



Engendering Local Government in the Commonwealth Caribbean

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Violet Eudine Barriteau

Lecturer and Head

CGDS, Nita Barrow Unit, The UWI, Cave Hill Campus

Now

Professor of Gender and Public Policy and

Principal, The UWI Cave Hill Campus

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Author's Note

Undertaking the research for this paper proved to be a challenging exercise. A theme such as 'The Experience of Engendering Local Government in the Commonwealth Caribbean' assumes that information on local government exists and what is perhaps lacking is how women have fared in local government structure. Instead I found there is a paucity of information on local government in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Very little documented, accessible information exists. Library searches and different types of consultations and referrals reveal inadequate sources of information on women and local government. I was forced to modify the title of the paper because at this phase we do not yet know the experiences of women and local government.

Attempting to find material to write this paper underscored the negligence accorded to this aspect of political participation by political scientists and other researchers. Feminist researchers, political scientists and historians have yet to address the area of women and local government. To do justice to this inquiry, investigations into primary sources are required. Information on women and local government must be unearthed and analysed. This requires visits to countries for archival searches, assessments of original documents and interviews with key players. In the absence of all of these, I have attempted an outline of the profile and experiences of women in local government drawing on the experiences of women and political participation at the national level.

I wish to thank my staff for their generous assistance in putting together this paper. They are Mrs Veronica Jones, Ms Sherry Asgill, Ms Rhonda Walcott and Mrs Catherine Gibson. I appreciate your dedication and professionalism.

Engendering Local Government in the Commonwealth Caribbean¹

From the feminist point of view the questions of women's collective reality and how to change it merges with the question of women's point of view and how to know it²

The feminist struggle to reconfigure identities and gender relationships is an essential moment in the reconstruction of the institutions of civil and political society... Indeed conventional gender roles are so deeply entrenched in our identities that they blind us to the political injustices which are only graspable with the shifts in these roles³

Introduction and background

The Commonwealth Caribbean comprises twelve independent countries of Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. It includes four British dependencies with limited self government. These are Anguilla, The British Virgin Islands, The Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat. The two remaining full British dependencies in the Commonwealth Caribbean are Bermuda and The Cayman Islands.

The Commonwealth Caribbean is geographically a small region with a total population in 1992 of just over five and a half million people. Only Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have populations that exceed one million. See Table 1.

The United Nations 1995 Human Development Report classify Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, St. Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago as having high Human Development Indices [UNDP 1995: 226]. Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia and St Vincent are ranked with a Medium Development Index. The majority of countries are ranked as middle income with a per capita GNP between US\$696 - 8,625.00. The exceptions are The Bahamas which is the only Commonwealth Caribbean country ranked with a high per capita income US\$8,625 or greater; and Guyana listed as low income with a per capita income of US\$695 or lower [UNDP 1995].

Table 1
Basic socioeconomic indicators for
Commonwealth Caribbean countries
1989-92

	Population 1992	%F	%M	GNP/Capita (US\$) 1990	External debt service ratio (%) 1990	Life expectancy at birth (years)1991	Infant mortality rate per 1000, 1990	Daily calorie intake 1989
The Bahamas	255,095	51.0	49.0	11,510	2.3	69	25	2,761
Barbados	262,653	52.1	47.9	6,540	13.7	77	10	3,279
Antigua & Barbuda	85,700	n.a	n.a	4,600	4.7	73	19	2,222
Trinidad & Tobago	1,283,000	50.1	49.9	3,470	19.0	71	25	2,853
St.. Kitts and Nevis	41,800	n.a	n.a	3,330	2.5	69	36	2,609
Grenada	91,200	n.a	n.a	2,120	7.3	70	31	2,706
Belize	189,392	49.1	50.9	1,970	4.1	67	45	2,656
Dominica	71,500	50.2	49.8	1,940	1.6	75	16	2,810
St.. Lucia	135,975	51.5	48.5	1,900	2.8	71	19	2,595
St.. Vincent & the Grenadines	107,600	51.0	49.0	1,610	31.0	70	22	2,604
Jamaica	2,460,000	50.9	49.1	1,510	-	73	16	2,609
Guyana	717,458	50.8	49.2	370	-	64	51	2,710
Turks & Caicos	12,300	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	74	2	n.a
Anguilla	9,700	n.a	n.a	n.a	1.0	75	5.3	n.a
British Virgin Is	17,000	48.7	51.3	n.a	n.a	69	29.8	n.a
Montserrat	11,000	50.3	49.7	n.a	4.7	71	11	n.a

Source: Towards Equity in Development: A report on the status of women in sixteen Commonwealth Caribbean Countries [Mondesire and Dunn 1995].

Race and Ethnicity

Socio-economic and demographic features merge with racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics that are relevant to understanding women's political participation in the region. A racially mixed population is one of the legacies of our history. Afro Caribbean people dominate in the populations of The Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean countries. In Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana the population is almost equally composed of Indo Caribbean and Afro Caribbean people. Forty nine to fifty one percent of the population of each country is of Asian, East Indian ancestry. In Trinidad and Tobago East Indian women were 39.6% of the total female population in 1980 [Mohammed 1988: 382]. However, East Indian labourers are also part of the migration legacy of Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. If Indo Caribbean women constitute a significant percentage of the population of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, can we expect their proportionate participation for women involved in local government? If not, how does culture and ethnicity complicate political participation and skewed gender relations? In Barbados, Barbadians of European origin form about 4% of the population [Barbados 1992]. There are also Caribbean citizens of Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish and French descent [Mondesire and Dunn 1995:13].

Belize is probably the most diverse country ethnically. Its population comprises Creoles, Mestizos, Garinagu or Garifuna, Mayan and Ketchi Mayan, and Mennonites [Mondesire and Dunn 1995: 13]. The population of African ancestry accounts for 36.4%, but the Mestizo population is the largest single segment, at 43.6% [Belize 1991].

Indigenous peoples constitute small but significant numbers in the population of Guyana, Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. See Table 2. In all these countries they are among the poorest of the population. They suffer

from shortages of basic infrastructure and have marginal access to the resources of the state [Mondesire and Dunn 1995: 15].

These populations include constituencies of women we know very little about. We need dialogue and research with indigenous women so that their concerns can reshape the political agenda. For instance, the Carib territory in Dominica represents one of the oldest forms of local government in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Its functioning and the place of women within it is extremely critical to our understanding of local government. Its existence simultaneously blends issues of race, ethnicity and gender with the rights of indigenous Caribbean people.

Table 2 Amerindian population 1994	
COUNTRY	POPULATION
Guyana	40,619
Dominica	3,400
St.. Vincent/Grenadines	6,000
Belize	26,000
Trinidad/Tobago	400
TOTAL	76,419

Source: Towards Equity in Development: A report on the
the status of women

Conceptual Issues on Gender and Governance

Commonwealth Caribbean countries have political structures derived from the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy. Elections are held regularly and changes of government are relatively peaceful although Jamaica has experienced some political violence during campaign periods leading up to general elections. The 1996 general elections in Guyana have been followed by political protests, street demonstrations, a CARICOM investigation and a rejection of the election results by the opposition PNC because of alleged widespread irregularities, some of which have been documented.

By the 1950's many of the structural obstacles to Caribbean⁴ women's participation in the political processes of classical democracy had been removed⁵. At the beginning of that decade the British colonial authorities widened the narrow franchise of earlier decades to give the vote to all women and men 21 years and over [Emmanuel 1979:1].

Yet possessing a *de jure* right to vote and to stand for elections has not produced a *de facto* inclusion and representation of women at all levels in Caribbean political systems. It has not transcended national government structures to be a common feature at the level of local government. Women in commonwealth Caribbean countries continue to experience a combination of subsystemic material and ideological barriers that thwart their full participation in the practices of governance nationally and at the community level.

Women and men committed to participatory democratic structures regard local government as one of the main institutions for reconstructing civil and political society. Bishnu Ragoonath defines local government as self government involving the administration of public affairs in each locality by a body of representatives. According to him it is a tier of government separate and distinct from central government but working in close partnership with it [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994: 2].

There are conceptual and ideological points of departure in those views of local government. In reality local government functions in the Caribbean to achieve several objectives. Where elections are held it maintains the presence of competing political parties at the constituency/community level. Through local government, parties can attempt to ensure their bases of support are not eroded while they pursue more global developmental policies. Local government also manages delivery of public goods and services and is presumed to do so more efficiently than central or national administrations. However local government in the Caribbean has not yet realised its potential for introducing more participatory, democratic processes.

A commitment to engender local government attempts to harness political will to remove, or at the least close the political gaps between women's *de jure* right to participate in the governing of their communities and their *de facto* experience of continuing albeit varying, levels of exclusion. It is an attempt to ensure that women make an input into the formulation of policy and the allocation of resources at the level where the state and civil society are in constant contact. Local government policy should be influenced by the people who have to live its prescriptions. Given our disproportionately high incidence of female headed households as revealed in Table 3, the circumstances of women's lives should influence local government policy as it should policy at the national level. Many policies introduced by local and national governments will affect women immediately.

As tax payers women form an important part of the tax base. If social services are reduced or expanded, as clients of these services policy makers must be aware of women's needs. As the main providers in the families they head there should be mechanisms for women to feed their concerns into the making of public policy. Finally as government workers who will deliver many of the public goods and services at the local level, government needs to draw on the service of women as public workers.

TABLE 3

**PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS
IN SELECTED CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES
(1980, 1985 AND 1992)**

COUNTRY	1980	1985	1992
Anguilla	n.a	n.a	33.2
Antigua/Barbuda	n.a	n.a	n.a
Bahamas	n.a	34.5	35.8
Barbados	43.9	n.a	43.5
Belize	22.4	28.5	22.0
Br. Virgin Islands	25.4	n.a	28.7
Dominica	37.7	n.a	39.7
Grenada	45.2	n.a	42.7
Guyana	24.4	28.3	29.5
Jamaica	38.1	29.8	42.0
Montserrat	42.1	n.a	40.0
St.Kitts/Nevis	45.6	n.a	43.9
St.. Lucia	38.8	n.a	40.4
St.. Vincent/Grenadines	42.4	n.a	39.5
Trinidad/Tobago	25.0	n.a	26.5
Turks/Caicos	32.4	n.a	n.a

SOURCE: Towards Equity in Development: A report on the status of women

Women as citizens represent more than themselves when they negotiate or are denied negotiations for inclusion in local government. Caribbean women also represent a constituency of children and older dependents. Their needs and political relevance are not always articulated as primary citizens with an equal claim on the resources of the political system. Engendering local government strives to give women a collective political voice, to create a strong political base for policies that are just, equitable and people centred. Without a strong political base, institutions for women will be anchored in interventions based on goodwill and patronage [Govender 1997: 2] rather than the right to stake a claim as equal citizens.

Where does the required political will come from? It must come from women and men committed to exposing political spaces and political processes as gendered and biased against women rather than gender neutral. Many of the regional reports and papers on engendering local government assume an *a priori* commitment to equality by deploying the terminology of >gender= and >engendering=. I explore and discuss the genealogy of gender and the conceptual confusion of the concept elsewhere [Barriteau 1996]. Suffice it to note that gender analysis goes beyond sex-disaggregated data and filling the blanks in analyses of the organisation of social life for areas lacking in information on women. While noting gender has a pre-feminist genealogy in biology, linguistics and grammar, the concept functions in feminist discourse and its applied fields, to reveal how the structures within the social and political world produce and reproduce male domination and female subordination [Meehan 1995: 1]. Once we recognise engendering government constitutes an attempt to reverse women's political and societal subordination we are better equipped to understand why its implementation is fraught with difficulties.

The concept and practice of governance also bears some discussion. Governance is pivotal in any assessment and discussion of engendering local government. Neville Duncan insists that governance must include the most legitimate instruments of democracy. That is, participation and consensus

building [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994: 20]. He goes on to add good governance must include: human rights, an adequate notion of democratic functioning, honest and competent public administration, an efficient public service, and sound management processes [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994: 20]. However, citizens can come close to realising this wish list for the functioning of local government without the empowerment of women or the engendering of the processes of governing.

Engendering local government requires altering power relations to ensure greater political participation by women. Governance facilitates participation that must enable women to initiate actions and determine outcomes that seek to change existing social, political and economic systems and norms in order to equalize asymmetric relations of gender [IWTC 1997: 18]. Engendering local government is an exercise in reconstituting institutions and relationships of civil and political society to achieve gender justice.

To engender local government is an attempt to change the balance of political power at the community level to be more inclusive of women and gender issues. It tries to correct for earlier processes of citizenship that viewed women as politically irrelevant. The existence of local government promises a greater democratisation of governmental structures and greater power sharing in the practices of governing. It implies a devolution of state power from concentrated national centres to diverse local peripheries. Engendering local government therefore requires we use the conceptual tools of governance and power sharing to analyze women's experiences in local government.

Engendering local government through power sharing and governance forces us to consider two main issues:

1. Expansion of the capacity of the state to manage its affairs by empowering women through the process of

greater democratisation.

2. The linking of the state and civil society to transform the state from within [Jain 1996: 9].

Empowering women through political participation constitutes qualitative and quantitative change in Caribbean political systems and cultures. Expanding the capacity of the state makes demands on the resources of the state. It requires the state to allocate resources for personnel, bureaucracies, technologies and programmes. Even though it may be costly this change is easier to implement because the means of effecting it is *material*.

On the other hand empowering women in politics, or engendering governance requires fundamental reorganisation of our political culture, it is essentially *ideological*. Empowering women places pressure on the value systems of states. Research on Caribbean state systems reveals these systems are patriarchal and exclusionary of women's interest in the public domain [Henry-Wilson 1989; Barriteau 1994; Reddock 1994; Mohammed 1994]. Empowering women problematizes the power vacuum women still experience as citizens. It questions our system of values and our ethical culture. It requires a reordering of power relations to enhance gender justice in the public domain. At the core of the will to empower women is the contradictory tension between enabling women to have political power as a means of creating more democratic, participatory and just political and economic structures, and the enduring ideology that women should be subordinate to men. Empowering women is ideological in nature. It requires re-examining asymmetric ideological relations of gender that reinforce women's exclusion. Altering this is considerably more challenging.

Most of the literature discussing the desirability of women's greater political participation sidesteps a discussion on the issue of power and the required new practices of power sharing. Instead the discussion focuses on expanding

governmental capacity and removing structural barriers by enhancing women's political skills. Great emphasis is placed on leadership training and networking. These strategies are very necessary and must be pursued. However, it is naive to assume that women can be integrated from the local to the national level of political participation and leadership without resistance. We must face the fact that women's political inclusion alters power relations. This will be resisted by men and women who have grown accustomed to or are vested in maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

Devaki Jain makes the point that integration of women into local government not only links the state and civil society, but that it holds out the possibility of transforming the state from within. This is unlike pressure groups and other NGOs that attempt to transform political representation by pressuring the state from outside [Jain 1996: 9]. In other words engendering local government becomes the Trojan horse invading the gendered, exclusionary and very problematic political/public sphere and radically transforming it.

There are some powerful assumptions underlying this insistence that participation and governance be engendered. It goes beyond the concern that at 50% of the population, women deserve to have 50% of the political representation. Engendering governance assumes women bring both a different style of leadership to governance and a different matrix of concerns. There is some evidence that women do approach leadership differently. Judy Rosener in examining women leaders in business finds that women have a more nurturing consensus style of leadership [Rosener 1990]. Devaki Jain assumes that women will make the state more sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice.

Whereas I do believe women and men may differ in leadership and management styles and may even focus on different concerns, I want to caution against an essentialist, reductionist interpretation of women's political

involvement. Instead I want to argue for recognising the importance of feminist consciousness and commitment in shaping the political agenda for women in politics. As a strategy this feminist consciousness must be nurtured in women interested in or involved in politics. I do not accept that women have an innate capacity "to care" more than men and will (devoid of lifelong socialization and acquisition of a gender identity constructed on nurturing) automatically make more humane, less corrupt leaders than men.

Maxine Henry-Wilson reports that on several occasions female parliamentarians in Jamaica refused to identify with women's interests and instead chose to articulate "a party line". [Henry-Wilson 1989: 244]. She used these occurrences to question whether a female community of interests exists. It does, but subscribing to it comes from a conscious decision to oppose women's subordination and not from the anatomy of being female. Or as stated by Johanna Meehan, "Before one can join the struggle, one has to be able to see there is one. Thus 'consciousness raising' becomes a crucial strategy which precedes and makes possible the universalist demands for equal rights" [Meehan 1995:8].

In Barbados in 1991 The National Democratic Party (NDP), sought to exploit the fact that it fielded seven female candidates for the general elections. The party boasted it had introduced a women's platform, and a women's agenda to the election campaign. It did not. The party sought to manipulate the fact that it was the only party with so many female candidates [Barriteau 1992]. The women in the party did not articulate any of the issues confronting women in Barbados who head 43.5% of households [Mondesire and Dunn 1995:113]. This was during the introduction of a structural adjustment and stabilization campaign. The effect of the latter on women in the Caribbean is well documented [Barriteau 1996]. The women's campaign rhetoric and pronouncements were the same as the male candidates in the NDP. There was no sensitivity to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice because these female politicians had not problematized the context of women's lives in a

developing country [Barriteau 1992]. They neither sought to speak to women's reality nor were they interested in women's point of view.

As a strategy for empowering women and engendering local government, a critical mass of women in politics is necessary but this is insufficient. Women and men in politics must understand how unjust gender relations impinge on women's lives, skew the distribution of resources within society, and contribute to maintaining inequalities that are inimical for women, children and men.

Women and Political Participation

Women seeking elected public office are in a position unlike that of women in any other area of endeavour. Direct public competition between men and women take place only in electoral office ... Electoral office is about the only place where there is direct competition between men and women in a public forum.⁶

One has to work much harder to achieve success⁷.

Before I examine women's experiences within local government, I review women and political involvement in the Commonwealth Caribbean. I want to demonstrate that the difficulties women may experience in becoming fully integrating in the governing structures of local government are part of an historical continuum of an uneasy relationship between women and political participation and leadership in the Commonwealth Caribbean. I also want to establish that Caribbean women have been struggling for political inclusion for a long time [Reddock 1990, 1994; Henry-Wilson 1989]. The historical data reveal some continuities between women's experiences then and now.

According to Bishnu Ragoonath local government in one form or another exists in nine commonwealth Caribbean countries. These are Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994:2]. He notes that only in Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are the local government representatives and councils elected [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994:2]. In the case of Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent the local government councils are supervised by local government officers appointed by the central government [Commonwealth Secretariat 1994: 2].

Women's involvement in political parties, parliaments, governmental bodies and administrative managerial positions map out the broad contours for assessing women's experiences in local government. It indicates the extent to which the engendering of local government is viable or symbolic manipulation. Maxine Henry-Wilson states the latter is frequently employed 'to placate and neutralize the mass of the public and those sections of the populations who possess minimal effective decision-making powers' [Henry-Wilson 1989: 247].

Almost as soon as the political process allowed it, Caribbean women competed with men to become holders of political office. The granting of universal adult suffrage had an immediate impact in the Eastern Caribbean since most women could not vote or stand for election before then. In the Leeward and Windward Islands and Barbados a total of 30 women contested national general elections between 1951 - 1979, Table 4 [Emmanuel: 1979]. Table 4 shows that Grenada, Barbados and Dominica stand out as having a comparatively larger number of female candidates for that period. Antigua and St. Kitts and Nevis (Anguilla)⁸ each offered one woman candidate in the 28 years covered by the data. Nine women contested elections in Grenada, followed by seven in Barbados and five in Dominica.

TABLE 4
WOMEN CANDIDATES IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN THE
LEEWARD AND WINDWARD ISLANDS AND BARBADOS 1951-1979

COUNTRY	NAME OF CANDIDATE	ELECTION DEBUT	OUTCOME OF FIRST ELECTION	% VOTE RECEIVED	² NO. OF CONTESTED ELECTIONS	POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Antigua	¹ Ms. Edith Richards	1956	Lost	2.6	1	Independent/Union
Montserrat	Mrs. Margaret Kelsick	1958	Lost	23.7	2	Montserrat Labour Party
	Miss Mary Taitt	1970	Won	52.3	3	Progressive Democratic Party
³ St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla	Miss Mary Charles	1971	Lost	22.3	1	Peoples Action Movement
Dominica	Mrs. P.S. Allfrey	1957	Lost	20.4	2	Independent
	Miss Mary Charles	1970	Lost	35.6	2	Dominica Freedom Party
	Mrs. Fadelle	1966	Lost	4.0	1	Dominican United People=s Party
	Mrs. Beryl Harris	1961	Lost	26.1	1	
	Mrs. Mabel James	1961	Lost	36.1	3	Dominica Labour Party
Grenada	Mrs. Nadia Benjamine	1972	Won	69.8	1	Grenada United Labour Party
	Mrs Cynthia Gairy	1961	Won	64.3	5	
	Mrs. E. James	1962	Lost	47.7	1	
	Mrs. E. Lahee	1957	Lost	28.1	1	
	Ms. H. Mascoll	1957	Lost	13.0	1	Peoples Democratic Movement
	Mrs. Waple Nedd	1972	Won	72.0	1	G.U.L.P
	Miss Gloria St Bernard	1957	Lost	7.9	1	Grenada National Party
	Ms. B. Sylvester	1976	Lost	36.5	1	People=s Alliance
	Mrs. E.L. Sylvester	1954	Lost	22.9	1	Independent

St. Lucia	Ms. R. Michel	1979	Lost	45.9	1	St. Lucia Labour Party
	Mrs. Y.H. Rock	1964	Lost	41.9	3	United Workers Party
	Mrs. L. Vos	1961	Lost	2.2	1	People=s Progressive Party
St. Vincent & Grenadines	Mrs. P. John	1974	Lost	2.5	1	Mitchel/Sylvester Facti
	Mrs. Ivy Joshua	1957	Won	83.3	6	People=s Political Party
Barbados	Mrs. E.E. Boume	1951	Won	51.5	3	Barbados Labour Party
	Mrs. Gertude Eastmond	1971	Won	52.0	2	Democratic Labour Party
	Mrs. Carmeta Fraser	1976	Lost	22.4	1	
	Mrs. Sybil Leacock	1976	Lost	43.4	1	
	Mrs. L. Martin	1961	Lost	7.7	1	Barbados Labour Party
	Miss Billie Miller	1976	Won	50.9	1	
	Miss N. Weekes	1971	Lost	42.5	2	

Source: Compiled from the appendices in Patrick A.m. Emmanuel, *General Elections in the Eastern Caribbean: A Handbook*, U.W.I. Cave Hill: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1979.

1. The data listed Ms. or Mrs., for some women, for others their names were just given. The inclusion of these indicates that married women were the majority of candidates.
2. Elections contested to 1979.
3. After 1966 Anguilla was not part of the state electoral system.

Of the 30 women competing for public office seven or 23% won their seats in their first bid for political power. All of the women who were elected on their first attempt were members of major political parties. No women won as independent candidates. This reflects an entrenchment of the two party system and the general weakness of independent candidates in the Westminster Parliamentary model.

It is difficult to determine what precise roles gender relations, party affiliation, class relations and prevailing socio-economic conditions played in women's electoral performance. Eugenia Charles would later emerge as the first female Prime Minister of the Commonwealth Caribbean and a formidable politician. Mrs. Cynthia Gairy and Mrs. Ivy Joshua won on every occasion they competed.

Not only did they receive relatively high margins but they were part of the victorious party. The point more relevant in their case is that they were the wives of the respective political leaders and Premiers/Prime Ministers of their countries. Eric Gairy and Ebenezer Joshua were charismatic, powerful leaders who dominated the political life of their era.

Class location and involvement in women's organisations are two distinguishing features of earlier female politicians. Rhoda Reddock notes that women members of nationalist, socialist and Marxist parties were often recruited from middle strata women's organisations [Reddock 1990:18]. Maxine Henry-Wilson states that women from "respectable classes" exerted influence primarily through social work. She comments that for some time this involvement was really a front for political activity. They used the cover of social work to articulate concerns of middle class women for political reforms and to demand changes in the conditions of working class women [Henry-Wilson: 239]. I have found a similar subversive strategy in the activities of women in the leadership of the International YWCA [Barriteau: Forthcoming].

The Voters Register of 1947 in Guyana, the last year in which the franchise was limited by property and income qualification, reveals the following about Indian women. They comprised 1.8% of all voters, 6% of all Indian voters and only 9.9% of all female voters [Poynting 1987:236]. Still in Guyana, The Women's Political and Economic Organisation, WPEO, set itself an overtly activist and political agenda. Established in 1946 its aim was "to ensure the political organisation and education of the women in British Guiana in order to promote their economic welfare and their political and social emancipation and betterment" [Peake 1993: 114]. According to Linda Peake the WPEO encouraged women to register as voters in the 1947 election. It deliberately attempted to influence the direction of local government.

Indeed it urged women in the charitable organisations to exert pressure on local government to bring about improvements in social welfare in general, and in housing in particular. Within its first three months it attracted approximately 160 members, both working and middle class women [Peake 1993:114].

This type of political activity coincides with pressure group politics. The WPEO was urging women to make local government responsive to the needs of the community.

A very significant feature is that the majority of the women, [Table 4], 20 or 66%, were married. Bledsoe and Herring speaking particularly of the United States, comment that, 'The low incidence of women in elected public office is at least partly a response to very practical restrictions on political mobility imposed by child care responsibilities, a duty that is still disproportionately placed on women' [Bledsoe and Herring 1990: 214]. The fact that the majority of women contesting elections in the Eastern Caribbean between 1951 and 1979 were married begs for further research. Superficially it seems to contradict the opinion that single women have more time for political activity. But what part did being a married "respectable" woman play in the selection of these women? Our societies are socially and politically conservative. Was the middle class, married status of the women seen as a positive factor for their candidacy? The period reported on is 19 years ago. We need more contemporary research to indicate whether single women are competing in equal numbers for electoral office or are now outnumbering married women as candidates.

The data does reveal a low incidence of women competing and an even lower percentage being successful. However, for the women who sought to be elected it is significant that the majority were married. Sixty percent of all those who contested the elections did so once. The fact that they had families may

have prevented them from further competition but it did not deter them in the first instance.

Maxine Henry-Wilson reports that a total of over 200 women were involved in electoral politics in Jamaica between 1962 and 1986. Of that number 194 contested elections in five local government elections between 1969 and 1986, see Table 5. [Henry-Wilson 1989:241]. Table 5 reveals the number of women contesting general elections between 1962 and 1983 in Jamaica. There is a slight but steady increase of women in electoral competition for that period.

TABLE 5
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN JAMAICA 1962 - 1983

Year	Total No. Of Candidates	Total Female	% Female	Total F/PNP	Total F/JLP	Total F/Other	Total F Successful
1962	114	3	2.6	1	1	1 (ind.)	1 (P)
1967	114	5	4.4	1	1	-	2 (J)
1972	113	5	4.4	2	3	-	2 (1P/1J)
1976	120	5	4.2	2	3	-	4 (3P/1J)
1980	126	12	9.5	4	5	3 (ind.)	6 (1P/5J)
1983*	66	8	12.1	-	8	-	8

*Election not contested by People's National Party.

Source: Maxine Henry-Wilson, *The Status of Jamaican Women*, p. 242. Compiled from *Report of Elections of Jamaica*, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1981, 1983 published by the Electoral Office, Kingston.

TABLE 6A
PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES 1980

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla	13	2	15.4	11	84.6
Antigua/Barbuda	-	-	-	-	-
Bahamas	65	3	4.6	62	95.4
Barbados	45	4	8.9	41	91.1
Belize	26	3	11.5	23	88.5
Br. Virgin Islands	12	0	0.0	12	100
Dominica	31	4	12.9	27	87.1
Grenada					
Guyana	63	9	14.3	54	85.7
Jamaica	60	5	8.3	55	91.7
Montserrat	13	1	7.7	12	92.3
St. Kitts/Nevis	14	1	7.1	13	82.9
St. Lucia	29	2	6.9	27	93.1
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	12	1	8.3	11	91.7
Trinidad and Tobago	67	9	13.4	58	86.6
Turks/Caicos	18	1	5.6	17	94.4
GRAND TOTAL	468	45	9.6	423	90.4

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 102

TABLE 6B
PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES 1985

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla	12	1	10.0	11	90.0
Antigua/Barbuda					
Bahamas	70	5	7.1	65	92.9
Barbados	48	5	10.41	43	89.6
Belize	36	3	8.3	33	91.7
Br. Virgin Islands	12	0	0	12	100
Dominica	31	4	12.9	27	87.1
Grenada	7	2	28.6	5	71.4
Guyana	72	16	22.2	56	77.8
Jamaica	60	3	5.0	57	95.0
Montserrat	13	2	15.4	11	84.6
St. Kitts/Nevis	15	1	6.7	14	93.3
St. Lucia	29	1	3.4	28	96.6
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	12	0	0.0	12	100
Trinidad & Tobago	67	10	15.0	57	85.0
Turks/Caicos	18	2	11.1	16	88.9
GRAND TOTAL	502	55	11.0	44.7	89.0

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 102

TABLE 6C
PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES 1992

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla	12	0	0.0	12	100
Antigua/Barbuda	17	0	0.0	17	100
Bahamas	79	10	12.7	69	87.3
Barbados	49	7	14.3	42	85.7
Belize	37	4	10.8	33	89.2
Br. Virgin Islands	12	1	8.3	11	91.7
Dominica	31	5	16.1	26	83.9
Grenada	15	1	6.7	14	93.3
Guyana	72	12	16.7	60	83.3
Jamaica	60	7	11.7	53	88.3
Montserrat	13	4	30.8	9	69.2
St. Kitts/Nevis	15	1	6.7	14	93.3
St. Lucia	29	4	13.8	25	86.2
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	12	2	16.7	10	83.3
Trinidad and Tobago	67	12	18.0	55	82.0
Turks and Caicos	21	4	19.0	17	81.0
GRAND TOTAL	541	74	12.6	467	87.4

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 102

The CARICOM Report provides a contemporary assessment on women's participation in parliamentary assemblies [Mondesire and Dunn 1995: 102]. Tables 6A to 6C indicate what changes occurred in women competing with men for public office. In 1980 the larger independent countries reflect higher percentages of women in parliamentary assemblies. However, no independent country had higher than 15% women as members of parliament or as senators appointed to the upper house. Even though Caribbean women have been able to stand for election and vote for over 50 years in all countries (except The Bahamas) we still lack a critical mass of female politicians.

In 1980 in Guyana nine women held seats in the national parliament out of a total of 63 seats. In Trinidad and Tobago women also held nine of the 67 seats. Over the three time periods covered by Tables 6A-C, women's representation in parliamentary assemblies increased in three countries. In the Bahamas, women in parliament grew from 4.6% in 1980 to 7.1% in 1985 to 12.7% in 1992. In Barbados women held 8.9% of the seats in the House of Assembly and the Senate in 1980. By 1985 this increased to 10.4% and by 1992 women constituted 14.3% of parliamentarians. In Trinidad and Tobago women parliamentarians also moved from 13.4% in 1980 to 15.0% in 1985 to 18% in 1992.

Women's participation at the highest level of political decision making fluctuated in most dependent territories and independent countries between 1980 and 1992. Overall, women's political representation as a result of national competitive politics grew by 3%. In contrast, men's successful participation in national politics never dropped below 70% in any Caribbean dependent territory or independent country. In 15 out of 16 Commonwealth Caribbean territories men held 81% or more of the seats in parliament.

Antigua and St. Kitts and Nevis bear watching. Between 1951 and 1979, as shown in Table 4, only one woman had contested general elections and then as an independent candidate. We must ask, do political parties in Antigua and

Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis have no confidence in women as candidates? Are we to assume Antiguan, Kittitian and Nevisian women are apolitical and do not want to support other women? I would caution against that interpretation. Instead we should juxtapose women's relative absence from electoral politics with the political culture of these countries, and women's leadership in other sectors of the society.

Women in Antigua have not been successful as candidates in the electoral system. The majority of women consider running for office to be part of a man's world. They therefore vote for men in preference to women. In the political history of Antigua and Barbuda, only two have been put forward as candidates by the opposition party. They were not successful [Inter-Parliamentary Union 1997: 43].

Earlier in 1997 women in Antigua launched a new women's organization called Professional Organization of Women in Antigua, POWA. They appear very organized and determined to make a difference. We wait to assess their impact on women's political leadership.

Table 7 disaggregates the data on women's participation in political decision-making into four major categories for 1995. These are: national parliament/assembly, national executive/cabinet, provincial government, local government [Commonwealth Secretariat, *Towards Gender Equality* 1996]. Grenada, St. Lucia, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago had the highest percentage of women in parliament in 1995. How does this translate into political leadership and influencing policy? Is there a correlation between women occupying top political office at the national level and the engendering of local government at the community level?

TABLE 7
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING AT NATIONAL PARLIAMENT/ASSEMBLY, NATIONAL EXECUTIVE/CABINET, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES AS AT JUNE 1996

COUNTRY	NATIONAL PARLIAMENT/ ASSEMBLY		NATIONAL EXECUTIVE/ CABINET		PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT		LOCAL GOVERNMENT	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Antigua & Barbuda	NO STATISTICS GIVEN							
The Bahamas	4/49	8.16	3/13	23.08	4/16	25.00	Not given	
Barbados	NO COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE				RECEIVED			
Belize	4/38	10.53	1/16	6.25	N/A		10/58	17.24
Dominica	3/30	10.00	2/9	22.22	N/A		99/313	31.63
Grenada	4/15	26.67	2/12	16.67	N/A		Not given	
Guyana	14/72	19.44	2/18	11.11	N/A		102/460	22.17
Jamaica	11/81	13.58	1/13	7.69	N/A		25/187	13.37
St. Kitts & Nevis	2/15	13.33	0/7	00.00	0/7	00.00	0/3	00.00
St. Lucia	4/17	23.53	1/13	7.69	N/A		30/75	40.00
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	2/19	10.53	2/12	16.67	N/A		Not given	
Trinidad & Tobago	13/68	19.12	3/22	13.64	N/A		18/124	14.52

Table 7 discloses that the percentage of women included in cabinet was lower than the percentage of women in parliament. Women in parliament whether elected or appointed are not readily made ministers by their governing parties. In almost all cases the ministries women head are some variant of social services, community development and women's affairs, health or education. In Barbados, Ms. Billie Miller is the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister. In fact in Barbados the three women elected are also government ministers. Only Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas have three women as members of cabinet. In Jamaica, Ms Portia Simpson is the Minister of

Labour and in The Bahamas, Ms Janet Boswick is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Even if we generally assume a feminist consciousness on the part of women ministers, the lack of a critical mass in cabinet and parliament will seriously constrain efforts to introduce policy to alter women's political subordination.

Only The Bahamas and St Kitts-Nevis reported having provincial government. Bahamian women comprised 25% of this while no women were part of the "provincial government" of St Kitts-Nevis.

The comparatively low involvement of women in the governing bodies of parliament in the Caribbean is consistent with the findings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In its study the IPU found, with some exceptions, that filling of senior positions by women in parliamentary assemblies follows the proportions of women in the bodies concerned [Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997: 128]. They conclude instead of acting as enlightened elites parliament just follows the electorate in maintaining nominal involvement of women. Political parties in the Commonwealth Caribbean do not generally field over 25% of women as candidates⁹. In the recent elections in St. Lucia, the victorious St. Lucia Labour Party successfully ran two female candidates, Ms Sarah Lucy Flood new Minister of Health, Human Services, Family and Women Affairs, and Ms Menissa Rambally, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Financial Services. At 21 years, Ms Rambally is probably the youngest woman elected to parliament in the region [Barbados Advocate 17 June 1997: 10-11].

The IPU found that the nomination of women candidates remain a very slow-moving phenomenon [IPU, 1997: 116]. In Grenada two political parties, the NDC and the NNP, ran women as 13.3% of its candidates in the last general elections. The People's National Party and the Jamaica Labour Party, both of Jamaica, fielded 8.3% female candidates respectively. The Grenada United Labour Party, which in the 1950's and 1960's led the way with several female candidates, joined the St. Lucia Labour Party and the United Workers Party, also of St. Lucia, in offering no female candidates¹⁰ in elections before 1997 [IPU, 1997:121].

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association study *Barriers to Women's Participation* suggests that since the majority of commonwealth parliamentarians win elections to parliament on a party ticket, political parties should play a significant role in redressing the existing gender imbalances [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 1996:18]. Gaining a place on the list of candidates can be a major obstacle to many women considering a career in politics. Men are the gatekeepers to higher political office and may hold traditional views on the comparative merit of female candidates.

In a conversation with a senior official of a political party in Barbados, I queried why the party seemed to bypass women who had expressed a strong interest in particular constituencies. He replied choices are made in the final analysis on who is more likely to win for the party. Political parties seem unwilling to lead the way in ensuring gender parity in candidate selections. This suggests that they undervalue women's contributions to political parties. Women organize fund-raising events, run constituency offices, undertake a disproportionate share of campaigning and tend to be faithful, loyal, hardworking, supporters. Most of the political parties have either formal or informal women's arms or wings. Yet the vital resources women represent to the parties are not translated into more opportunities to contest elections on behalf of their parties. According to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, women "are awarded a disproportionate number of seats, have little influence on party policy and little leverage to push nominees for electoral office. They still largely make the tea and not the policy" [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 1996: 20].

The NGO Factor

The institutions and groups of civil society play a critical role in advancing women's participation in politics and in developing women's leadership. Women-centred NGOs have pressured political parties to examine the way they operate. They take on board a wide range of political issues. In the 1995 general elections in Trinidad and Tobago a coalition of women's organizations drew up a ten point women's political platform which they used to inform parties contesting the general elections what the parties needed to have to be truly representatives of women's viewpoints [Women's Political Platform 1995]. They organized a number of public fora and submitted to Prime Minister Basdeo Panday a list of women eligible to serve in high public office [Express November 1, 1995]. Within two weeks the same coalition was describing as unsatisfactory the appointment of only three women as ministers [Express November 24, 1995].

In Jamaica a women's political caucus, a bi-partisan grouping of women, operates to support women in and interested in politics. In Barbados in 1997 the National Organization of Women, NOW, brought together women from the three political parties in a public rally to share their experiences and frustrations as women politicians. It was the first time female politicians from different parties shared a public platform [Harris June 8, 1997]. The Dominica National Council of Women, DNCW, an umbrella organization of non-governmental women's groups has as one of its primary objectives making its members aware of the importance of their participation in political life. They offer seminar workshops and consultations in this area [IPU, 1997:34]. The effort of the WPEO in Guyana to politicize the conditions of women's lives and to encourage them to be active politically was earlier noted.

Women in Local Government

TABLE 8A
PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE BODIES
1980

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla					
Antigua/Barbuda					
Bahamas					
Barbados					
Belize					
Br. Virgin Islands					
Dominica	33	4	12.1	29	87.9
Grenada					
Guyana	235	52	22.1	183	77.9
Jamaica	552	70	12.7	482	87.3
Montserrat					
St.. Kitts/Nevis	5	0	0	5	100
St.. Lucia	60	13	21.7	47	78.3
St.. Vincent/Grenadines					
Trinidad & Tobago	137	28	20.4	109	79.6
Turks/Caicos	4	0	0	4	100
GRAND TOTAL	1026	167	16.3	859	83.7

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 105

TABLE 8B
PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE BODIES
1985

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla					
Antigua/Barbuda					
Bahamas					
Barbados					
Belize					
Br. Virgin Islands					
Dominica	35	3	8.6	32	91.4
Grenada					
Guyana	375	95	25.3	280	74.7
Jamaica	528	51	9.7	477	90.3
Montserrat					
St.. Kitts/Nevis	5	0	0	5	100.0
St.. Lucia	60	17	28.3	43	71.7
St.. Vincent/Grenadines					
Trinidad & Tobago	145	19	13.1	126	86.9
Turks/Caicos	4	0	0	4	100
GRAND TOTAL	1152	185	16.1	967	83.9

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 105

TABLE 8C
PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE BODIES
1992

COUNTRY	TOTAL	FEMALE	%	MALE	%
Anguilla					
Antigua/Barbuda					
Bahamas	139	12	8.6	127	91.4
Barbados					
Belize					
Br. Virgin Islands					
Dominica	37	3	8.1	34	91.9
Grenada					
Guyana	460	102	22.2	358	77.8
Jamaica	187	24	12.8	163	87.2
Montserrat					
St. Kitts/Nevis	5	0	0	5	100
St. Lucia	75	30	40	45	60.0
St. Vincent/Grenadines					
Trinidad & Tobago	170	37	21.8	133	78.2
Turks/Caicos	4	3	75.0	1	25
GRAND TOTAL	1077	211	19.6	866	80.4

Source: CARICOM : Mondesire and Dunn, 1995, p 105

The statistical information available on women in local government gave differing results for countries having local government structures. According to the CARICOM report local governments exist in seven independent Caribbean countries and one dependent territory. Tables 8A to 8C record the participation of women and men in local representative bodies for 1980, 1985 and 1992. Table 7 includes statistics on local government for The Bahamas and Belize along with the other countries for 1995. What is immediately noticeable is that women do not necessarily enjoy a higher degree of involvement in politics at the local level than they do at the national level.

In Dominica, women's participation in local government declined from 12.1% in 1980 to 8.1% in 1992 but dramatically increased in 1995 to 31.63%. Besides the government within the Carib territory, the local government structure in Dominica is over 100 years old. It originated in the late 19th century with two municipal town boards, Roseau and Portsmouth. In 1939 village boards were granted legal status and by 1954 became village councils [Jubenot 1996:5]. The local government system in Dominica has four municipal and 34 village councils.

Nalda Jubenot undertook a study of the role of women in the development of local government in Portsmouth, Colihaut and Dublanc in Dominica. She questioned 30 councillors as to why few women became elected members of local government bodies. Sixty three percent answered that responsibility for household and family takes priority, 17% replied women do get support from men; 13% felt women lacked confidence and 7% state that women view politics as a male domain [Jubenot 1996:20]. Eighty seven percent of all respondents felt that women had a definite contribution to make to the development of local government. The woman who has been the sole female Mayor of Portsmouth felt she had made an important contribution to the development of the community [Jubenot 1996:20].

Dominican women seem to be active in local government. In 1975 a woman¹¹ was elected Mayor of Portsmouth for the first time when she received the highest number of votes cast. Between 1975 and 1996 14 women served in the Portsmouth Town Council. Unfortunately, there are no statistics for the other councils [Jubenot 1996:14].

Guyana has one of the most complex local government structures in the region. The Local Democratic Organization Act No. 12 of 1980 established ten regional democratic councils that span the country [Johnson, 1996: 1]. The work of the Regional Councils is coordinated by the Minister of Regional Development who is accountable to Cabinet and Parliament for the functioning of local government.

A deliberate effort has been made to engender local government in Guyana but Urmia Johnson, in a study of women's participation in the local government system of Guyana, reports that the Bureau of Women's Affairs decentralized some of its functions to the Regional Democratic Councils in 1983 and 1984 [Johnson, 1996: 2]. To enable the Bureau to achieve its mission statement a Women's Affairs Regional Committee was established on each regional committee. This gave the local government system in Guyana a structure for mobilizing around women's issues. Johnson concludes that the Regional Councils have not afforded women effective participation in political decision making and in the economic and social spheres of these Regional Councils.

Johnson's study is very relevant. It provides insights in the working of the local government system from the perspective of gender. In addition, she integrates an analysis of race and ethnicity with women's political participation hence establishing ethnic and cultural differences. Table 9 shows that women constituted 20% of local government representatives on regional councils in 1992. The national government is formed by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Coalition and they had a slim majority over the People's National Congress for

Council Members. However, women are 51% of the PNC Council Members as opposed to 10% for the PPP. The other three parties had no women on the regional councils.

Table 9
MEMBERS OF REGIONAL COUNCILS BY GENDER (SEX)
IN GUYANA, 1992

POLITICAL PARTY	M	F	TOTAL
People=s Progressive Party/Civic	89	10	99
People=s National Congress	60	31	91
Working People=s Alliance	8	0	8
The United Force	6	0	6
United Republican Party	1	0	1
TOTAL	164	41	205

Source: Stabroek News: 26/11/92, in Urmia Johnson=s AWomen=s Participation in the Local Government System of Guyana: @

On both councils the PNC (which draws its support from the Afro-Guyanese population) had a higher number of women representatives even though overall women’s representation was lower than ever [Johnson, 1996: 32]. Johnson notes that in the two main political parties women have lower numbers than men in the highest decision making bodies. Table 10 shows sexual composition in the five political parties in parliaments. In the PNC women outnumber men in membership while in the PPP men outnumber women.

TABLE 10
PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES BY GENDER (SEX)
IN GUYANA, 1992

POLITICAL PARTY	M	F	TOTAL
People=s Progressive Party/Civic	25	3	28
People=s National Congress	16	7	23
Working People=s Alliance	2	0	2
The United Force	1	0	1
TOTAL	44	10	54

Source: Stabroek News: 26/11/92, in Urmia Johnson=s *AWomen=s Participation in the Local Government System of Guyana*:@

Occah Seapaul [1988] and Pat Mohammed [1988] discuss the societal and religious constraints and limitations placed on Indo-Trinidadian women. Seapaul highlights the passive role ascribed to women by traditional Hindu custom that requires her to focus her energies and interests on the domestic domain.

It was accepted that the roles for which Hindu women were destined were those of wife and mother. Marriage was the only profession to which they could have looked forward. The established culture that forced her into remaining in domesticity naturally restricted the developments of her interests and satisfactions which lay beyond the home [Seapaul 1988: 90].

Patricia Mohammed identifies the contradictions Indian women experience in wanting an expanded role in the public domain:

They were keepers of the culture, they were passive and submissive, they were expected to sacrifice their own ambitions for the benefit of their brothers and husbands. Despite all of this, we can see that some Indian women had begun to commit themselves to goals which identified with the national interest [Mohammed 1988:390].

It is not surprising when in relation to Guyana Johnson points out that even on local government councils where the PPP dominates, Indo-Guyanese women are the least represented in membership.

Generally women of African descent have a higher profile in public life and women's organisations and the statistics on women's participation on these councils reveal this. From interviews, it was noted that less Indian women participated in political life due to cultural factors and the view that a woman's place is in the home. [Johnson, 1992:33].

However, Johnson reported that many interviewees felt that with the election of the PPP/Civic government in 1992 women of East Indian descent felt they had more scope and opportunity for participating in community and public affairs [Johnson, 1996: 33].

In St. Kitts and Nevis there has been a continuing exclusion of women from local government between 1980 and 1992. For none of the three time periods covered in Tables 8A-C were women part of the local government structure. In the absence of other information it is difficult to determine whether women contested elections and were rejected or were not selected as candidates.

Again in 1996 (Table 7) women in St. Kitts and Nevis continue to remain outside the political process of local government. Table 4 reveals an historical trend of the low involvement of Kittitian and Nevisian women in national politics. As in Antigua, one woman contested elections in St. Kitts and Nevis between 1951 and 1979. This suggests a low level of politicization among women including perhaps an unwillingness by political parties to groom women for leadership positions. These suggestions aside, serious research is needed to examine women and political leadership in the Leeward Island states.

In St. Lucia women's involvement in local government grew considerably between 1980 and 1992, as shown in Table 8A - 8C. Women formed 21.7% of local government in 1980, 28.3% in 1985 and 40% in 1992. Table 7 shows that women maintained that ratio in 1996. In fact St. Lucia women in local government enjoyed the highest level of women's involvement in local government in the Commonwealth Caribbean. In 1994 Ms. Adelina Auguste was Mayor and Chairman of the Castries City Council while Ms. Lucy St. Cyr was Chairman of the Castries Village Council.

TABLE 11
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS, 1969 - 86
IN JAMAICA

Year	Total No. Of Candidates	Total Female	% Female	Total F/PNP	Total F/JLP	Total F/Other	Total F Successful
1969	520	31	5.9	13	18	-	16 (10P/6J)
1974	558	51	9.14	24	24	3	25 (17P/8J)
1977	558	65	11.65	30	35	-	31 (28P/3J)
1981	552	70	12.68	37	34	-	38 (8P/30J)
1986	528	51	9.8	21	27	1 JAP	
						1 WPJ	

Source: Report of the Elections of Jamaica - 1969, 1974, 1977, 1981, 1986, published by the Electoral Office Kingston.

Key

PNP - People's National Party

JLP - Jamaica Labour Party

(These have been the two major political parties since the granting of Universal Adult Suffrage in 1944)

JAP - Jamaica/America Party

Jamaican women gradually increased their success in local government elections between 1969 and 1986 as Table 11 shows. They moved from 3% of the elected local government officials in 1969 to 6.8% in 1981. Candidates from the People's National Party were more successful than candidates from the Jamaican Labour Party even though both parties fielded roughly the same number of female candidates.

Summary

Constraints and Limitations

To assess the extent to which women are empowered in participating in local government structures we should employ the conceptual tools of power sharing and governance to the functioning of these processes. Unfortunately not enough data exist on the experiences of women in local government in the Commonwealth Caribbean to enable us to offer any definitive statements on women's experiences within them.

Interviews with women in local government, analyses of the programmes of councils, municipalities and boards, assessment of resources allocated to local government structures by central government, assessment of financing raised by local authorities and the kinds of programmes to which they are allocated, are all necessary to determine whether there is a correlation between women's active participation and leadership in local government, and the empowerment of women within government bureaucracies and communities.

These records do not exist in any readily accessible form. They now have to be collated or created. I suspect women in local government experience similar barriers to women in politics at the national level; however we do not know the particularity of their experiences. At this stage we do not have a record of who these women are, what they have done, what compromises they have been forced to make or alternatively how they may have influenced local government structures to reflect their agenda.

As a preliminary step we need a comprehensive research project that will unearth and construct the realities of women in local politics. We have yet to merge the questions of women's collective reality and how to change it with the questions of women's points of view and how to know it.

At this point the immediate project is to know the points of view of women in local government in the Commonwealth Caribbean. We must construct that data base because without it recommendations and prescriptions for change are tenuous. Having said that, the paper still indicates some areas for concern for engendering local government.

Culture played through ethnicity seems to influence the rate of participation in local and national politics of East Indian Caribbean women. Even though politics in Guyana is largely race-based (and I do not condone this) the political party to which the majority of Indo-Guyanese belongs does not have an acceptable percentage of women active. Culture seems to function as a barrier for East Indian Caribbean women although, we assume, to a lesser degree in Trinidad and Tobago, given the involvement and prominence of several Indo-Trinidadian women in politics. A good area for research would be a comparative study of Indo-Caribbean women and politics in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.

I suggest that the link between local and national politics as it relates to women and empowerment seem to be negative. Nothing we have uncovered indicates a change in the uneasy relationship between women and political participation in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Women do not dominate national politics and elected women are still assigned "housekeeping" ministries. These are the ministries associated with the traditional reproductive roles of women. The irony is that these portfolios are critical to the functioning of government and society. However, like women's work generally, these ministries are not respected or ranked as prestigious as portfolios dealing with economic affairs, or international trade and investment. We will be entering a new phase of politics when a prime minister (male or female) holds the portfolio of social services and women's affairs. I look forward to this.

In St Lucia the new Minister of Women's Affairs has a portfolio that is staggering and grossly burdensome. It seems as if the decision makers in the new government have collected all the portfolios that are supposed to characterize women's work and assigned them to Minister Lucy Flood. Her portfolio of Health, Human Services, Family and Women's Affairs reflect that even in national politics the image of woman as nurturer and caretaker dominates. In conversation with Minister Flood in July 1997, she assured me her portfolios were neither staggering nor burdensome. She stated she could manage them and what is required is efficient, effective coordination of all the divisions by the various heads. I respect the Minister's opinion and admire her energy and conviction. My conclusion remains.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the women's political platform expressed early optimism on the naming of Kamla Persad-Bissessar as the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. This was short-lived. By early 1996 she had been replaced as Attorney General. Ms Billie Miller in Barbados and Ms Janet Boswick in The Bahamas as Ministers of Foreign Affairs hold non-traditional ministries for female politicians.

I suspect but cannot confirm that at the local level women in politics will have similar responsibilities. Local government is often seen as the housekeeping division of central government. National governments tend to treat local governments as functioning only to deal with problems of sanitation, water, community health and maintenance of infrastructure and not the expansion of democratic decision making. Political parties do not seem to be interested in preparing women for leadership at the national level. It would be useful to discover if this is indeed a strategy at the local level.

Women NGOs seem to have a very critical role to play in engendering local government. The WPEO in Guyana, the Women's Political Platform in Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominica National Council of Women, the National

Organization of Women in Barbados and the Women's Political Caucus in Jamaica, have all done credible work to support women in politics.

Pressure from outside of government structures to incorporate women seems to be potentially more influential a source than the "Trojan horse theory" held by Devaki Jain. However, NGOs must guard against being overly optimistic about the significance of incremental gains. The political system is still gendered with entrenched patriarchal values shared by many men and women. Women have to build a critical mass of female and male politicians who understand the complications posed by the subordination of women and who have the political will to try to change it.

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² Catharine A Mackinnon. 1989. *Towards a feminist theory of the state*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 241.

³ Johanna Meehan. 1995. Introduction In: Johanna Meehan (ed.), *Feminists read Habermas: Gendering the subject of discourse*. New York and London: Routledge, 1-20.

⁴ Caribbean in this paper refers the Anglophone Caribbean countries and the British dependencies of the Commonwealth.

⁵ Jamaican women had a limited franchise based on property qualifications in 1919. While women had the right to vote and to stand for elections in St. Lucia in 1924, in Jamaica in 1944 and Trinidad and Tobago in 1946, women gained universal adult suffrage in the majority of British Caribbean colonies in the 1950's starting with Barbados in 1950. The Bahamas was last in 1961 with all restrictions to political participation removed in 1964. See *Inter-parliamentary Union, Men and Women in Politics, Democracy Still in the Making: A World Comparative Study* (Geneva: Inter-parliamentary Union, 1997):28; Maxine Henry-Wilson, *The Status of Jamaican Women, 1962 to the present in Jamaica in Independence Essays on the Early Years*, Rex Nettleford ed., 229-239 (Kingston and London: Heinemann Caribbean and James Currey, 1989).

⁶ Timothy Bledsoe and Mary Herring. 1990. Victims of circumstances: Women in pursuit of political office. *American Political Science Review* 84 (1): 213 - 223.

⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, Minister of Health, Government of Barbados, speaking on her experiences as a female politician, Cabinet Minister and Member of Parliament, in Margaret Harris' *Liz pours it out at Oistins Sunday Sun* June 8, 1997: p.10A.

⁸ (See note 3, Table 4.)

⁹ The NDP in Barbados 1991 was an exception. In that year it fielded seven women candidates, 25% of the party's candidates contesting the election.

¹⁰ For St. Lucia this does not include the May 1997 general elections in which two young women 21 and 28 years were elected on the SLP ticket, one other woman unsuccessfully competed as an independent.

¹¹ Researchers must name individuals. I have seen several references to women in politics especially in the earlier periods and almost everything is known about her except her name.

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