

EDITORIAL

Introducing the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies

Knowledge is one of the major commodities being bartered today. This is not a contemporary development. Knowledge has always been associated with the currencies of power and control. What is new at this time are the methods by which technologies of knowledge dissemination have transformed how we acquire and are given access to information. The Caribbean, like many other societies, are major downloaders of information from multiple sites, such as cable channel television and the internet. While these methods provide us with uncritical and incredulous amounts of data from other societies, unless we also become major uploaders of our knowledge and creative ideas, we are placed in a poor bargaining position in this new system of power where information has become a major resource. We need to tap into inventive technologies of publishing that might allow us to reach more people in a relatively short time and at reduced costs of dissemination of hard copy material. Admittedly, this is still limited to users who have access to technology and equipment. What is exciting about the new sites for publishing, however, is that it also expands the formats for publishing, so that not only can we access the written word, but through spiralling innovations in digital technologies, we have the possibility of including sound and image along with the written text.

The Centre for Gender and Development Studies joins a large number of educational institutions and departments already in this brave new world of online publishing. While current uses of technology for website publishing and surfing has wide appeal to a younger generation who are savvy with the keyboard and software, the space is equally available to a globally linked scholarly publishing world presenting numerous opportunities to the well known along with emerging scholars and practitioners in various fields. An added bonus of online publication is that it opens the window for a relatively more fast-paced dissemination of the work of university departments whose business it is to interrogate existing knowledge and generate critical scholarship. A cautionary line, nonetheless, needs to be drawn. Online publications must observe the conventional methods of rigorous peer review and the editorial standards required of academic journals and scholarly publishing.

Although gender studies in the Caribbean has been prolific in its output over the last decades, the ideas generated by Caribbean gender scholars remain limited to few on the map of feminist scholarship. Yet, this is precisely the way in which the global gender discourse has been shaped, through the theorists whose work have captured the imagination of many, rather than eyes of the few. The differently placed theoretical and empirical concerns that trouble Caribbean scholars rarely emerge as compelling ones on the international scene, not because they are without merit, but because the ideas do not circulate or penetrate sufficiently to compel serious response and exchange. Without comparative dialogues, the issues and concerns that have been raised, and the kinds of work being carried out in gender studies in this part of the world, remain on the margins of gender scholarship rather than central to some of the new questions now being articulated. For example, in her paper in this issue *Going global? Transnationality,*

Women/Gender Studies, and Lessons from the Caribbean, Alissa Trotz, a Guyanese-born scholar located in Canada, writes that she sees the Caribbean as a space that produces knowledge with important lessons for a remapping of women/gender studies in a Canadian context. She begins to respond to another question that also concerns Caribbean gender scholars “[U]nder what circumstances are we able to claim that we belong to other significant locations that enable new theoretical and political connections?”

How might we in the Caribbean benefit from greater cross-cultural exchanges with scholars based in different locations who are similarly concerned with the gap that has emerged in feminism and gender studies between those who make theory and those who do not, between those who create knowledge, and those who are ostensibly outside this reconstructed elitist space. Ideas take a while to infuse themselves into different empirical realities. Yet, the knowledge economy is built through the generation of ideas and empirical data that speak to a multiplicity of scenarios that reach beyond a provincial audience. These are only a few of the concerns that have influenced the publishing of an open access online journal *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies (CRGS)* from The Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. To ensure and maintain the strict standards of publishing, the journal has drawn on the expertise of colleagues both regionally and internationally who serve in editorial, advisory or review capacities. In this first issue, I thank those who in agreeing to work alongside us have indicated their commitment to our goals, among these to make the best of our scholarship available to the widest range of users and to advance our engagement in a global forum of exchange.

In this issue, the journal sets out to establish a formative identity, recognising that the process of identity creation is itself ongoing and open-ended. Implicit in its title is the multiple meanings suggested by the word *review*, meaning variously to present analyses, to facilitate appraisal of ongoing work, to create a space for the *re*-viewing of gender through dialogues that concern gender in the academy and communities we serve, and to ensure that these are reviewed critically by users both within and external to the Caribbean. The *CRGS* brings together a wide-ranging set of papers: thus, its first characteristic if you like is that it is deliberately broad based uniting scholarship, creativity and activism in gender studies and feminism in a seamless interplay that is the hallmark of our institution. The Centre for Gender and Development Studies was formally institutionalised on the multi-campus University of the West Indies in 1993 after over a decade of preliminary work that led to its official departmental recognition. Its mandate is that of Teaching, Research and Outreach in almost equal measure, with the understanding that each of these areas was not mutually exclusive of the other. While the demands of academic production in gender and feminist research and theorizing are as crucial to our production of knowledge, so is the interface which must be established with government and non-government organizations, individual readers and a wide collective of users who belong to distance education programmes, secondary schools and the public whom we serve. The journal attempts to reach those within and outside the region, does not limit itself primarily to an academic audience, although its academic component is both rigorous and rich, and retains the lion’s share of the publication. It strives to connect

with an audience of users in a forum that is deliberately filtered through the distinctiveness of a Caribbean voice and lens.

Filtered through a Caribbean lens: Engaging new technologies of gender

This first volume of the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies, sub-themed in the immediate heading above, establishes a cross section of academic, scholarly, and creative essays that provide exploratory sites to continue our gender and feminist discussions. It is necessary to explain, as Editor my own separation of these two terms gender and feminism. In the first, I refer to the conceptual category of *gender* as it is applied, theorized, acted upon and continually undergoing redefinition and meanings. By *feminism*, I refer to the politics and activism involved in this area of work, a consciousness and agreement that gender equality is a prominent goal in the path of development, even while there are different routes one might take to work towards this goal.

The varied spheres of engagement in scholarship, which derive from gender studies and feminism activism within the region, are approached from many different angles and positionalities in this journal. In this sense, the journal is a free-thinking space in the old-fashioned sense of the word, imposing on each scholar or contributor no theoretical or ideological limits other than a profound interest in their subject matter and a commitment to the goals of good writing and thinking.

In *Diversity Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism*, Rhoda Reddock proposes that “feminist scholars have contributed a great deal towards deconstructing the categories of ‘race’, ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ where women, in particular, have been ‘othered’ in their relations and positioned as markers of ‘racial, ethnic and national difference” both within and between societies. She examines, through the work of the early 20th Century feminists in the Anglophone Caribbean, how the women’s movement have interacted, negotiated, and created alliances and coalitions or sought to challenge racialized hierarchies and divisions in their everyday praxis. The contributions of the women’s movement to the politics of nation, state and society remain primary areas for younger scholars to review and analyse. This paper opens a path to examination of this theme in coming issues.

Shaheeda Hosein, a historian, disputes a popular construction of East Indian femininity in the Caribbean as passive in *A Space of Their Own: Indian Women and Land Ownership in Trinidad 1870-1945*. She demonstrates through historical evidence that the commodity of land ownership offered Indian indentured and post indentured women the opportunities for independence, family survival, social status and religious freedoms. In uncovering this data, if anything, Hosein presents the story of all migrant women of any race as more alike than different and thus defies a notion of uniqueness of any one racialized group in the process of adjustment after displacement, other than the cultural traditions they draw on to do so and the opportunities made possible in new settings.

Nicole Roberts in *Racialised Identities, Caribbean Realities: Analysing Black Female Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry* segues into to Spanish-speaking language groups

of women engaged with issues of race and identity formation. Roberts analyzes representations of femininity in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean verse, privileging the black female voice. She looks at representations of women in the poetry of three twentieth century female poets, Cuban born Excilia Saldaña (1946-1999), Puerto Rican Mayra Santos Febres (1966) and Dominicana Aída Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994), exploring how the poets see themselves in the role of definers or shapers of Hispanic Caribbean identity. The three female poets in some measure succeed in deconstructing myths surrounding black female identity, while providing a broad platform for discussion of the racially problematic reality of colour differentiation that still prevails in the contemporary Hispanic Caribbean.

The gender discourse in the Caribbean has never been isolated from an ongoing dialogue with masculinity, a feature well recorded in the gender scholarship of the region from its inception¹. Linden Lewis, in *Man Talk, Masculinity and a Changing Social Environment*, grapples with the full range of pressures and influences on Caribbean men's conception of what masculinity means in the region today. This paper reflects on how Caribbean men have traditionally communicated with each other, directly and indirectly. Lewis argues against a separatist politics between the sexes, suggesting that even while men accept the responsibility of shaping manhood and masculinity, that the internal debate amongst themselves must take cognisance of women's right to be treated equally before the law, in the workplace, and in the home.

While Gabrielle Hosein continues to flesh out the contributions of her PhD dissertation entitled "Everybody Have to Eat: Politics in Trinidadian Public Life" for University College, London, she shares the visual data and insights she has harvested from ethnographic field work in a photographic essay *Masculinities in Motion*. The visibility of masculinity in a discourse in gender which has been for too long been dismissed in the Caribbean and elsewhere as "dem woman ting" is a commitment in feminism, not to privilege the masculine over the feminine, but to see masculinity as also composed of many parts and not set in an unyielding patriarchal plaster mould. Her essay here reveals male narratives that expose how pride, love, livelihood, family, ambition or violence are all interwoven with masculinity.

This song and dance in the performance of gender is carried out in multiple sites, each with different interactions and effects on how gender practices and attitudes are shaped in any culture. In *Dancehalls, Masquerades, Body Protest and the Law: The Female Body as Redemptive Tool Against Trinidad and Tobago's Gender-Biased Laws*, US based scholar, Michèle Alexandre compares and contrasts United States concerns with those of Trinidad and Tobago. Alexandre argues that feminist jurisprudence must identify women's bodies as tools for redemption against sexual profiling, sexism and patriarchy.

¹ For instance the Women in the Caribbean Research Project carried out between 1979 and 1982 initiated by Joycelin Massiah, then Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at UWI, Barbados, and the inaugural seminar on teaching and research in gender at the UWI in 1986 published by 1988 in *Gender and Caribbean Development* Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (Eds) both involved a collaboration with male colleagues.

She challenges the existence of a range of acceptable morality practices that are generally used to evaluate women's behaviours and justify sexual profiling.

Aisha Mohammed, a young scholar from California, USA, who spent a Fulbright year at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies carrying out research in Trinidad, takes the examination of gender to song and stage. Chutney-soca is commonly perceived to be a fusion of 'chutney', an Indo-Trinidadian folk music originally performed during Hindu weddings, and 'soca', which is Afro-Trinidadian fête music that developed through a mixture of calypso with soul. In *Love and Anxiety: Gender Negotiations in Chutney-Soca Lyrics*, she suggests that the lyrics and performance of this relatively new musical form provide a public forum for both Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian sex/gender belief systems to come into intense interaction, resulting in real and symbolic disruptions in the Indian system of gender relations. Aisha Mohammed concludes that these disruptions can result in the reconfiguration of gender relations for Indian women and men at a metaphoric level, thus continuing the destabilization of gender norms as these are constantly being renegotiated in a society through different media.

Composing architectural stills of the fast-paced salsa dance in black and white photographs, Puerto Rican photographer and professor of architect design, Ivonne Maria Marcial, unsettles our gaze on bodies in the movement of a dance. In the photographic essay *La Salsa Nuestra de Cada Dia*, the dance might be viewed either as a communication of bodies in harmony or as a violent interlude between a man and a woman. The privileging of sight over sound, movement or text, offers new technologies for the unwrapping of gender, approaches which have as yet not been sufficiently confronted in the region's scholarship.

The decoding of the visual text has become central to my own scholarship in gender in the Caribbean over the last decade. Patricia Mohammed's *Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque* presents an iconographic reading of images of the colonial past to the present, focusing on how the gendered has been made picturesque in paintings and photographs of subjects captured in the European artistic or travellers' gaze. Adding to this stare, I am conscious of the act of repetition, reproducing the same images while attempting to reinvent the gaze. I am challenged with an ideological and theoretical conundrum, faced not only by the scholar in visuality but parallels with the theoretical and ideological stance of some postcolonial writing. In what tone or stance does one view the subject, whether female or racialized, drawn from a subjugated past? The dominant tendency is to depict postcolonial subject or the subordinate gender either as victims or caught persistently in heroic resistance in the face of the odds. Both binary positions are incapable of dealing with different kinds of agency enacted by real people living their daily lives. Preserving the gaze under lowered western eyelids does not deal with the systematic "othering" that is constantly being reproduced, including that within the region. Perhaps adding to our textual discourses, the reading representation practices of gender in the Caribbean offers new technologies of decoding the past and the present.

Among the technologies not directly confronted have been those of gender and sexuality. The journal therefore invites the boldly titled contribution by Crista Mohammed,

Subverting the Gay-Lesbian Agenda: A Re-examination of Shani Mootoo's 'Cereus Blooms at Night'. Crista Mohammed examines Mootoo's fictional novel set in Trinidad as it explores dichotomies, inner compulsions and outer markers of sexuality and gender and so establishes a continuum of sexual identities and sexual behaviours in antithesis to the male-female, masculine-feminine polarities. Crista argues, however, that there are instances where the novel contradicts its own agenda and that although Mootoo achieves the goal of undermining heterosexual privilege and subverting entrenched binary constructions of gender and sexual identity, rather than challenging hegemonic modes of belonging, the novel at times "ossifies them".

Perhaps a primary difference regarding 'gender work' in the Caribbean is the extent to which gender scholars are consistently involved in the generation of policy at national and regional levels. As the principal institution engaged actively in research on gender in the region, the CGDS promotes the value of research driven policy and intervention. This ongoing experience with practitioners on the field affords a space for grounded theory through praxis. In *30 Years Towards Equality: How Many More? The Mandate of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in Promoting Gender Justice in the Barbadian state*, Eudine Barriteau examines the role of the Barbadian Bureau of Gender Affairs in gender intervention. Barriteau challenges the value of the concept of *gender equality* in the popular gender mainstreaming discourse, arguing instead that we need to be considering more carefully the promotion of the goal of equality through an understanding of what *gender justice* demands.

Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation is the report of a seminar at Emory University, Atlanta on March 29, 2003 convened by Amira Jarmakani, Donna Troka and three other postgraduate colleagues, in the wake of the post 9/11 trauma of the USA. The five young women brought together four scholar/activists in a public exchange of paradigms for survival to tell stories about the work that they do, in order to find out how people and societies move on from critical moments in their lives. They locate in these story-telling analyses an empathetic contact point with others, pulling on the time honoured tradition of the sharing of experience, and on the principles of second wave feminism, the personal is political. The journal is pleased to offer a voice to brave initiatives like this from young scholars by publishing their rendering of this dialogue.

Research leads to valuable insights on priorities and concerns of societies. Largely published in monographs that are often not widely accessible to users, the findings of such research frequently remain outside the knowledge base of the populations who may benefit from these encounters. In this issue, two research initiatives are given exposure. In the first, "*A Gift from God*": *Gender and the Feminist Ethnography of Water in Three Trinidadian Communities*, Diana Fox, Heidi Savery, and Ron Dalton report on a preliminary ethnographic study of water acquisition and management processes in three Trinidadian communities. In this component of the Gender and Water research and activist project of the CGDS, Fox et al examined the impact of gender ideologies as a key component in the decisions, work patterns, values and meanings associated with water for people of the three communities. In the second, an ongoing and long-term research and

activist project of the CGDS entitled *The Making of Caribbean Feminisms* is given attention. One component of this project involves the collection of biographies of women and men who have played important roles in the making of feminism in this Region. In each issue, the journal will allocate space to publishing some of these biographies. In this one, we focus on two women Diana Mahabir-Wyatt and Brenda Gopeesingh culled from interviews carried out by Kimberly Byng and Michelle Seeraj.

A regular feature of every issue will be book reviews of titles that relate to the Caribbean either directly or through comparison. Adele Jones reviews the book *Caribbean Mothers: Identity and Experience in the U.K.* by Tracey Reynolds while Donna Drayton reviews *Midlife and Older Women Family Life, Work and Health in Jamaica* by Joan Rawlins.

With ensuing issues, we know that this journal will develop a wider catchment of contributors through its readership. This first issue has necessarily focussed on work from scholars working in Trinidad in particular. At least three of the papers contained began as seminar presentations at the CGDS, St Augustine. Originally, these would have been published as hard copy working papers and reached a more limited audience. While this issue has concentrated on beginning an online global conversation and providing a clearinghouse for some of our in-house material, it is equally geared to encourage cross-cultural dialogues through different mechanisms. Users of this first issue are invited to write responses and enter a conversation with any works published here. With the individual scholar's and editor's permission, these will be published in further issues. We also welcome independent papers, particularly those with comparative and cross-cultural perspective of relevance to the Caribbean. The journal invites readers and users to engage in gender scholarship and activism through new technologies of seeing, hearing, listening and speaking gender.

As creator and first guest editor of the journal, I must extend thanks to those who have worked assiduously with me to make this first issue possible. We thank Frank Soodeen and Charlene Woo Ling at the UWI Main library for ideas associated with online publishing, Diana Fox for unselfish sharing of the process that she initiated at Bridgewater State College, Massachusetts, Marsha Pearce, graphic artist for her design concept, Linda Speth and Donna Muirhead of UWI Press, Kingston Jamaica for also sharing trade secrets in publishing, Nazma Muller for her editorial support, Michelle Seeraj for her photo editing skills and Daren Dhoray and Kerry Bullock of UWI Campus IT services for their readiness in providing the IT advice and support that this initiative required. The backbone of all publication is the consistency of follow up, communication and networking required. In this respect, colleagues on the Editorial and Advisory Boards have been highly supportive, with many of them also serving as Reviewers for the Journal. To all Reviewers thank you for your time generously given. We are afraid that such dedication will only be rewarded with further calls on your time and look forward to a long and rewarding relationship. To paper contributors, thank you for agreeing to publish with us in this maiden issue, apologies for delays and pushing back of deadlines, put this down to the teething pains of bringing out any new publication series. The most profound thanks, however, must be given to Donna Drayton, Editorial Assistant who has

assiduously kept this journal on track despite time and impetus derailments, keeping a steady hand on the email reply function, to all of us, but primarily to me.

Patricia Mohammed
Guest Editor