his own way deconstructing the class relations of the village and despairing over what seems like a remote possibility that there can be any change in the social arrangement of life in his community. Second, as I have noted elsewhere (Lewis, 1998), Earl Lovelace in *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979, 86) captures an important way in which man talk is negotiated in the Caribbean. Lovelace points to an interesting encounter between Fisheye (the community's bad man) and Aldrick, which provides the reader with some insight into the nature of male negotiation of territory and spheres of influence. Aldrick, acting on behalf of his dragon-making acolyte, the young boy Basil, who turns out to be Fisheye's son, approaches the latter with a sort of empty braggadocio:

> 'I just bringing home your little son. I hear you does beat him for nothing'.
> 'So what'?
> 'So', he plunged on, for he was aware of the boy standing tensely beside him. So, I come to warn you. If you beat him again I going straight to the gym and lift some weights and learn some jujitsu and come back for you'.
> 'I ain't making joke tonight', Fisheye said coldly.
> 'If you think is joke I making, touch him', Aldrick said, maintaining his tone.

Despite maintaining the 'warrior' talk, Aldrick does not in fact challenge Fisheye directly; the tension between them is deflected by the humour. Aldrick has to present himself as fearless to defend his reputation as man to Fisheye, but also to Fisheye's son Basil, on whose behalf he is in fact interceding. He acknowledges his inadequacies by suggesting that he has to go to the gym to be in readiness to take on a fight with Fisheye. Nevertheless, Aldrick is in fact stung by Fisheye's dismissal of him and his pseudo-aggressive pose. The above dialogue points to the way different types of masculinity may collide from time to time, but avoid destroying each other[1], Lovelace notes that this aggressive, anticipatory and conciliatory humour is the means by which men say to each other what they have to say, while avoiding conflict.

It is common knowledge that a lot of truth is said in the context of humour, and that it is only through humour that one man may be permitted the space to convey his feelings

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[1] See Lewis, 1998 for an extended discussion of the gender dimensions of *The Dragon Can't Dance*

toward another. It should be made clear however, that sometimes the conflict cannot always be averted and such conversations end quite differently from that involving Aldrick and Fisheye, especially when issues of reputation and honour are at stake. What is also interesting is that a lot of man talk is very shallow and trivial, and for the most part, men get to know each other only superficially. The spectre of homophobia haunts such encounters, preventing the establishment of more meaningful relationships between men.

Furthermore, not only do men speak to each other in words but in also actions, in behaviour, and through objects that on the surface have seemingly nothing to do with masculinity. There is a particular quality, style and code of male fashion and aesthetic among men in the dancehalls of the Caribbean. In fact, this form of dress in some cases is not permissible outside the realm of the dancehall without public opprobrium. Men are speaking to each other in the manner of their dress, in the swagger of their walk and in the pose they adopt. Men in the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico speak to each other through the roosters they carry to the gayelle to fight other cocks to their death.   As Stuart Hall has observed, the rooster is often an extension of these men (cited in Lewis, 2003). Some men speak to each other through the reputation of the dogs they breed, or the size of the car they drive, and yes, some speak to each other through the women who accompany them in public. It is perhaps unnecessary to address the way in which women are objectified in this process of 'man talking to man' through the embodiment of woman at this juncture. One should hasten to recognize however, that this objectification could be a two-way street, with women, desiring to be, and be seen with particular types of men for a whole range of reasons that are equally multi-layered.

It would be useful at this point to offer some conceptual clarity about what is meant by the term masculinity. For some individuals, especially those of who labour in the vineyard of gender affairs, this is no simple or routine task, largely because there is a commonsensical understanding of masculinity as experienced in everyday practices of men. Masculinity is something men do, not something they necessarily define in any systematic way. Beyond this taken-for-granted view however, there is something bigger about the unarticulated nature of masculinity for most men. As Pierre Bourdieu once noted, masculinity, as a hegemonic ideology, dispenses with the need for justification. This "anthrocentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded . . ." (Bourdieu 2001, 9). Rather than be comforted by the arrogance of such thinking, one could approach the phenomenon not merely in definitional terms, but by raising a more provocative kind of question about when do men become conscious of themselves as men?   When do they become conscious of their own gendered subjectivity? This question is perhaps more intriguing than simply defining what is masculinity, because it immediately raises profound issues about identity and about the nature of being. In order to illustrate this point about being and consciousness, this idea will be illustrated through and exchange between two leading African writers, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria and Nuruddin Farah of Somalia. In 1989, these two men held a

public conversation in London about the business of writing, African and Nigerian identity, and related matters. In responding to Nhuruddin Farah's question about when did he begin thinking of himself as a Nigerian, Chinua Achebe said that he knew he was Nigerian from birth but then he added a very important caveat: "In a situation your various identities manifest themselves with varying intensities at different times. You have them all along".

Though reflecting on the question of national identity, Achebe nevertheless brings us to a point that is important to an understanding of masculinity as a gendered identity and allows us to raise the question, when do men become conscious of their masculinity? When is there an ontological sense of being? Under what conditions do men become conscious of their subjectivities as men? What is being suggested here is that Achebe provides us with some insights into these questions when he says that your multiple identities manifest themselves with varying intensities at different times, but that we only become aware of them under specific historical, cultural, economic and political circumstances. What Achebe was getting at was the specificity of consciousness and he quite rightly reflected in the end, that it was not at a precise moment that one identifies the awakening of the consciousness necessarily, but rather, it is the confluence of social forces and practices that interpellates, or calls forth this subjectivity.

For some men the onset of this consciousness of their manhood and masculinity comes in various disguises. A youngster in the Caribbean might be repeatedly told by an older boy or young man that "not because he may be seeing froth on his urine that that observation in and of itself made him a man". The implication of this injunction always seemed to be that at the first sight of such an occurrence, there was a sense that at least one was approaching manhood. Having a girlfriend, or at least developing an interest in the other sex was definitely the heteronormative marking of not merely acquiring a consciousness of masculinity but a sense of the recognition of gender difference and a time of budding sexuality. In his ethnographic work in the area he called Grannitree, Chevannes raises a more troubling observation about this transition: "Another example of the inequality between genders, this time between sexually mature men and women, is ability, if not the right, of man physically to discipline women, without social sanction. Boys do not have this right. When they do, it is a sign of having made the transition to men (2001, 56). Chevannes notes further:

> At sixteen years old, Everton was quite at home in the company. He was already a man. A number of developments mark the transition to manhood in Grannitree. First is the ability to make income earning the principal activity. Everton was already out of school, forced by economic circumstances

> Maas James and his other friends were asked when did a boy become a man. His reply was as soon as boys started earning their own money and taking care of themselves. Milverton, his friend, introduced a qualification and second point, namely that the boy must also be assuming responsibility, which is having someone dependent on him. This, according to Juki, a third member of the group, meant having a girlfriend, disobeying one's parents and coming home late (2001, 58).

For many in other parts of the Caribbean however, the transition was more clearly marked at least culturally. Some felt that you become a man and therefore aware of your masculinity when you were able to leave home without asking for your parents' permission. Far more convincingly for many however, was fathering a child. This act was proof beyond question that a boy had made the transition to manhood.

Consciousness of one's masculinity then, emerges out of a constellation of social practices or behaviours of men. It is also connected to an ideology that orients men to an understanding of themselves as gendered subjects for whom society has devised specific roles and expectations. Men are not born with this awareness of themselves. Society must impose this understanding on them. It is very commonly said these days that masculinity is socially constructed, and by this it is meant that not only does the society play a determining role in shaping the general contours of this subjectivity but also that it proceeds through sanctions and rewards to police the boundaries of the identities it establishes.

Inasmuch as masculinity has to do with how men become conscious of themselves culturally, it is not merely limited to behaviours designed to win the approval of other men. Masculinity also has much to do with men's relationships to women. There is a sense in which men in society collectively define masculinity for themselves but they are always cognizant of the way women influence the trajectory of their identity, validating it, interrogating it or rebuffing some or all aspects of its practice. In short, women help to shape the general terrain of masculinity at some level. Hence, at the level of performativity therefore, masculinity has as much to do with seeking the approval of men, as it is to do with obtaining the approval of women[2]. As Pierre Bourdieu argued very provocatively: "Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself" (2001, 53).

Bourdieu's observation here is perspicacious. Since men are all born into pre-existing social contexts, which already have an established understanding of manliness, the fear of the female in them, to the extent that some actually acknowledge such a phenomenon, has to do with what David Plummer recently described as the "aversion to male gender transgression" (2005). To deviate from notions of how real men are supposed to act and what real men are supposed to represent, often leads to feminization – hence the tendency to conform to ideals of normative masculinity. It should be pointed out that femininity, as an ideological practice of women, follows a similar relational trajectory, as does masculinity. Here too hegemonic notions of the feminine conspire to suppress the masculine in women because of similar fears of being viewed as too aggressive, unladylike, masculine or lesbian. Here again, the spectre of homosexuality looms large.

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[2] For a more detailed discussion concerning the specific cultural configuration of Caribbean masculinity, see my "Caribbean masculinity: Unpacking the Narratives" in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean,* ed. Linden Lewis, University of Florida Press, 2003.

What separates masculinity from femininity are not mere expressions of behaviour but the element of power. Masculinity is not only a hegemonic ideology but also a practice that facilitates access to power, privilege and valued resources. One should hasten to say that clearly not all men exercise power but all men benefit from patriarchal privilege. As is often the case with privilege, whether the result of race, class or sexual orientation, recipients are usually blissfully unaware of its benefits. It is therefore left to those who are without access to stated privileges to point out the lopsidedness of their impact. Consequently, those men in the Caribbean, as elsewhere who are essentially blocked from access to the apparatuses of power, have a hard time understanding the nature of patriarchal privilege, in light of the denial of class and social privileges in other spheres of their own lives. In this regard, the reconfiguration of gender relations occasioned by economic globalization further exacerbates this problem of recognizing privilege for these Caribbean men[3]. It is this element of power however, which underpins masculinity that gives it its resilience, its ability to adjust to new challenges and crises. The power that underpins masculinity is particularistic but represents itself as general thus obscuring its influence at some levels and naturalizing or normalizing privilege that does not extend to women. As is always the case with the exercise of power however, it is constantly contested and resisted both by women and marginalized men.

Marginalized men are homosexual or transgendered men. Transgender is an umbrella term for people who do not conform to typical gender roles. The masculinity practiced by marginalized men, though very much recognized throughout the Caribbean, falls outside the accepted norm of masculine behaviour largely because of religious, cultural and other moral and ethical objections. The fact remains that transgendered and homosexual men are very much a part of Caribbean society. They do not stop being men because of their sexual orientation. If this claim is true, then Caribbean professors, researchers, social workers, state officials, religious leaders and policy makers have an obligation to understand the type of masculinity embraced by these men, and to move beyond expressions of narrow sexual politics, which focus on policing the boundaries of masculinity.

Consideration should be given both the historicity and the cultural construction of masculinity. In the context of the Caribbean, the weight of history and culture can never be overstated. Slavery and indenture have exerted tremendous pressures on the construction of masculinity, forcing adjustments and accommodation to circumstances over which men at times had no control. Similarly, specific and continuing cultural influences, particularly through the practice of religion and religious beliefs, become important in the lives of many men. It is therefore important to begin to understand and assess the influences of Christian principles and precepts on men's thinking and their understanding of themselves as men. Equally significant to our understanding of this phenomenon in certain parts of the Caribbean, especially in places such as Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, is the teaching of the Qur'an and the way it fashions the consciousness of some men in their thinking about an ideal model of masculinity.

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[3] See Lewis, 2004 for an elaboration of this point.

There are also important insights one might glean from the teaching of Manu Samhita[4] and those who seek to follow the Brahminical principles more strictly. In addition, there are those who find answers to the challenges of learning to be a man through the epic tales of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Having indexed the more traditional religions of the region, it does not in any way mean that one should be insensitive to the role played by Rastafari, Santeria and Voodoo in the social construction of masculinity in the Caribbean, particularly for men of African descent. Masculinity is not a fixed entity. It is constantly adjusting and changing with different circumstances. This quality, it can be argued, participates in the dynamics of social relations.

A reasonable question to ask at this point is, why is the region now engaged in a discussion about the features of masculinity? What has happened to elicit such importance around a topic that many have taken for granted for so long? The easy answer to this question is simply that the social environment is changing fundamentally. This however is not a satisfactory response. Part of the answer however has to do with a wider global dialogue that is taking place about the role and changing status of men, to which the Caribbean concerns are related. This expanding discussion also has to be seen not only in *reaction* to feminist activism but as Connell states, in *response* to feminism and also in relation to governmental actions strongly recommended by international organizations, to involve men in the process of gender equality (see Connell, 2005 *inter alia)*. As Raewyn Connell recently pointed out: "The rapid internationalization of these debates reflects the fact, increasingly recognized in feminist thought – that gender relations can be shown to have a global dimension, growing out of the history of imperialism and seen in the contemporary process of globalization" (2005, 1804). One can argue further that the process of globalization has led to political and economic changes taking place in contemporary Caribbean society, the impact of which has in the words of Achebe, tended to cause identity [in this case masculinity] to manifest itself much more intensely. The responses to these changes have been expressed locally but the root causes are profoundly globally engineered.

What then are these profound changes? In a recently published book *Between Sex and Power,* Göran Therborn (2004) described patriarchy as the big loser of the twentieth century. He argued that patriarchy has conceded far more than other powerful ideologies. His argument in defence of this position is much broader than traditional responses. Therborn observes that the inroads against patriarchy were made as a result of three powerful political currents. At the global level, Therborn identifies Sweden in the aftermath of the First World War, as the backdrop from which was established full legal equality between husband and wife. This precedent was followed and more radically expanded by the enactment of broader and more sweeping gender legislation in Russia following the October Revolution of 1917. The *second* major assault on the foundation of patriarchy came in the period following the Second World War where in Japan, at the time occupied by the US, a constitutional proclamation was imposed by General MacArthur, that legislated equality of the sexes. In China, the victory of communism there, in the words of Therborn, "meant a full-scale assault on the most

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[4] London: University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1996

ancient and elaborate patriarchy of the world". This assault in the process eliminated all legal vestiges of the Confucian era. For people in the Caribbean, it would be important to note that the improvement of the status of women in Cuba has been largely because of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This Revolution opened up opportunities for women, particularly in Higher Education and in medicine that had not been experienced in Cuba before.

A *third* factor in the wearing down of patriarchy globally according to Göran Therborn, occurred in the tumult of the student rebellion of the1968 in France. This student movement pushed for and won important rights for women among other constituencies. Therborn also cites the United Nation's inauguration of the Decade for Women in 1975. He notes that this action represented a pivotal juncture in the global erosion of patriarchy. Therborn's point should not be misinterpreted here. These legislative initiatives facilitate institutionally change, but their implementation does not necessarily mean that patriarchy is removed or eliminated in the process of social interaction between men and women. Change is much more likely to take place in a legislative environment conducive to gender equality than one in which there is no institutional will to make this happen.

The argument thus far is that the attacks on patriarchy at the global level are forcing men to become more aware of their gendered identity, and for some, to begin to examine critically the meaning of masculinity. In the more specific context of the Caribbean, some four decades of feminist theorizing and mobilization around issues of gender, identity, equality and broadened citizenship rights have forced men to sit up and take notice. In a recent article, this author argued that consciousness is always the product of specific historical and material conditions. These conditions shape the political matrix of this consciousness (Lewis, 2004). Indeed, as Rhoda Reddock recently reminded us, there was mobilization of women around labour issues as far back as the 1930s in central and southern Trinidad and in places such as St. Vincent (Reddock, 2005). There were also women who were very active in the struggle for decolonization, who may or may not have seen themselves as feminist activists but who, nevertheless, placed the issue of women and women's concerns on the agenda in those early years.

Peggy Antrobus' recent reflections on feminist activism also revealed the role and contributions of the Caribbean Women's Association, the Women's Revolutionary Socialists Movement of Guyana, the Women's Auxiliary of the People's National Party of Jamaica, Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), Development of Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN) and other NGO organizations, as all making a significant impact on the status of women in the Caribbean. At the level of scholarship, there has been a tremendous outpouring of research and theoretical work produced namely through the Women and Development Studies Group, the Women and the Caribbean Project, the DAWN occasional papers, CAFRA and the Centre for Gender and Development Studies on all three campuses of the University of the West Indies. Joycelin Messiah nicely summarized these developments in her recent survey of feminist scholarship and society (Massiah, 2004).

One additional issue worthy of consideration in this regard is that many regional governments have been responding to the Beijing Declaration to encourage men and boys to participate in the process of gender equality and transformation.

The point then is if the Caribbean region is witnessing a heightened interest in the phenomenon of masculinity, it is in part because of these decades of feminist scholarship and activism over gender equality and the status of women in the region. This growing consciousness of male subjectivity is also related to the arguments presented earlier about the global debates on the changing role of men, and institutional adjustments aimed at involving men more specifically at all levels. The cumulative effect is that these interventions have forced men to come to terms with their political identity and the basis of the privilege of some men. It is difficult to identify a period in the region when there was more popular and academic discussion about men's vulnerability, their frailty, their marginalization and the seemingly purposelessness of male groupings on the streets and sidewalks of many Caribbean societies.

In addition, to the foregoing, one of the main reasons for this outpouring of discourse about masculinity in the Caribbean is the heated and controversial claim about male marginalization. There is a developed literature on the discourse of male marginalization, which has taken place since the late 1980s in the region. It is not the intention of this article to join this debate; there are several people who have dealt eloquently and decisively with this topic, suffice it to mention the work done in this area by Eudine Barriteau (2003), Rhoda Reddock (2003), Odette Parry (2000) and Jeanette Morris (2004) among others. Rather, the idea is merely to raise the following point. The concern about girls out-performing boys in schools seems not to consider historical changes, and seems insensitive to the impact of social class, race and poverty in determining why some boys seem to perform poorly, while others do quite well at all academic levels, as well as in the world of work. Moreover, talk about the changing status of men in the Caribbean, for the most part, does not refer to all races of men in the region but principally to men of African descent and, in some contexts, men of Indian descent. In addition, as the CARICOM Report of 2003 indicates the results of the perceived advancement of girls and women via education is rather mixed. Citing the work of Barbara Bailey, the Report concludes that though women have higher participation rates than men in education, men continue to out-perform women in some of the more critical areas of science and technology (2003: 5)

Commenting on the issue of change that has been taking place within the educational system in the Western world, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 90) observed:

> One of the most important changes in the status of women and one of the most decisive factors of change is undoubtedly the increased access of girls to secondary and higher education, which together with the transformation of the structures of production (particularly the development of large public and private bureaucracies and the social technologies of management), has led to a very important modification of the position of women in the division of labour. Women are now much more strongly represented in the intellectual professions, in administration and in the various forms of sale of symbolic services – journalism, television, cinema, radio, public relations, advertising, design and decoration, and they have intensified their presence in the occupations

closer to the traditional definition of female activities (teaching, social work and paramedical activities). This having been said, while female graduates have found their main career openings in intermediate middle-range occupations (middle management, technical staff, medical and social personnel), they remain practically excluded from positions of authority and responsibility, particularly in industry, finance and politics.

Bourdieu's observation has relevance to the Caribbean and is corroborated by a study done by the CARICOM Secretariat on *Power and Decision Making: Men and Women* (2003*)*. Barry Chevannes (2001) also arrives at a similar conclusion about what the progress of women in higher education has meant in real terms in the Caribbean. Given these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that while women have experienced some gains in society, patriarchy remains firmly ensconced in all the sinews of power in the region, and even though concessions have been made from time to time, there is no indication that patriarchy's collapse is imminent. Despite Therborn's argument about patriarchy being the biggest loser in the twentieth century cited earlier, even he sounds a word of caution: "The secular changes of the twentieth century, for all their character of epochal turn, do not mean that patriarchy has disappeared from the earth. In larger areas of the world, it is still strongly entrenched. And neo-patriarchal movements, usually with religious argumentation, have appeared" (2004, 107). This situation of entrenchment obtains in the region insofar as men across the Caribbean continue to dominate the corporate boardrooms, the structure of institutional power and the material wealth of these societies. Nevertheless, though patriarchy retains a formidable presence in contemporary society, it continues to be challenged both globally and locally in accordance with Therborn's primary argument. It might therefore be argued that some of the current efforts to defend male privilege are in recognition, albeit grudgingly so, of cracks in the armor of patriarchy and its hold on the social order of Caribbean society of the future.

A concern in this article about the apparent preoccupation with the under-performance of boys in the Caribbean has to do with the implications of most of the unease expressed to date over the situation. Where were all these concerned men, in government, university administration, in the clergy and in the wider community, who have now become so vocal, when there was at least the perception that boys were doing much better than girls were and had more access to educational opportunities? Why was there no similar concern for the future of young girls, who presumably were under-performing? What was the impact of the all, or mostly male, teachers on these girls, and which role models did they have to pattern their lives after? Would they not have been suffering trauma from so one-sided a socialization as is often heard to be the problem facing boys today? Who cared about how they coped?

Could it be then, that the current concern about under-achievement has less to do with the fact that girls are out- performing boys educationally, and more to do with the fact that the latter are defying tradition and acting out of character? Is there a fear of what it might be if women began to occupy all of the major decision-making positions in society? Apparently, things were quite acceptable when boys were in line to inherit all the privileges of the patriarchal order. Girls in today's society are simply messing up

the order of things, an order, which is supposedly natural and normal. This after all is the way that things were meant to be. It is the sort of despair into which Lamming's character Trumper resigned himself, convinced that it was the only way the village could be organized. It follows a simple traditional aphorism, men lead and women follow. The region must begin to devise ways of moving beyond such a narrow view of modernity.

Now, least there be any misunderstanding about the point being made in the foregoing, perhaps the matter should be stated as clearly as possible. If there is a concern with how boys are performing educationally, and how young men appear in some contexts to lack drive and purpose, then it is society's responsibility to begin to address that problem structurally, and in terms of attempting to improve motivation, and also by assisting young men in clarifying and achieving important life goals. The Caribbean must instill in its young men a renewed sense of purpose with values that do not conform to the prevailing ethos of materialism and hedonism. Among older men, the region should promote a greater vision of civic engagement and socially productive enterprise. Caribbean people and their leaders should not however, hide behind their failure to interest and engage boys and young men intellectually, by suggesting that their lack of achievement is somehow tied to the performance of girls and the advancement of women. The best interest of the next generation is not properly served by employing this sort of zero-sum approach. The point here is that this is not about one group of people replacing another – in this case women replacing men - but about attempting to build a society that is based on full citizenship rights for all, so that everyone could participate in a genuinely mature democratic environment. In addition, one should not lose sight in all this, the fact that deficits in education are still significant in the region and that public expenditure on education has been decreasing in some countries because of fiscal problems and the demands of global economic reforms (Mc Bain, 2005, 38).

What challenges do Caribbean men face in this conjuncture?

If we agree that there are powerful, global political and economic forces that are restructuring how people live, work, learn, communicate, and travel, among other developments, what would make masculinity, which is part of a social relationship, immune from this process of transformation? Gender does not stand outside of social relations. There are issues facing masculinity requiring men to make adjustments in their lives, and causing them to rethink their understanding of what is expected of them, what is actually possible in the current milieu, and how individuals might advance as men and women in this new millennium. This article focuses on consideration of three areas: Patriarchal erosion, unemployment including sexual harassment issues and the question of violence.

One of the first challenges that Caribbean men must face is as Pierre Bourdieu charges, that patriarchy can no longer impose itself with the transparency of something that is taken for granted (Bourdieu 1998, 88). This interrogation of masculinity and patriarchal power is unlikely to burn itself out. In addition to the efforts of women,

there are progressive men all over the Caribbean who have become convinced of the rectitude of a system based on gender equality and who work among themselves and in concert with women in the furtherance of such a cause. The reality is that the old order has essentially run its course. Men must face the challenge of coming to terms with a changing social environment in which they must embrace a more comprehensive understanding of the notion of gender equality as a fundamental and important part of genuine democracy.

One of the major challenges facing Caribbean masculinity at this time is that of unemployment and the related phenomenon of job insecurity. The workplace has long been a site of the construction and reinforcement of gender identity and meaning for men and women. However, the present situation exploits the differences between men and women for its own advantage.

> Women have become preferred candidates for certain kinds of jobs needed in a global economy organized around services and JIT (Just In Time) production processes. The main reasons for this are that women remain associated with unremunerated and service-oriented reproductive labor and are often seen as physically better suited to perform tedious repetitive tasks as well as more docile and, therefore less likely to organize than men (Marchand and Runyan, 2000: 16).

Men perhaps more so than women, have tended to define their gender identity in part, through work. Work is integral to that idea of winning the 'bread' which men are expected to undertake. In the context of the Caribbean however, this breadwinning role appears to be more ideologically affirmed that real. It therefore becomes problematic for some men, if they do not participate in this particular construction of their masculinity. In the context of high unemployment levels in the Caribbean, the idea of measuring one's masculinity in terms of one's ability to work becomes unsettling to the performance of masculinity. What happens when the expectation of working and providing for one's family is not an option? Are men no longer men, or do they feel less than men on such occasions?

Related to this problem requiring men to adjust how they understand themselves as men, is the issue of job insecurity which plagues those people, men and women who are currently employed. This condition of work raises the level of vulnerability for workers, engendering demoralization and a loss of militancy in the context of an industrial environment characterized by high levels of unemployment, underemployment and societies "haunted by the spectre of joblessness" (Bourdieu, 1998: 83). Such insecurities impinge not only on those immediately affected by it but also those indirectly touched by the phenomenon – namely spouses or partners and children. Some men fear that unemployment threatens their masculinity, while others often take these problems home where they play themselves out in dysfunctional ways.

A strong case can be made for the state, trade unions and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) to intervene to help men, and women, cope with these challenges in ways that are more constructive. A lot of work has to be done in the Caribbean about assessing the social and psychological impact of unemployment on

men of all social classes. Programs and policies aimed at retraining and retooling men and women in these circumstances are critical to a healthy industrial environment. Having stated this point, and contrary to popular perception, while some men are becoming unemployed for the first time, women in most Caribbean countries are more consistently affected by unemployment than men. According to the previously discussed Caribbean Community Secretariat Report, "The gains women have made in the education sphere have not translated into real gains in the work sphere. Women's economic activity rates continue to be persistently lower than men's. Women experience higher rates of unemployment and remain unemployed for longer periods of time on average than their male counterparts" (2003, 4). The study showed that the unemployment rate for women aged 15 years and over –which ranged from ten to twenty-three percent - exceeded the rate for men of the same age category for all CARICOM countries studied (2003, 94). Moreover, the situation is no better for younger women in the region.

> Youth unemployment rates in the later 1990s (or around 2000) were more than 20 per cent in most countries, and for women the rates were particularly high. Unemployment rates for young were women also higher than the rates for young men in the early 1990s, in some countries by a quarter (e.g., Trinidad and Tobago, 43 per cent for women and 33 per cent for men); and in some, young women's rate was about twice the rate for men (27 and 28 per cent, respectively) (CARICOM Report 2003, 93).

In addition, while women with lower levels of education have higher unemployment rates, the fact remains that women experience higher levels of unemployment than men do at all levels of education (see CARICOM Report, 2003). It is reasonable to conclude therefore, that concerns about women dominating available jobs are largely overblown.

Sexual Harassment

This issue of sexual harassment has to be addressed because a number of men around the Caribbean have been indicating that they do not know how to act in the workplace these days. For the most part, sexual harassment is widespread in the region. Many men in the Caribbean fail to recognize the import of this problem. Indeed, many do not view it as a problem at all. Though some men would stop short of sexual battery, they see no harm in engaging in sexual banter in the workplace or of creating an uncomfortable environment for women, lesbians and gay men.

Nowhere is gender tension more pronounced than in the economic sphere of the workplace. The traditional hierarchical arrangements of the workplace are conducive to the reproduction of inequality and subordination, which are at the foundation of male domination. Recognizing the way power is distributed within organizations, demands that more vigilance and effort be expended at this site to ensure against patriarchy. The Caribbean workplace, though characterized by important industrial advances resulting from strong trade union representation in the past, has not always been as outstanding with respect to gender equality or gender transformation. It is true that some women have been able to transcend patriarchal obstacles but areas of important concern to

democratizing the workplace have largely been ignored. Despite global initiatives undertaken by the International Labour Organization and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions with respect to gender equality and gender transformation, trade unions in various parts of the Caribbean have not been eager to adopt or even embrace some of these ideas.

If the region is serious about transforming social relationships then greater emphasis needs to be placed on establishing a more democratic work environment. A democratic work environment means that more countries in the Caribbean need to adopt sexual harassment laws. While there has been some discussion of the topic in recent years, only the Bahamas and Belize within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), have established specific sexual harassment legislation.

There is a need for strong leadership by the state in this regard, especially considering that in the Caribbean the state remains the biggest employer. Moreover, the silence of the region's trade unions on this matter of sexual harassment is a cause for much concern. One would have hoped that given its charge of ensuring that the workplace becomes a more democratic site that the trade unions in the region would have been in the vanguard for change on this issue. For the most part, the issue has not been on the front burner for most unions in the Caribbean. Given its position of power and influence, and its long established tradition of struggle for democracy both in the industrial and political realm, the region's trade unions have to assume a more active role in the fight for workplace democracy that embraces the establishment of sexual harassment legislation. They must play their part in winning the right for work in an environment free of sexual harassment, coercion, innuendo and speech that alienate both men and women and marginalized men in the workplace.

Beginning with boys, and addressing the problem at the adult level, there needs to be a massive process of re-socialization to combat the attitudes which make some men believe that their behaviour is not offensive to others. In this regard, progressive men, young and old, have to be prepared to counsel their peers about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. The more men in trade unions, NGOs, Governments, and so on begin speaking out against the practice of sexual harassment, the more likely others would think carefully before offending their colleagues in the workplace. There is also a need to establish a new economy of exchange between men and women in the work environment. Men and women are living in different and more challenging times and must learn to negotiate relations with each other that are based on mutual respect.

The Question of Violence

One of the areas in critical need of change among men in the Caribbean is their resort to violence as a technique of conflict resolution. Men in general are the biggest perpetrators of violence against each other and against women. Many are socialized into a generally acceptable warriorhood, in that sense in which Earl Lovelace has so wonderfully described it in *The School Master* (1968), *Wine of Astonishment* (1984), *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) and in *Salt* (1997). In defending this warriorhood in

terms of respect, honour, nation, country and God, men find it difficult to seek other forms of negotiating autonomy, difference and change. Violence is however not reducible to the physical, emotional or verbal. Violence also has to do with the deprivation of rights. Exclusion of women and marginalized men from participation in the major decision- making processes - political and corporate - of the society is also a form of violence. In addition, there is the phenomenon of symbolic violence, which is a form of persuasion exercised over individuals and involving their consent, often without their conscious understanding of their complicity (Bourdieu 2001). Gender domination in other words operates within the purview of symbolic violence. In summary, violence is a much broader societal phenomenon of which particular aspects of men's participation in this behaviour are but a part. We cannot isolate men's violence from the wider patterns of violence established historically and culturally.

Men in the Caribbean must begin to mobilize against verbal and physical violence meted out to women, as well as to marginalize or non-hegemonic men and to children. Every major report on the status of women in the Caribbean in the last ten or more years has pointed to an increase in the level of violence against them. The United Nations Inter-Agency Campaign on Women's Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean to Combat Violence against Women and Girls stated very forcefully that such violence constitutes the single most prevalent and universal violation of human rights. This situation of violence against women is acute in places such as Haiti, Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica. Some 735 cases of rape were reported to the authorities in Jamaica for 2005 (Drummond 2006). In its 2004 report *Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence and Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, *Human Rights Watch* details the type of abuses meted out to gay and lesbian individuals in Jamaica, and argues the case of police and state complicity in certain areas of this abuse. In October, the Guyana Human Rights Association expressed concern over what it perceived as the prevalence of violence against women. It also went on to denounce the judicial systems treatment of victims of sexual violence as "systematically and intentionally humiliating" (Amnesty International Report 2005). In other islands though the situation may be less severe the problem nevertheless persists.

Violence against women is of a particular quality because it involves people of different strengths (usually); people who stand in different relations to power, and who often have different types of institutional mechanism of support and protection. More importantly, violence against women participates in a general pattern of abuse of women, which is verbal, emotional and physical. This is a quality of violence that is different in kind from the violence that takes place between men or the violence some women occasionally mete out to some men.

The challenge facing men in a changing social environment is to start helping other men break the cycle of destruction. The initial work therefore of men's groups such as *Men Against Violence Against Women* in Trinidad and the objectives of *Men of Purpose* in Guyana, are to be encouraged as these groups grapple with the issue of re-socializing some men away from the brutality of domestic and other forms of violence against women. There are other men's groups that should be encouraged and

strengthened such as *Help and Shelter* in Guyana that specifically seeks to address the plight of abused children and domestic violence. In Grenada, the Legal Aid and Counselling Clinic established a program called *Say No To Violence.* This program was organized by and for men who are abusive to women and is the result of a men's forum of the Legal Aid Clinic known as *Man to Man*. These are all initiatives, which suggest that some Caribbean men are beginning to see the need to address these matters of violence and abuse. Though this is a desirable focus and a timely intervention coming from men across the region, the violence among men themselves should not be relegated to the back burner, especially as far as it also has implications for how men resolve conflicts with marginalized men, women and children.

Whereas the violence against women has received much popular attention, the violence of men toward other men is taken for granted and normalized, and therefore not considered particularly worthy of attention. Moreover, violence directed at homosexual men is not even considered really problematic. Both men and women, on religious grounds, by appeals to nature, or in accordance with social convention, often rationalize or excuse violence against homosexuals in the Caribbean. The region cannot afford to condone violence against people who may not share the heterosexual norm while condemning acts of violence when directed against women. People need to be more vocal in their condemnation of the physical and verbal abuse of all, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. Failure to criticize all forms of violence is to be less than sincere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if one accepts that masculinity is not a fixed notion but one that is constantly changing and adjusting to new circumstances, then clearly there exists a space within which men can navigate these new challenges that face them in the changing social environment of the Caribbean. The growing economic independence of some women, the advancement and achievement of the feminist movement in the region, the economic decline of the area, the problems in civil society, the loss of jobs of some men, have all had their impact on gender relations, creating different and new roles for men and women in the Caribbean. One cannot ignore the threat that all this represents for some men in the region. What is abundantly clear is that however people of the region have imagined the past to be, they cannot expect the present or the future to be exactly the same.

What is urgently required are ways of negotiating these changes, a massive process of gender re-socialization, the creation of an environment for dialogue between men and women, and the development of creative strategies for intervention in this phase in which the region finds itself. More men need to participate in thinking through what it means to be a man in the Caribbean and to map the terrain of masculinity in contemporary society. The dialogue about masculinity has to continue but when man talks to man, the talk has to become more substantive, more meaningful and more constructive. Man has to begin to talk about the weightier issues of being, of gender consciousness and sensitivity, and about economic alternatives to the pervasiveness of a

corrosive neoliberalism that currently blankets the region. Men have to begin a serious dialogue about the kind of history they are engaged in making and the retreat from progressive politics, which involves attention to issues of gender. Men can no longer sleep to dream but dream to make the world more conducive to the full flourishing of the potential of men and women. Rather than face the future with trepidation or resentment, men, working together with women, need to seize the opportunity to establish a better, more just, society.

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