



“What is this t’ing t’en about Caribbean Feminisms?”: Feminism in the Anglophone Caribbean, circa 1980-2000

[Ellie McDonald](#)

Outreach and Community, Anti-Slavery International
London, UK

Abstract

This paper explores the complex history of Caribbean feminist activism in the late twentieth-century, based on interviews with Peggy Antrobus of Barbados, Andaiye and Alissa Trotz of Guyana and Patricia Mohammed of Trinidad. It attempts to create a hitherto absent archive of these figures while interpreting their ideological and political positions. It is divided into three sections. The first explores the individual trajectories that gave these women a political consciousness. The second explores the regional and global linkages of Caribbean women's/feminist activism. The third discusses the long crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, including the decline of 'Left' projects and the impact of growth-oriented economic policies, and their role in engendering a Caribbean feminism which was not subordinated to larger nationalist or revolutionary projects. The paper ends by comparing how these persons have positioned themselves and reflect on the contemporary feminist movement.

Keywords: feminism, Caribbean women, intersectionality, gender and development, oral history

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank Dr Richard Drayton for his guidance in helping me to develop my original dissertation thesis on which this paper is based. I am indebted to Peggy Antrobus, Patricia Mohammed, Andaiye and Alissa Trotz for allowing me to interview them and to Merle Collins for her written responses. Thank you for sharing your reflections so generously. A particular thanks to Peggy Antrobus, Alissa Trotz and Andaiye for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. All of their perspectives were immeasurably valuable to me, not only as a researcher, but also as a feminist.

How to cite

McDonald, Ellie. 2016. "“What is this t'ing t'en about Caribbean Feminisms?": Feminism in the Anglophone Caribbean, circa 1980-2000." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 10: 43–66.

Introduction

‘By the time we came to the late 1990s where it was more and more obvious that in practice addressing all forms of oppression is not what we were doing, no I didn’t call myself a feminist anymore... First of all I really don’t like the hyphenated feminism... I was happy when feminism by itself was about all of those things. So I stopped referring to myself as a feminist sometime in the late 1990s’
– (Andaiye 2015)

In this short quote Andaiye describes why, in the late 1990s, she chose to no longer identify as a feminist. Why, at the start of a research project about the flowering of Caribbean feminist movements, have I begun with its decline in the eyes of one activist? I have done so because I think Andaiye's reasoning demonstrates the degree to which Caribbean feminists in this period attempted to understand the intersections between different power structures and relationships of class, race/ethnicity/ colour, nation, gender, sexuality, colonialism, and more. When Andaiye felt that Caribbean feminism(s) no longer foregrounded an analysis of these different power relationships – indeed, that feminism only paid attention to these hierarchies through hyphenated feminisms – she no longer identified as a feminist. In the period of the 1980s, individual women and women's groups in the region, such as DAWN¹ and CAFRA², set out to address these collusive hierarchies within the context of the Caribbean and the Global South. Yet the quote above alludes to how changing contexts throughout the late 1980s and 1990s contributed to shifting Andaiye's perspective.

My research centres on how four Anglophone Caribbean activists came to identify with feminism and took part in feminist activism throughout the period of the 1980s and 90s. This paper is based on oral history interviews with Peggy Antrobus of Barbados, Andaiye and Alissa Trotz of Guyana and Patricia Mohammed of Trinidad. These interviews are understood in the context of a

large body of published sources, including interviews, articles, books and speeches. It is the positioning of these women within varying geographical, institutional and ideological locations which excited and interested me. Peggy Antrobus came to feminism through her work as Director of the Women's Bureau in Jamaica. Since 1985, as a member of the DAWN network, she has been a major link between the transnational feminist movement and women in the Caribbean. By contrast, Andaiye's pathway into feminism was grounded in radical politics and in the idea of 'praxis... a social critique of the concrete' evident through her work with Red Thread in Guyana³ (Scott 2002). Alissa Trotz, who is an academic and also a member of Red Thread in Guyana, questioned why I chose to include her, given that she does not consider herself as an activist (an ambivalence structured by her institutional affiliation as an academic living out of the region) and has not 'really been involved in the women's movement, even though I am involved with Red Thread and at times get picked up in that way' (Trotz 2015). The end of this quote alludes to why I had wanted to include her, due to her positioning at the intersections of academic/activist, international/diasporic Caribbean communities. Through her role as the Regional Course Director of Women and Development Studies, Patricia Mohammed has disseminated the work of Caribbean activists and academics. One of her most interesting insertions in the historiography has been in deconstructing the idea of difference among women, particularly investigating why Indo-Caribbean feminism remains 'subtext and subterranean' (Mohammed 2015). While this is an eclectic mix of activists with different perspectives on feminist politics and practice, for the most part they are brought together through a shared experience of the postcolonial period. Alissa Trotz, by contrast, identifies as a 'child of the post-colonial disillusion' (Trotz 2015).

Methodologically, oral history sources present both difficulties and advantages. Oral history sources are not only filtered through the 'fragility of memory' (Scott 2010) but through the subjectivity of the subject and the interviewer. In conducting my interviews, I began by considering the different positions of my interviewees and I as academics/activists/students, Caribbean/Caribbean

diasporic/English citizens and as black/white/brown, older/younger women. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to take part in these conversations and to access their perspectives. I came to this research topic with an interest in answering certain questions, including whether intersectionality in Caribbean feminisms prefigured Western thinking on intersectionality? And how does one come to identify as a feminist? My subjectivity, and that of my supervisor, also informed the selection of the women I interviewed. The choice to interview Peggy Antrobus, Andaiye, Patricia Mohammed and Alissa Trotz represents an uneven and limited selection. It should be stated that by no means does my research of these four individuals qualify as a coherent history of feminist activism in the region. Rather, it provides an insight into a small selection of the activism that took place in this period. I seek to counter this unevenness through placing these interviews within the context of these activists' larger bodies of work, seeking to establish continuities and developments in their thinking.

Oral sources have important strengths, constantly reminding the historian to engage with the subjectivity of their materials and with the accuracy of their interpretation, as the presence of living subjects 'constrains us in our interpretations, allows us, indeed obliges us, to test them against the opinion of those who will always, in essential ways, know more than ourselves' (Thompson 1978). This has been the case in my paper, as discussions with these four women following our initial interviews increased my understanding of their positions and interventions. The use of oral history also accounts for the absence of certain topics in this paper, such as sexuality, as this was not discussed at length in most of my interviews. The lack of attention to sexuality during my period of study reflects the context in which these activists were organising, where feminisms originated from and/ or linked with anti-colonial, leftist and radical movements, globalisation and development discourse, respectively. Another major advantage of these oral testimonies is in their reflective nature, demonstrating the changing ways in which these activists have narrated the history of Caribbean feminisms and positioned themselves within this history. Part of my

research will centre on how their 2015, contemporary oral reflections represent the developing logic of their arguments.

Structurally, my work will be divided into three sections. The first, *'The Personal is Political and the Role of Non-feminist Politics'*, discusses how these women's early everyday experiences led them to focus on gender. It examines how through their personal trajectories within non-feminist politics, each of these women gained a political consciousness which intersected with feminism. In the second section, *'Local, Regional and International Links'*, I discuss how these Caribbean activists related their appeals to the activism of other regional and international activists, such as Selma James and the Global Women's Strike⁴ and women from the Global South through the DAWN network. I consider how different local, regional and international feminist currents stimulated one another. The third section will examine *'The Crisis of the 1980s and 1990s'*, the period of declining left-wing movements and economic restructuring programmes implemented throughout the region. In this historical moment, Caribbean feminists forged a distinctive critique of the growth-oriented, IMF-inspired economic policies. To conclude, I consider how my interviews with these activists represent their continuing dialogue with Caribbean feminism, as each made new insights and adjusted their perspectives. In addition, I consider what research is still needed to understand 'what is this t'ing t'en about Caribbean feminisms?' (Mohammed 2015).

The 'Personal is Political' and the Role of Non-feminist Politics

'Well, it was a U.S. slogan but in my own experience I guess the political became personal' – (Antrobus 2015).

For many of these activists 'the personal is political' was present in their early understandings of feminism. The idea that 'the personal is political' first gained

prominence in the U.S. in the 1960s. Central to this idea was ‘the conviction that the private was of very public concern’ (Whelehan 1995). Yet, as was articulated by black and Chicana feminist critiques in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s, the ‘personal is political’ was a disjunctive term to many who were subject to consistent state intervention in their domestic lives (Mohanty 2003). Nevertheless, I would argue that ‘the personal is political’ was present in their understandings of feminism as a principle of understanding ‘structured power experientially.’ Moreover, this experiential knowledge, the ‘moment-to-moment meaning of being a woman in a society that men dominate’ developed as a form of consciousness-raising, a ‘method of analysis, mode of organising, form of practice and technique of political intervention’ (Hosein n.d.). Crucially, while they benefitted from this U.S. articulation, the way in which they understood the ‘personal is political’ was grounded in their particular locations, as black/ Indo/ mixed race, working/ middle class, Caribbean women. Describing how she understood the ‘personal is political’, Peggy Antrobus said ‘I didn’t get that from slogans – anymore than I got my feminism from U.S. perspectives’ (Antrobus 2015).

For these activists, an understanding of the ‘personal is political’ emerged through their lived experiences. Andaiye described how ‘watching my aunt who raised me, hit the pot hard against the edge of the sink and wondering ‘why she angry?’ constituted her ‘version of the personal is political’ (Andaiye 2015). Both Mohammed and Antrobus equally traced this recognition to their domestic relationships. Crucially, this recognition of gender oppression in their familial and domestic relationships fed into their academic concerns and attempts at consciousness-raising. For Antrobus, this experiential learning and reflection on gender-based oppression allowed for a ‘deeper understanding of other forms of oppression based on class, race, ethnicity, culture and international relations’ (Antrobus 2004). This is reflected by Andaiye who noted coming to understand how the private injustices experienced by her aunt and mother formed part of the ‘subordination of the whole group’ (Andaiye 2015). For Antrobus, Mohammed and Trotz this examination of the collusion of different

power structures was also generated by their academic research. Mohammed noted how considering the status of her mother in the family provoked a 'major reaction to the confines of patriarchy and privilege within the Islamic church' (Mohammed 2015) and caused her preoccupation with understanding how gender was negotiated in the Indo-Caribbean context.

For some, gender was a secondary point of analysis following their engagement with non-feminist politics. Andaiye came first to challenging racial oppression through her work with radical left-formations in Guyana and at the fringes of the Black Power movement in New York. Her feminist consciousness came as she recognised the limitations of these movements in their understanding of sex/gender oppression. Andaiye turned to the work of Selma James and the International Wages for Housework Campaign. Within this movement she found the insertion of gender, sex and, critically, race within a Marxist framework. She noted how 'that made total sense to me... that if you did the analysis of capitalism, you did not leave out women' (Andaiye 2015). For both Peggy Antrobus and Andaiye, the intersection of different power structures came as a product of their geographical and political locations – 'because of the nature of the Caribbean' (Scott 2002). For both, gender provided a new and interesting way of assessing other questions. Through her work with DAWN from 1984 onwards, Antrobus foregrounded the experience of the poor, Third World woman as in her 'we find the conjecture of race, class, gender and nationality which symbolises underdevelopment' (Hill 2003). The need to attend to the intersections of different power relationships was crucial to their work. Michelle Rowley has extended this analysis, arguing that in the case of Peggy Antrobus, the foregrounding of this class and race consciousness 'as *the means* of describing her feminist consciousness prefigures mainstream thought on the intersections of race, class, and gender' (Rowley 2010).

But there is debate over the degree to which non-feminist political movements (nationalist, left-wing and Black Power movements) enabled feminist organising. The difficulty of securing women's participation, and countering their

marginalisation, within other social movements was addressed by these activists. Caren Grown and Gita Sen noted the difficulties of women organising within political parties ‘for fear of being labelled divisive to the struggles of workers or the poor’ (Grown and Sen 1987). Even organising within women’s groups and parties can be problematic if they avoid a ‘clear assignment of responsibilities or delegation of authority for fear of mirroring existing hierarchies or established power structures’ (Grown and Sen 1987). Patricia Mohammed has argued that nationalist movements in the region failed to pay ‘any systematic attention to or analysis of gendered subjectivities’ (Barnes 2006); this perspective is shared by Alissa Trotz. Referring to the power disparities among those within the WPA, Andaiye noted how the male leadership would too often ‘pose an issue in terms that you couldn’t enter’, leading her to question the capacity of radical, leftist formations in the region to ‘effectively deal with questions of gender’ (Andaiye 2015). Added to which, the implosion of the Grenada revolution had a catalytic impact. The realisation that the 5,000-strong women’s arm of the New Jewel Movement ‘had so little autonomy and so little power that they could exercise no independent kind of influence on the kind of madness that was developing there’ provoked a ‘despair about our capacity in the region for radical transformation’. Emerging from this, Andaiye noted how feminism provided ‘a political home in the face of the loss of that political home’ (Andaiye 2015). These insights demonstrate the differences in how these activists have viewed the trajectory of Caribbean feminisms and its origins. While Andaiye’s analysis demonstrates the need for feminists to break from other forms of political organising, others have chartered a more progressive relationship between non-feminist and feminist organising.

By comparison, Peggy Antrobus places a greater emphasis on the progressive impact of left-wing politics. In the context of Jamaica, Antrobus argued that ‘the national politics I would say was extremely important in putting gender on the agenda’ (Antrobus 2015). Alissa Trotz moderates her assessment, noting that while organised party politics ‘obscured the significant contributions of women to the anti-dictatorial struggles in Guyana’ (Trotz 2007), through their

involvement in left-wing movements, feminist activists 'inherited a radical sort of critique which they subsequently brought into feminist organising' (Trotz 2015). I would emphasise the positive impact of left-wing politics in enabling these activists to produce intersectional, feminist critiques. But this is not necessarily at odds with Andaiye's perspective. Andaiye's understanding of the limitations of left-wing politics in addressing questions of gender oppression enabled her to co-found Red Thread, introducing the gender/sex analysis. Patricia Mohammed also charted a progressive relationship between her work with socialist movements, groups such as the Concerned Women for Progress (CWP)⁵, and her entry into feminist politics and activism. While nationalist and radical left movements in the region did not necessarily deal with questions of sex and gender sufficiently, they were of vital importance in aiding these women to produce intersectional feminist critiques.

In this section I have made three main claims. I have argued that the idea that the 'personal is political' was representative of an enduring, Caribbean local theory, emerging experientially for many of these activists. It is crucial to challenge the view of Caribbean feminist theory and action as a derivative of Anglo-American feminisms. These testimonies demonstrate how, in their early lives and political activism, the idea that the 'personal is political' was already present as a guiding principle. Yet it was the extension of this principle into a form of consciousness-raising or 'praxis' that allowed them to form intersectional feminist critiques and to address, to some extent, the disparities among women in its organising. Thirdly, I argue that the attention these activists paid to the intersection of different power hierarchies was a product of their involvement in other forms of non-feminist politics, while emphasising that this does not indicate an inherently progressive relationship between left-wing/nationalist politics and feminist movements.

Local, Regional and International Links

‘Where do we place Caribbean feminism and the Caribbean feminist voice in that sense, because it becomes almost a marginal voice... is it that we have really had nothing to say? Is it just that we haven’t published in the right places?’ – (Mohammed 2015).

‘What I tried to do was to create a space, even though it was within the bureaucracy, where women, especially grassroots women, could speak for themselves and indicate what they wanted of the bureau’ – (Antrobus 2007)

Throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, institutional and informal, international, regional and local connections have contributed to the circulation of feminist ideas and literature. In the words of Patricia Mohammed, Caribbean feminists have sought to create a ‘discourse – an intersection with other discourses’ (Mohammed 2015). The UN Decade for Women (1975-85) was of great importance in promoting the generation of new knowledge about women’s lives and in creating spaces for women to mobilise. Regional groups like DAWN, WAND, the Women and Development Studies Project and CAFRA were aided by the machinery of the UN Decade. But Caribbean feminists also benefitted from informal networks with Anglo-American, transnational and ‘Third World’ feminists. Beginning by positioning these activists in relation to the international feminist movement, I will then investigate the role of institutional bodies in linking different local, regional and international projects. Comparing this to criticisms of how regional/international connections have alienated The UWI from its grassroots communities. I finish by examining the germinal role of DAWN activists within the Caribbean.

The debate over the use of the ‘wave’ metaphor to describe feminist activism is useful in showing the extent to which these activists connect the Caribbean to the international feminist movement. Patricia Mohammed employs the idea of

waves insofar as 'each wave is not just a chronology of events; it is continually engaged in a polemic with history, thought and action' (Mohammed 2007). There is a blurring of linearity, chronology and concepts within Mohammed's definition as she broadens the traditional 'wave' narrative in order to 'situate feminism in the Caribbean as part of a tradition of western intellectual thought and activism' (Mohammed 1998). Peggy Antrobus's use of the metaphor reflects her similar interest in placing the Caribbean within the international movement. But for Andaiye and Alissa Trotz, the 'wave' metaphor homogenises Caribbean feminisms through tying them to Anglo-American narratives, insulating them from important events including the upsurge in anti-colonial uprisings. For Trotz, 'wave' narratives are 'profoundly disjunctive given that [in] the Caribbean/ Guyanese context I was working in, difference, not similarity, was the point of departure' (Mohammed 2003). This debate demonstrates key differences in the way these activists understand feminism in the Caribbean and position themselves in relation to a universalised feminist movement.

Both the UN Decade and The UWI have served as important media for different local, regional and international efforts to generate knowledge of women's lives and feminist activism. Two regional programmes, the 'Women in the Caribbean Project' (WICP, 1979- 1982) headed by Jocelyn Massiah and the Women and Development Unit (WAND, 1978), formed in the context of the UN Decade, were central in mobilising activists, leaders and educationalists in community-based and regional projects. Both WICP and WAND, through creating and disseminating knowledge in the formal academic context, 'enhanced the credibility and legitimacy of feminist activism within both the academy and the wider society' (Barriteau 2003). The quote from Peggy Antrobus at the start of this section addresses the significance of WAND in integrating the voices of grassroots women into a regional framework. It served as a catalyst for several new initiatives, including CAFRA and the Women and Development Studies programme. With the institutionalisation of Gender and Development Studies, there has been a continued effort to stimulate community, regional and international links. One more recent example of this is the 'Making of Caribbean

Feminisms’ research project and its offshoot, the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, initiated by Patricia Mohammed, which succeeded in generating new knowledge while developing ‘an organ that wasn’t processed through readers of the North necessarily’ (Mohammed 2007).

But for many of these activists, there are doubts about The UWI’s ability as an institution to generate activist-research networks with its local communities. While acknowledging that the academy does important work, particularly around knowledge-creation and publications, Antrobus argues that ‘the links with women’s activism still needs strengthening’ (Reddock 2006). In establishing WAND, The UWI provided a space that facilitated and supported feminist activism; but Antrobus notes how it failed to make the link between the teaching and research on campus, and the sites of WAND’s community-based work, thereby missing the opportunity to stimulate a multi-directional relationship between grassroots, local activism, UWI regional scholarship and research. Perhaps, then, the most important work in terms of stimulating a focus on women’s’ lives and activism has been generated by individual activists within The UWI, sometimes in conflict with the University. Rhoda Reddock is unparalleled for her commitment and served as a catalyst in the formation of both the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) and Working Women in Trinidad and Tobago and CAFRA at a regional level. The UWI was therefore useful in legitimising some of these projects and in providing spaces for these activists to mobilise.

Andaiye has staged a different critique, challenging the very assumption of activism and academia as aligned interests. Linnette Vassell has made a similar intervention, arguing that in the triad of feminism, gender studies and activism, ‘activism is subordinated in the hierarchy of the triad. Its place reflects the distancing of brain and brawn; of the academy and the community/ NGOs; of theory and action’ (Vassell 2004). The critique of Andaiye and Vassell is distinctive in questioning the very ability of The UWI – and perhaps any academic facility – to reconcile academic and activist objectives. By

comparison, for Antrobus the question is not whether Caribbean feminists can bridge the divide between the institutionalised, academic setting and the grassroots, but rather, 'how do you nurture feminism in the academy?' (Rowley 2007). While indicating the difficulties and constraints imposed by the academic setting, Antrobus recognises the value of teaching (and research) as a mode of consciousness-raising (Rowley 2007). Alissa Trotz is an interesting addition to this study. While she notes her structured ambivalence to the Caribbean feminist movement, she is interestingly part of a new generation of younger activists who are using new media, through her column in the *Stabroek News*, to translate academic knowledge in publicly accessible formats.

DAWN's critique of the ways in which growth-oriented economic policies, political conservatism, religious fundamentalism and militarism originate in the same sexist ideology is arguably the most original intervention to the body of feminist knowledge to which Caribbean feminists have contributed. DAWN combined the institutional framework provided by the UN Decade with the experiences of local women throughout the Caribbean and the Global South. Antrobus emphasised the importance of meetings in 1984 and 1985 in the lead-up to the UN Conference in providing the medium for women throughout the Global South to mobilise. Antrobus contributed to developing the platform document for DAWN presented at the NGO Forum of the UN Conference of Women held in Nairobi in 1985. The DAWN platform considered 'the interlinked crises of debt, deteriorating social services, environmental degradation, militarism, religious fundamentalism and political conservatism – as consequences of growth-oriented economic policies and programmes' (Antrobus 2015), an analysis which prefigured both economists' and left-wing critiques of the impact of SAPs. Not only did this framework of advocacy represent a vital intervention throughout the Global South, but it was also adapted within local contexts by Caribbean activists to challenge their governments' policy frameworks of structural adjustment. Mohammed, Trotz and Andaiye have all recognised the success of DAWN in placing Caribbean data

within comparative feminist theory. I will discuss this further in *‘The Crisis of the 1980s and 1990s’*.

In all of these cases, institutions, regional networks, feminist groups and activists have engaged in valuable exchanges of knowledge. The success of this was evident in the different local projects which contributed to the establishment of Women and Development Studies units at The UWI and which worked to legitimise the links between gender studies and feminist activism. But there are also criticisms, including of how institutionalisation has served to alienate research (and teaching) from activism and community-based projects. Furthering this critique, Andaiye and Vassell challenged the very capacity of academia to stimulate activism, questioning ‘is there a disconnection of Gender Studies from its feminist and activist roots’ (Vassell 2004)? I will return to these historiographical differences in my conclusion.

The Crisis of the 1980s and 1990s

‘I’ve had small ‘Aha!’ moments from the work of other women but the big ‘Aha!’ moment was from the work of what became the Global Women’s Strike’ – (Andaiye 2015)

‘What have we had to say about global feminism or international feminism that has made a difference on the world landscape? DAWN for instance, maybe’ – (Mohammed 2015)

By ‘crisis’ I am referring to the wave of IMF/World Bank-inspired monetarist, neo-liberal restructuring programmes adopted by Caribbean governments. My research centres on the impact of these crises on feminist organising and activism. I argue that in the apex of this economic moment, feminist activists’ made new insights to the body of feminist knowledge. As demonstrated in the

quote above from Mohammed, the DAWN critique was perhaps the key intervention of Caribbean feminists which 'made a difference on the world landscape' (Mohammed 2015). DAWN activists criticised SAPs as part of a broader sexist ideology which de-monetised women's time and labour and undermined their significance as economic actors. While noting the success of these Caribbean critiques, it is important to assert a significant caveat into the debate. In the new millennium, Antrobus analysed how from the '95 Beijing Conference onwards there was a push back, reflected in the retreat from the DAWN analysis and the exclusion of violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights from the first iteration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I examine the critiques forged by Caribbean women, while also considering how changing political contexts in the mid to late 1990s de-radicalised the movement.

Through applying local examples within the DAWN advocacy framework, Peggy Antrobus and other figures within the DAWN network made a distinctive critique of neoliberal, growth-oriented economic policies. A statement made by Caribbean women at a CARICOM regional meeting held in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1985 in preparation for the UN End-of-Decade conference scheduled for Nairobi, emphasised how, under the present economic crisis, 'women are again being expected to take on more of their governments' responsibility for the health, education and social well-being of the society' (Reddock 1998). They challenged CARICOM governments to review this policy framework. The Bridgetown Statement applied the DAWN critique in noting how 'social tensions, dislocations and economic disparities' were the consequence of monetarist, neo-liberal development models (Reddock 1998). Peggy Antrobus summarised the DAWN critique as 'triple jeopardy: cutting jobs (in the health and education sectors) in which women predominate, cutting services (on which women depended in their role in social reproduction), and then increasing pressures on women's time as they were expected to fill the gaps created by those cuts in services' (Antrobus 2015). Her crucial role in regional and international forms of feminist movement-building was evident in

her Letter on 'The Debt' which made the Caribbean example central to the DAWN analysis (Antrobus 1989).

For Andaiye, this period of economic crisis in the region was also central to her linking of gender oppression and economic theory. She noted how Clotil Walcott (the trade unionist and organiser of NUDE), on meeting Selma James and hearing about the International Wages for Housework Campaign 'made the connection that people often have difficulty making between the unwaged housework and the waged housework' (Andaiye 2015). Through developing a framework of advocacy, Walcott, alongside Trinidad and Tobago Senator Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, were central in making Trinidad and Tobago the only Caribbean state to pass legislation relating to the recognition of unwaged caring work. The 1996 Act to Count Unremunerated Work required the maintenance of statistics and a "mechanism for quantifying and recording the monetary value of such [unwaged caring] work" (Ministry of Legal Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago 2014); added to which, in 1994-1995, CARICOM government ministers responsible for women's affairs adopted the analysis of the centrality of women's unwaged work during their preparations for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. They argued inside the conference for a language that would recognise unwaged caring work, while activists from the International Wages for Housework Campaign, including Clotil Walcott, lobbied delegates outside the official conference (Trotz 2015). Through their interventions, these activists showed the importance of recognising 'women's role in social formation and the economy' (Mohammed 1998) during this period of economic crisis.

It was during this period that activists from the Global Women's Strike incorporated theories of unwaged caring work within a Marxist framework. My interview with Andaiye demonstrated the importance of Selma James' ideas for her, as she came into contact with the International Wages for Housework Campaign after it launched the Global Women' Strike (GWS) in 2000. For Andaiye, James' perspective represented the insertion of women's experience

within a Marxist framework. It emphasised how ‘*all* women, whether or not they do waged work, do *unwaged* caring work’, thus the ‘question of gender turns on locating the distinctiveness of women’s *caring* work with the enlarging framework of productive labour’ (Scott 2002). This is the point at which the theories of Marxism and feminism intersect, as James inserts the experience of women as unwaged carers within the Marxist framework of commodity-producing labour. Andaiye also notes that anti-racism was central for both the Wages for Housework Campaign (later GWS) and Red Thread, the latter of which has worked consistently to organise with Indo-, Afro-, Indigenous and grassroots women across their differences. Returning to the idea posed in ‘*The Personal is Political*’, I argue that these activists adopted an intersectional feminist critique in this period of interconnecting political and economic crises. Red Thread is one key example of how Caribbean feminists incorporated local examples within a broader structural analysis.

Yet the interconnecting economic and political crises in the region can be considered to have de-radicalised Caribbean feminism(s) from the mid to the late 1990s onwards. While the crisis period of the 1980s had a crucial role in radicalising Caribbean feminisms, increasingly throughout the 1990s and particularly following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, as Peggy Antrobus has identified, post-Beijing exhaustion on the part of women activists, the changing leadership within the feminist movement and the emergence of mainstreaming projects and ‘gender experts’ served to detach the movement from its radical, transformative roots. Part of this analysis was also made by Alissa Trotz and Andaiye. The major difference in their perspectives was that, for Andaiye, the cumulative weight of these factors led her to no longer identify as a feminist. In my interview with Alissa Trotz she identified how ‘we see the mainstreaming of feminism that is led particularly by... supra national organisations like the United Nations, the ILO [International Labour Organization], [and] the World Bank.’ Trotz identified how within this mainstreaming, organisations such as the World Bank co-opted the language of feminist activists (Trotz 2015). In a similar vein, David Scott has argued that feminist politics was

increasingly marked by ‘mainstreaming women into economic plans designed by the IMF’ (Scott 2002). These perspectives question whether we should view Caribbean feminisms in this period in linear terms. The testimonies of these women point towards a regression in the late 1990s as feminist groups became increasingly tied to the specifications of funding agencies and reduced to gender mainstreaming projects.

In sum, I have demonstrated how Caribbean activists substantiated the ideas of DAWN and the International Wages for Housework Campaign/Global Women’s Strike through applying and transforming these frameworks within their national contexts. In the work of both individual women and women’s groups in the Caribbean, this structural critique has endured. Yet the consequences of the economic crisis, accompanied by the decline in left-wing movements, negatively impacted on feminist organising in the region. As a result of these changing contexts, ‘perhaps the most important challenge now facing feminism in the region in this context is to be a transformative, rather than a reformist project’ (Trotz 2015).

Conclusion and contemporary reflections

‘I stopped referring to myself as a feminist sometime in the late 1990s’ – (Andaiye 2015)

Perhaps the persistent, underlying question of my research has been in underlining how these women’s perspectives on feminism and their involvement in the movement have shifted over time. This was evident in the question of the links between activism, academia, transnational capital and NGOs. In our interview, Andaiye remarked on the similarities between her work and the work of Linnette Vassell, having previously considered herself at odds with the work of other activists. While Vassell argued that feminist organising in the 1980s allowed

'women with more power (however derived) to dominate or exclude – consciously or not, deliberately or not' (Vassell 2004), Andaiye has addressed the limitations of CAFRA in addressing the hierarchies among women within its organising. My research demonstrates how these activists have made their own, slightly nuanced claims on the difficulty of forging a radical, transformative project in the context of institutionalisation. Andaiye and Trotz have criticised the increasingly paradoxical and limiting relationship between radical groups and transnational capital and NGOs as a means of funding. Antrobus, Trotz and Andaiye have all lamented that feminist organising in the 1990s increasingly moved away from the critique of neo-liberal policies and their increased exploitation of women's caring work. Trotz has pointed to what appears to be an increasing and often resigned acceptance that 'capitalism is permanent and unchangeable and so your job is not to confront it' (Trotz 2015). The challenge for Caribbean feminisms then is ensuring it does not 'domesticate itself... losing sight of the wider critique of imperialism' (Trotz 2015). One of the key insights of my research has been in demonstrating the scope of criticism and self-criticism in the Caribbean women's movement.

How, then, have these women positioned their definitions of feminism in relation to one another? Through qualitative interviews, my study represents the developing logic and nuances which distinguish these activists' understandings of feminism. Both Andaiye and Peggy Antrobus have developed their definitions of feminism in response to the way Patricia Mohammed defined feminism as an 'expression of sexual equality' (Antrobus 2004). Antrobus makes the 'distinction between feminism as an expression of sexual equality and feminism as a critical politics that goes beyond sexual equality, using critical Third World feminist theory to question the whole system of production and reproduction' (Antrobus 2004). Andaiye notes that 'if you're using the definition of feminism, that it's an expression of gender equality and therefore including all women who are doing any work with women as feminists, yes you could say that the feminist movement includes more than a handful of Indian women, but that's not my definition' (Andaiye 2015). I would argue that Andaiye's definition of feminism as

a radical, transformative project has implications for the way she defines its origins and who she defines as feminists. Reflecting this, she comments that feminism was 'never, in my mind, not dominated by black or brown Afro women with a very small percentage of Indian women' (Andaiye 2015). Comparatively, Mohammed speaks of feminism as amorphous and plural, present in multiple spaces and among women who are not normally active in explicitly 'feminist' groups, such as Indo-Caribbean women in groups like the Hindu Women's Organisation. Mohammed points to the impossibility in defining feminism when some women's movements do not actively view their objectives in terms of feminism, stating 'who was the first feminist and who will be the last?' (Mohammed 2008). While Mohammed continues to identify with feminism as a plural and shifting project, Andaiye chooses to no longer identify with a feminism that defines itself as an 'expression of gender equality' (Antrobus 2004).

What, then, is needed to further understand 'this t'ing t'en about Caribbean feminism' (Mohammed 2015)? One crucial aspect missing in this research is an analysis of sexuality, reflecting that it has been recognised as 'one of the blindsides of the Caribbean feminist movement' (Mohammed 2015). There should be further consideration of the ways in which sexuality related to the assessment of other power relationships and oppressions within the activism of the 1980s and 90s. What would the activists of the 1980s and early 1990s contribute to this question? How was heteronormativity centred within the feminist organising of this period? Indeed, the 'third-wave' Caribbean activists to which Mohammed (2003) refers to in 'Like Sugar in Coffee...' are working to ground sexuality within the contemporary feminist movement. Finally, I would argue that this research has gone some small way towards demonstrating the continued importance of oral history reflections. Oral testimonies provide an exciting way of investigating historical questions and of 'assessing long-term meaning in history' (Thompson 1978). They equally serve present-day purposes, aiding past and present generations of feminist activists to engage in a progressive, critical relationship with each other. Antrobus highlighted the

importance of this in these words: 'don't waste your time reinventing wheels: build on what we've done, but don't be limited by it...' (Reddock 2006).

¹ DAWN was established at a meeting in Bangalore in 1984 in the lead-up to the 1985 UN Third World Conference of Women in Nairobi.

² Founded in 1985, CAFRA is a regional network of feminists, individual researchers, activists and women's organisations which spans all cultural and linguistic areas of the Caribbean.

³ Red Thread was formed in 1986 in Guyana by seven women who were members of the Working People's Alliance led by Walter Rodney.

⁴ Andaiye noted in our interview that Red Thread is no longer part of the Global Women's Strike.

⁵ CWP was formed in 1981 to educate men and women on the origins and manifestations of female oppression in society and to combat violence against women.

List of Abbreviations

CAFRA	Caribbean Association of Feminist Research and Action
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
UN	United Nations
UWI	The University of the West Indies
WAND	Women and Development Unit
WICP	Women in the Caribbean Project
WPA	Working People's Alliance

References

Primary Sources

- Andaiye. 2015. Interview by Author, March 15.
- Antrobus, Peggy. 2015 Interview by Author, February 26.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2015. Interview by Author, March 4.
- Trotz, Alissa. 2015. Interview by Author, March 9.

Secondary Sources

- Antrobus, Peggy. 2004. "Feminist Activism: The CARICOM Experience." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie, 35-58. Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press.
- Antrobus, Peggy. 1989. 'Letter on "The Debt".' In *Women and Action: Rome and Santiago. International Women's Information and Communication Service*
- Antrobus, Peggy. 2004. *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies*. London: Zed Books.
- Barnes, Natasha. 2006. *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Barriteau, Eudine, ed. 2003. *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press.
- Development. 2010. "Power, Respect and Solidarity: In Conversation with Peggy Antrobus and Gita Sen." *Development* Vol.53, no,2: 150-155.
- Grown, Caren and Gita Sen. 1987. *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Hosein, Gabrielle. N.d. "Caribbean

- Feminism, Activist Pedagogies and Transnational Dialogues." *Feminist Theory & Activism in Global Perspective*, 116-129.
- Ministry of Legal Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago. 2014. *Counting Unremunerated Work Act*. Accessed October 31, 2015.
http://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/laws2/alphabetical_list/lawspdfs/19.09.pdf.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2008. "Forever Indebted to Women: The Power of Caribbean Feminism." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, Issue 2, 1-10.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2007. "Introducing the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, Issue 1, 1-8.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2003. "Like Sugar in Coffee: Third Wave Feminism in the Caribbean." *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol.52, no.3: 5-30.
- . 1998. "Stories in Caribbean Feminism: Reflections on the Twentieth Century." *5th Anniversary Lecture*. St Augustine: Centre for Gender and Development Studies.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 1998. "Toward Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean." In *Rethinking Caribbean Difference*, edited by Patricia Mohammed, 6-33. London: Routledge.
- Mohanty, Chandra. 2003. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 2006. "Reflections: An interview with Peggy Antrobus." *Development and Change Forum* No.37, no.6: 1365- 1377.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1998. "Women's Organizations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean: The Response to Global Economic Crisis in the 1980s." In *Rethinking Caribbean Difference*, edited by Patricia Mohammed, 57- 73. London: Routledge.
- Rowley, Michelle. 2007. "Feminist visions for Women in a New Era: An Interview with Peggy Antrobus." *Feminist Studies*, Vol.33, no.1: 64-87.
- Rowley, Michelle. 2010. "Whose Time is it? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Feminist Advocacy." *Small Axe* Vol.14, no.1 1-15.
- Scott, David. 2004. "Counting Women's Caring Work: An Interview with Andaiye." *Small Axe* Vol.8, no.1: 123-217.
- Scott, David. 2010. "The Fragility of Memory: An Interview with Merle Collins." *Small Axe* Vol.14, no.1: 79-163.
- Thompson, Paul. 1978. *The Voice of the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trotz, Alissa. 2004. "Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana." *Small Axe*, Vol.8, no.1: 1-20.
- Trotz, Alissa. 2007. "Red Thread: The Politics of Hope in Guyana." *Race Class*, Vol.49, no.2: 71-79.
- Trotz, Alissa. 2010-15. "In the Diaspora." *Stabroek News*.
- Vassell, Linnette. 2004. "Feminisms, Gender Studies, Activism: The Elusive Triad." In *Gender in the 21st century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie, 687-705. Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press.
- Whelehan, Imelda. 1995. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.