



Editorial

# Tool or Weapon? The Politics of Policy Making, Gender Justice and Social Change in the Caribbean

Editors

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## Introduction

Working on an issue that invited scholars to engage the issue of gender and policy in the Caribbean has caused us both to reckon with what exactly would count as “policy” in and for the Caribbean region. We were stumped by the realization that too often, the words that are proximal to the category of “policy” – “health,” “public,” “foreign,” “culture,” “gender,” – come in for quite a sustained and rigorous engagement, while the actual use of “policy,” the thing being modified by “health,” “public,” “foreign,” “culture” or “gender” is left holding the status of common knowledge, a kind of pact and secret handshake between author and reader. Obfuscation notwithstanding, what we know is that policy, like law, justice, government, development and gender are frequently conveyed as deceptively simple concepts (Engle Merry, 2009).

Ironically, scholars in the fields where we would expect this operationalizing to be done – say for example, public policy or political science - themselves merely mark the lacuna before simply moving on to offer their own rigorous analysis of their core thematic engagement, while the operationalization of policy itself languishes. Efforts to confront this problem of meaning have sometimes swung so wide as to be meaningless themselves. Take for example, Dye’s assertion that policy is essentially “whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (Dye, 1998:1). Or, similarly, Lowi and Ginsberg’s framing of policy as “an officially expressed intention backed by a sanction, which can be a reward or a punishment.” (1996: 607). These are not definitions that help in a world where policy is temporal, temperamental and often conveyed by fiat via social media, or alternatively in policy environments where the actors and sites are anything but discrete, tending toward blurred, opportunistic and imbricated relationships. In other words, in these conceptual renderings where “government” begins and ends or alternatively, where exactly is policy made are matters that are far more messy, more readily felt and, at times, untraceable because of the region’s geographic, economic and institutional scale.

Policy-making in the Caribbean emerges from a multi-faceted, fluid, and at times eclectic, ad hoc, shape-shifting constellation of actors, arenas and approaches. Historically, policy has emerged from disciplinary locations such as economist Sir Arthur Lewis's dual sector economy or T.S. Simey's influence on welfare planning, or further, the entanglements of policy with politics, as reflected in the region's many five-year strategic plans, as well as through interactions with and pressures from global actors. In this imbricated sense, the region's peoples and institutions are never far removed from the effects of Caribbean policy-making, despite efforts that might make public policy appear as though guided by absolutes, objectively constructed, and devoid of personal stakes that are inevitably bounded to the structural.

Caribbean feminists, with a clear understanding and critique of the state's power to shape our possibilities to be, have historically approached it as a product of our social reality and have attempted to use policy toward a practice of democratizing citizenship. Their work has offered an unapologetic unveiling of the ways that policy has not only been masculinized but has often been, literally, the business of men. In the midst of this, there has been an intermittent but strident critique of this masculinization in politics (Barriteau 2001), in education (Leo Rhynie, Barrow and Bailey 1997), gender mainstreaming approaches (Rowley 2011, Hosein and Parpart 2016) and banking (Lycette and White 1989) to name but a few. Caribbean feminist interruptions of the state's exercise of power have been many and carry a long life. For example, Hazel Brown's Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (1971), established as a means of ensuring that economic policy (e.g. pricing of goods), was mindful of women as single mothers, as consumers, as low-income wage earners. Or, as another example, the *Women in the Caribbean Project*, whose research-based approach provided a multidisciplinary understanding of Caribbean women's lived realities, with the clear intent of challenging Caribbean state-actors' imagined sense of the "legitimate" citizen/actor around whom policy is framed. With the complete awareness of Caribbean women's historical ability to "act independently of official policy to improve their situation," Joycelyn Massiah saw

some of the most productive dimensions of the Project residing in its capacity to inform new approaches to planning and “human resource development” where “information about women [would] be included in decision-making and policy making processes” (1986: 165). And, in the more contemporary lobby for national gender policies, we find that the work of crafting a gender policy, when led by state actors with a feminist bent, is as much informed by these earlier regional quests for equity as they are a response to international imperatives about “why gender matters.” Faced with a problem of meaning, we thought it best to think inductively, theorizing from the pieces that appear in this issue, drawing on their interventions in order to think more broadly about the role of policy in the English-speaking Caribbean.

In that sense, policy may well become whatever governments choose to do, but what are the ramifications for small-island states, when acts of “choosing” can be greatly constrained by economic and political flows that far exceed the actual boundaries of the nation-state? Two of the pieces in the issue point us in the direction of thinking about policy formulation in the Caribbean as always already a trans/national artifact. Patricia Rosenfield's ***Reflections on American Philanthropy in the Caribbean: The Influential Role of Caribbean Women*** brings historical depth and a transnational ethos to the discussion. Rosenfield offers an overview of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations' and Carnegie Corporation's early twentieth century presence in the Caribbean. Reversing the expected flows of power, Rosenfield highlights the ways in which Caribbean feminist activists worked to ensure that the priorities and programmes of the Foundations were responsive to the needs of the region. There are multiple locations and histories at work, highlighting as it does the early public health work of these organizations, the influence of US politics on their policy direction, the ramification of their interventions for ongoing work in the Caribbean and the role that Caribbean feminists played in ensuring that the needs of the region remained central to the policy direction of these organizations.

Similarly, Deborah McFee's ***Women/Gender and Development in Trinidad and Tobago and Post-Genocide Rwanda: Complicating Human Security, Carving out a National Gender Policy Response to Violence Against Women***, which follows makes a case for the role that national gender policies might play in mitigating state and communal violence. McFee's piece offers a comparative discussion between Rwanda and Trinidad and Tobago and their different processes in formulating a national gender policy. The piece positions Rwanda didactically in order to mark what Trinidad and Tobago might learn about the possibilities of a gender policy to intervene in narratives of violence, in its yet to be implemented national gender policy. It is a given that feminists have invested in national gender policies as instruments of equity; McFee's work however raises this already high bar to consider whether these policies might also act as instruments of peace.

Building on the transnational dimension of policy formulation, Sheila Stewart provides a necessary voice of a regional feminist-activist practitioner on the structures of global governance, namely the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for advancement of women's rights as human rights and the link between peace, security and democracy. This contribution entitled, ***How Can the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Transform the Economic Empowerment of Women in the Caribbean Sub-region?*** is a carefully written, detailed analysis of the post MDG language of sustainable development, gender equity and equality and women's empowerment that will ultimately provide a framework for much of the state-based work around public policy on women and gender in the Caribbean. Stewart's work is instructive in a number of ways. She very clearly brings to the fore the language of the UN; by the end of the piece the Sustainable Development goals are evident and the place of the stand-alone gender and development goal 5 is very evident. However, Stewart's very relevant, Caribbean-based grounding of the key concepts of the 2030 Agenda and the overview she provides to this new framing of women's economic empowerment benefits from her identifying regional labour market-based challenges to women's economic autonomy, gender equality and issues

related to unpaid work and care, is significant forming a policy space informed by multiple perspectives. Interestingly, it is in her engagement of these issues that she provides an invaluable synergy between her work and those layers of questions that are identified in Rowley's treatment of NGPs. Additionally, she too highlights questions of gender blindness and the cost of such underlying assumptions in the policy making process.

Michelle V. Rowley in her piece entitled ***Should We Still Hope? Gender Policy, Social Justice, and Affect in the Caribbean*** facilitates a revisiting of the idea of the National Gender Policy. This revisiting takes place as an interrogation of the National Gender Policy as an instrument of development pushing toward a consideration of the role that affect theory might play in the ever-evolving state-based processes inherent in addressing the complexity of gender-based inequity. The piece interrogates gender policy as a search for meaning among contending constituencies and the interconnections that exists between individual positions situated within accepted gender norms and the structural inequalities that are the core business of the NGP. Rowley's work creates a productive, interactive space between Caribbean governments and Caribbean peoples in our journey to make meaning of and to institutionalize gender, gender justice and gender equality. As she grounds our understanding of these variables, this paper brings to the fore a number of critical engagements which include: the transformational possibilities of gender equality as a goal as it is framed in the current language of regional public policy, the significance of persistent obfuscation of some groups while prioritizing the needs of others, thereby making very evident the perpetuating of entrenched systems of discrimination within clear policy objectives of the building of systems of gender equity. This paper draws some innovative parallels. One such parallel is found in its call on both policy making and activism to reflect on the complex relationships between the absence of gender justice for our gender non-conforming citizens and our persistent inability to provide for the poor, the homeless and the elderly regionally. It also leaves our advocacy and activism to grapple with whether it is at all possible to have a *gender policy in the absence*

of a gender polity, as is presently the case when populations, state machineries, advocates and practitioners speak with and past one another in the making of regional National Gender Policies.

The submissions to this issue remind us that at its best, policy is an enabling device between the needs of the population and the power of the state. Tracie Rogers' discussion is a meditation on the vulnerabilities that emerge when this population/power relationship is breeched, as it so often is. Rogers' work provokes us to think about the ways in which Caribbean youth are far too frequently marginalized from discussions of state care and responsibility and subsequent policy formulation. Her piece, ***Silence, Invisibility and Social Policy: Putting the Pieces Together with HIV Positive Youth*** foregrounds the structural vulnerabilities that hinder Caribbean youth from disclosing their HIV status. Rogers's work pushes back against these invisibilities by drawing on a participatory research methodology in which she positions her youth subjects as co-collaborators in a discussion of HIV/AIDS care.

The themes of advocacy, invisibilizing and the legitimizing of constituencies in policy making in the area of women and gender is also reflected in the Simone Leid's contribution to this issue of the CRGS.

Leid's paper, ***Legitimizing Virtual Constituencies: How CSOs are Using Digital Technologies to Enlarge the Space for Citizen Participation in Women and Gender Issues in the Caribbean***, places the politics of policy making squarely in a 21<sup>st</sup> century dialectic. She explores the place of online social movements in expanding the democratic possibilities by their ability to 'by-pass' traditional gatekeepers to impact on policy by creating innovative methodologies and tools to deepen ideas of legitimacy and reconfigure constituencies in the policy process. Leid's piece provides a real-time challenge to traditional regional feminist organizing. According to her, the opportunity presented to civil society by the virtual world, while it enlarges its constituency base, notions such as membership and representation are forced to be revisited. In the midst of this



challenge, the overview provided by Leid's research on regional cyber activism conducted by a web survey platform creates a rich and comprehensive reading of emerging forms of activism and the inevitable power of such a voice. Interestingly the power of one such voice of cyber activism is looked at by Amilcar Sanatan in the interview section of this issue of the CRGS.

Ideal type renderings of what "policy" might mean and do would suggest that policy formulation arises out of prisms of rationality. The façade of rationality invariably hides the ways in which it is analogous to the craft of sausage-making – messy in its process and consumed once contained. As editors, we wanted to lay bare both process and person. Mc Fee's interviews with Folade Mutota and Jane Parpart present insight into two different positionalities. Using an interactive and reflexive methodology, Parpart and McFee reflect on the efforts at mainstreaming gender within the state and argue for more capacious understandings of "gender" within the state's policy direction if gender mainstreaming is to achieve its intended goal of social equity and justice. McFee's conversation with Mutota offers a different tact in its engagement with Mutota's intersectional, activist encounters with both the Pan-Africanist and feminist movements in the Caribbean. Reading across these political terrains, the interview invites us to think about the synergies that have informed the growth of Caribbean feminisms and its imbricated entanglement with transracial politics, as well as socialist and Pan Africanist political sentiment.

Lastly, ***Enduring Sexed and Gendered Criminal Laws in the Anglophone Caribbean*** brings us to a legal commentary by Arif Bulkan and Tracy Robinson. Rooted in the need for public policy to open access to the varied forms that a just society could take, this commentary brings to the fore the power of strategic litigation as a mechanism to advance gender equity within the regional legal system. The commentary presents the work of the UWI Rights Advocacy Project (U-RAP), an outreach activity of the Faculty of Law The UWI established in 2009 concerned with promoting social justice and human rights in the Anglophone Caribbean. Bulkan and Robinson focus on U-Rap's work on law reform of the

indictable offence which criminalises “unnatural” sex in Belize, a summary offence in Guyana criminalising cross-dressing in public for an “improper purpose”. What becomes evident with a careful reading of this commentary is how much the historical, socio-cultural colonial-based legacy of Caribbean society is intricately tied to our treatment of gender, equality and citizenship in our legal systems. It reinforces the difficulty in divorcing our legal structures from our social realities. Additionally, the use of this legal example provides an ideal opportunity to unpack some of the conundrums and contradictions inherent in fulfilling policy commitments to gender justice and the protection of human rights within constrained notions of gender and gender identity. In the midst of these multiple conundrums this contribution makes evident the opportunity to the advancement of gender equity afforded by what Michelle Rowley refers to as a gender polity. Their strategic litigation and efforts at educating in order to influence public debates, might well offer a model of how we might begin the difficult conversations that inhabit gender policy making in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Adding to the activist bent of the issue, ***Social Media and Feminist Social Change in the Caribbean: An Interview with Ronelle King on #LifeInLeggings, an interview with Amilcar Sanatan***, focuses on a response to a very personal experience of the failings of those institutions designed to protect and serve regional populations from experiences of gender-based violence. The emergence and growth of #Lifeinleggings sheds a very critical light on regional policy responses to the oldest area of regional feminist activism. 24 year-old, self-identified feminist from St Michael Barbados, Ronelle King illustrates the power of the strategic use of the virtual world to compel policy makers to reflect on the critical need for us to increase regional activism around gender-based violence through a feminist-informed lens. Sanatan's exchange with King provides a very mindful mapping of some of the issues brought to bear in the Leid piece. One of the most thought-provoking issues is the fact that her activism, like Leid's, is borne out of a personal experience. The capacity of the virtual world to be a place where the personal can quickly become political activism is made very

clear and reinforced, as Sanatan provides us with the creatively logged details of his feminist conversation between Caribbean youth. Of particular importance to this conversation is its boundless capacity to provide a sketch of Caribbean gender relations, the processes of building gender justice as a mind space and the collaborative spaces that become pivotal for the sustaining and advancement of any movement.

The issue reviews Gabrielle Hosein and Jane Parpart's ***Negotiating Gender, Policy and Politics in the Caribbean: Feminist Strategies, Masculinist Resistance and Transformational Possibilities*** (2017). The edited collection is an empirically rich encounter with the policy efforts underway throughout the region toward the realization of gender justice. Tonya Haynes presents a careful and thorough review of the work – asking us, as she does, to now consider how the collection of essays builds and expands upon earlier scholarship in the field. We need only read the title of Jewel Fraser's review of Frédérique Bedos' documentary, "***Des Femmes et Des Hommes – A Missed Opportunity***," to grasp Fraser's level of dissatisfaction with Bedos' ability to convey the extent to which the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have enriched women's lives.

To some extent every submission to the issue is working through some aspect of a difficult conversation that forms a lens into policy making in the area of women and gender in the Anglophone Caribbean. We also saw this issue on gender and policy as an opportunity to think about the ways that we might complicate the ways that these conversations can be held. The need to find alternative ways of representing these difficult conversations, brings us to the art of ***Intersectionality and Imagery in the Caribbean Context*** by Dominique Hunter. Dominique Hunter is a young and upcoming Guyanese artist whose contribution to the issue offers a discussion of the politics of her art, alongside a clear critique of the ways in which Caribbean states have abdicated in providing support for the training and work of the region's artists. We close off the issue with two pieces of poetry, Amilcar Sanatan's "Nineteen Eighties Hymns: For the IMF and IBRD and Ministers of Finance" sings a "Sankey" for those harmed and promises

broken as a result of the work of the Bretton Woods institutions in the region. Kevisha Cordice's poignant and moving performance conveys the trauma and pain of sexual violence, its prevalence and its insidious infiltration into experiences of childhood. We end here, because the business of policy is unfinished business, the future is plentiful but our hope is that the heaviness you feel as you listen to this poem will be harnessed into demanding a policy framework that is accountable to issues of justice.

The "inner life" of policy-making tends to get our attention only when the gaps between planning and implementation become untenable (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, & Fritzen, 2010). This issue we have aimed to preempt this logic by highlighting the many ways in which policy processes are rife with inconsistencies, irrationality and absence of coordination, despite efforts to render it as a rational process. The experience of post-colonial states in the area of women and gender, such as those located in the Anglophone Caribbean, compels us to look beyond the significance of policy making as the pursuit and the valuing of absolutes, towards a more organic re-reading of the idea of objectivity. This issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* brings us into a more organic reflection of the uses, definitions and processes of policy making as it relates to the Anglophone Caribbean. The essays, interviews, artistic contributions and commentaries carefully capture a host of researched positions, perceptions and viewpoints that facilitate an interwoven mapping of the politics of policy making as it pertains to women, gender and development. The authors and contributors in some way speak to each other and elucidate various points within each other's work.

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