

POLITICS, POWER + GENDER JUSTICE IN THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN



Women's Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation

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IGDS

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Women's Political Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago: Understandings, Experiences and Negotiations

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List of Acronyms

CIWIL	Caribbean Institute for Women In Leadership
CONCACAF	Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football
COP	Congress of the People
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IGDS	Institute for Gender and Development Studies
ILP	Independent Liberal Party
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MSJ	Movement for Social Justice
NJAC	National Joint Action Committee
PNM	People's National Movement
PP	People's Partnership
TOP	Tobago Organization of the People
UNC	United National Congress
UWI	University of West Indies
WINAD	Women's Institute for Alternative Development

Preface

This chapter is one of several outputs of a research project undertaken between 2011 and 2014 by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at the University of West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus. Titled *Politics, Power and Gender Justice in the Anglophone Caribbean: Women's Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation*, the project was spearheaded by IGDS in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and led by Principal Investigator, Gabrielle Jamela Hosein, with the support of Lead Researcher, Jane Parpart.

Additional technical feedback was provided by Project Advisory Team members including Rawwida Baksh, Eudine Barriteau, Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Patricia Mohammed, and Linnette Vassell. Feedback and support from Francisco Con-Montiel, from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), also contributed to the project outputs. Support from the staff at IGDS, St. Augustine, and especially Tisha Nickenig for project coordination and management, and Kathryn Chan for graphic design and layout, deserve particular recognition.

The project examined four strategies to promote democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality in the Anglophone Caribbean. First, women's political leadership was explored for the extent to which it creates greater governmental will and capacity to more actively and effectively transform gender relations both within and outside of the state. Second, quota systems were assessed for their impact on effective women's participation and leadership in representative government. Third, the usefulness of national gender policy documents for promoting gender equality was evaluated. Finally, the impact of feminist movement building on women's capacity to be effective transformational leaders within democratic political life was investigated.

Each of these strategies has expanded the spaces for realizing women's rights and gender equality, created greater capacity (among women and men) to achieve transformed gender relations, and shifted the gender ideologies that present resistances to women's effective political participation and leadership. Together, they reflect a core set of historical struggles waged across the Anglophone Caribbean. This project therefore sought to document the history of struggle in five Caribbean nations. It focused on specific countries where these struggles appear to have been won. Trinidad and Tobago provided an appropriate case study for examining the impact of women's contemporary political leadership, Guyana for exploring

the impact of quota systems, Dominica and Jamaica for exploring the formulation and impact of national gender policies, and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) for evaluating the impact of feminist advocacy on women's rights, effectiveness and representation in democratic governance in St. Lucia. These cases thus investigate four global strategies for advancing democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality. They offer insights into transnational, regional and national alliances between states, international organizations, NGOs and feminist movements, and demonstrate the relevance of national case studies for understanding regional and global experiences. Indeed, the project's comparative, historical and case study approach shows that both regional and national case studies are essential if we are to understand how democracy, the state and politics offer opportunities for and resistances to renegotiating gender relations in different twenty-first century contexts. For a more comprehensive summary of the project's conceptual framework, methodologies and findings please refer to the Introduction by Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Jane Parpart, available at IDRC and IGDS, UWI, St. Augustine. The following is a list of related chapters produced by the project:

- "Getting to One-Third? Creating Legislative Access for Women to Political Space in Guyana" by Natalie Persadie;
- "National Gender Policies in the English Speaking Caribbean" by Deborah McFee;
- "The Patriarchal State and the Development of Gender Policy in Jamaica" by Maziki Thame and Dhanaraj Thakur;
- "Feminist/Womanist Advocacy Toward Transformational Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean: The Interplay of Individual and Collective Agency" by Shirley Campbell;
- "Crossing over the Barriers: A Historical Journey of Women's Political Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean" by Beverly Shirley;
- "Advancing Gender Justice? The Opportunities, Resistances, and Limitations of Guyana's Quota System" by Iman Khan
- "Masculinities and the Practice of Dominica's National Gender Policy" by Ramona Biholar;
- "Enactments, Contestations, and Possibilities of Women's Transformational Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean" by Denise Blackstock

Executive Summary

On May 24, 2010, Kamla Persad-Bissessar made history in Trinidad and Tobago when the country elected her to be the first woman prime minister. This victory came twenty-three years after her first political post in 1987 as a local government alderman for the St. Patrick county council. On January 24, 2010 she rivaled United National Congress (UNC) founder and former prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Basdeo Panday, to become political leader of the UNC, and led the UNC and coalition of political parties in the May 24, 2010 national elections against the incumbent Mr. Patrick Manning and the People's National Movement (PNM).

Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar joined the esteemed ranks of just a handful of women prime ministers in the Anglophone Caribbean including the late Dame Eugenia Charles, prime minister of Dominica from July 1980 to June 1995; Janet Jagan, prime minister of Guyana from March 1997 to December 1997, and president of Guyana from December 1997 to August 1999; and Portia Simpson-Miller, current prime minister of Jamaica, and previously from March 2006 to September 2007.

As a woman of east-Indian descent, Ms. Persad-Bissessar overcame the masculinist ideals of her predominant Hindu, East Indian political party. Presenting herself as “the woman candidate,” she highlighted her femininity, womanhood and motherhood, and appealed to both Indo and Afro-Trinidadian women constituents who found the idea of a strong woman political figure attractive. She also appealed to men who were tired of the past masculine, somewhat authoritarian leadership, and sought a kinder, more integrative leader. Pertinent women's rights groups and feminist activists supported her, who viewed her impending election as a victory for all women in Trinidad, and as a means to push the gender agenda in parliament. An examination of her victory and the impact of her political leadership is therefore significant to analyze whether it increased and enhanced women's participation in politics, as well as the pursuit of gender equality and justice in Trinidad and Tobago.

Three years into her first term,² Persad-Bissessar's record on promoting gender equality and women's rights remains uneven. Appointments of women to political and decision-making

² The Prime Minister is elected for a five-year term.

positions, including ministerial posts and state boards, remains low under her leadership. Women comprise 28.6% and 19.4% of parliamentarians in the House of Representatives and Senate respectively.³

While this is a slight increase from the prior administration, it falls below the 30% critical mass for national parliaments.⁴ The increase in the number of women on state boards is attributed to feminists' interventions in the country, not her leadership. Amid her promise to constituents for gender-responsive budgeting and the end of discrimination based on sexual identity or orientation, a national gender policy that promotes both remains stalled in the country's cabinet. While the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development underwent several key changes, and while many women's activists and female politicians continue to support Persad-Bissessar, their support has begun to wane due to unmet expectations.

While many constituents view Persad-Bissessar as an inspirational figure due to the gendered, cultural and religious confines that she overcame to become prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, she appears limited to actually change policies, practices and ideals which affect all women, and especially women in political power. Structural and ideological barriers to women's access to political power and effective leadership remain. The structure of political parties and political processes remain inherently masculinist due to society's gendered assumptions of male and female roles. Acceptable behaviors and attitudes of men in politics and during political campaigns differ greatly than that of women who are often weighed down by the confines of notions of femininity and respectability. While resistances do occur, including from Persad-Bissessar, such challenges to gendered assumptions, especially with regard to power and leadership, have not translated from discourse to policies that aim to transform gender relations and shift gender ideologies.

While women's political leadership is an important strategy for expanding the spaces required to realize women's rights, gender equality, transformed gender relations, and a shift in gender ideologies that present resistances to women's effective political participation and leadership, it is not effective unless all women, especially those in the feminist and women's movements, support it. This is especially important in a Caribbean society that greatly relies on religious and cultural ideals that have strict gender assumptions on the roles of men and women, which underscore social and economic contexts. To transform these structural and ideological barriers that seek to keep women out of politics, feminist intervention and transformational female leadership needs to accompany women's political leadership.

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Women in National Parliaments*. January 1, 2014. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010114.htm>

⁴ 30 per cent is widely considered the "critical mass" benchmark mark for women's representation in national parliaments. This benchmark is supported by the Inter Parliamentary Union, UN Women and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

I have often been the lone woman's voice in a huge sea of men. That is what I have stood out for in my political career...being the first woman to do several things. I remember clearly what drove my decisions in those days as I voted for certain bills, and as I contributed to debates in Parliament and took certain stances in the country. It was the full and complete knowledge that I was in a rare position...as one of the few female representatives of this country...it was my duty to assume the natural role of mother when it came to national issues. In that sea of men who argued and cussed each other...I knew I had to be the rare voice of fairness, nurturing, caring and love. I knew that my vote was always influenced by the thought of how those policies or stances would affect the heart, mind and bodies of the country. My maternal instincts made me choose sometimes not by my head, but my heart. But as any true mother, those instincts were never wrong. And so, I cared for the people of my constituency, my party and the nation, as a mother. I did it because of the great love of my country. I am the woman who has awoken and I will never turn back

Prime Minister Kamla Persad Bissessar 2007⁵

⁵ Known as the 'No Woman No Cry Speech,' after the famous Bob Marley song, which was played before her entrance, Persad-Bissessar delivered this speech during the UNC Alliance's election rally at Mid Centre Mall in Chaguanas on Sunday October 7, 2007.

Introduction

On May 24, 2010, Kamla Persad-Bissessar made history in Trinidad and Tobago when the country elected her to be the first woman prime minister. This victory came twenty-three years after her first political post in 1987 as a local government alderman for the St. Patrick county council. On January 24, 2010 she rivaled United National Congress (UNC) founder and former prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Basdeo Panday, to become political leader of the UNC, and led the UNC and coalition of political parties in the national elections against the incumbent Mr. Patrick Manning and the People's National Movement (PNM) on May 24, 2010.

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⁶ IPU, 2008, Summary Report of Proceedings, 52nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

gender equality. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in its 2009 *Equality in Politics* report also found that women's progress in parliaments was "patchy" and gender equality was only achieved "occasionally" or "rarely" in parliament.⁷ Kabeer (2003) pointed out, however, that one of the indicators for monitoring gender equality and women's empowerment (as stated in the third Millennium Development Goal)⁸ relates to the number of seats women hold in national parliaments. She noted that when gender equality is achieved in the representation of women in parliaments, "such an achievement could, with certain qualifications...have the most potential for transformation"⁹ (in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment).

Taking a Caribbean perspective, Barriteau asserted that "empowering women through political participation constitutes qualitative and quantitative change in Caribbean political systems and cultures." It "places pressure on the value systems of states" and in doing so, "problematizes the power vacuum women still experience as citizens." Furthermore, she argued that such an act, reorders power relations to enhance gender justice. Empowering women in politics, is thus not only material, but also ideological since it means "creating more democratic, participatory and just political and economic structures" (Barriteau 1997, 11). Most importantly, the power of having a woman elected as a political leader within what has been widely seen as a masculinist political space and political culture, enables feminists to see such an election as a strategy for advancing feminist goals, and most importantly gender justice. According to Barriteau, gender justice is defined as:

....a societal condition in which there are no asymmetries of access to, or allocation of, status, power and material resources in a society, 'or in the control over and capacity to benefit from these resources.' In a gender system characterized by gender justice there will be no hierarchies of gender identities or of the meanings society gives to masculinity and femininity (Ibid., 3).

A just gender system is thus pivotal in reconstructing those complex systems that create and maintain the unequal access and allocation of "status, power and material resources within society" (Barriteau, 2001, 26). Such unequal access has permeated and infused the political sphere and political processes. In this edited collection, Beverly Shirley also noted that while the presence of women in the political sphere was due to long arduous fights for political rights by Caribbean women, "the fact is that the proportion of women in governments is not reflective of

⁷ IPU, 2009, *Equality in Politics. A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments. An Overview of Key Findings.*

⁸ Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3) - Promote gender equality and empower women

⁹ Naila Kabeer, "Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and the Millennium Development Goals: Promoting Women's Capabilities and Participation." http://www.unescap.org/sdd/publications/gender/gender_dp_13.pdf

the proportion of women in the electorates. (Shirley 2014). This therefore raises questions about the structural and ideological constraints that limit women's entry into politics in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as their advancement once they gain entry. It also raises questions about the extent of such constraints in limiting women's ability to create the very structural and ideological transformations needed to create greater gender justice. The election of Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar is thus worthy of a critical feminist analysis in order to examine these structural and ideological constraints, and whether being elected a political leader and prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago was a successful strategy for advancing women's rights, gender equality, democratic governance, women's political participation and leadership, and gender justice.

To this end, this chapter maps the gendered political space within Trinidad Tobago three years after Persad-Bissessar's 2010 election to determine if and how the prime minister advanced gender equality and equity in her own political party, across parties, and throughout the nation. It examines the possibilities and limitations of female political leadership as a means to increase women's political participation and power through specifically examining Persad-Bissessar's experiences as a woman, mother, grandmother and wife, the meanings and understandings of these experiences and her attempts to mainstream gender in budgets, ministerial and state board appointments, as well as legislation, namely the national gender policy. The chapter also closely examines the experiences of women members of parliament (MPs) and women in local government throughout their campaigns to their present experiences in political office. The authors especially examine the process of political campaigning to reveal the gendered climate in politics that women navigate, and how this in turn impacts and limits their leadership and their own understandings of politics and power.

Methodology

Grounded in ethnographic methods,¹⁰ this chapter is a case study of women's political leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. It employs a mixed method qualitative approach and includes interviews, discourse analysis, content analysis and participant and non-participant observation.

Additionally, in-depth, semi structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with participants between January 2013 and July 2013. Interviews as a means of data collection is useful in allowing the researcher insight into interviewees' points of view (Berry 1999), as well

¹⁰ Ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions occurring within a group, organization or community (Reeves, et. al., 2008, 512).

as a means of receiving detailed information of interviewees' experiences (McNamara 1999). In order to understand women's experiences of political contestation and political life in Trinidad, the authors interviewed heterogeneous groups of women in politics in Trinidad. The authors interviewed women across racial lines in local government (2010-2013), and those currently serving in the House of Representatives and the senate in Trinidad and Tobago from three political parties. Interviewees included Ms. Khadijah Ameen, chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation (TTPR), and deputy chairman of the UNC during the time of this research. Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar chose Ms. Ameen to contest the Chaguanas-West by-election of July 2013 against the incumbent Mr. Jack Warner. Ms. Ameen, of mixed Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian descent, and a young mother of one proved to be a remarkable source for this chapter. Her experience as a participant in local government for over thirteen years not only spoke to women in local government, but her role as chairman of the UNC and then contender in the Chaguanas-West by-election provided the authors with great insight into the experiences and negotiations of a young woman of mixed racial descent navigating a mostly male East Indian political party.

In addition to several interviews with Ms. Ameen, the researchers were also able to conduct participant and non-participant observation at Ms. Ameen's TTPR office. The researchers visited the office three times a week for one month and when allowed, assisted Ms. Ameen and the office staff with administrative tasks. The researchers were also able to sit in on two TTPR meetings, one of which was chaired by Ms. Ameen. During Ms. Ameen's July 2013 election campaign, researchers also partook in campaign walk-about and attended campaign rallies at Asja Girls College, Caroni Savannah Road on July 5, 2013, Monroe Road, Cunupia on July 10, 2013, Caroni on July 12, 2013 and in Charlieville on July 22, 2013. These were helpful to data collection and contextualisation as they permitted insight into party politics and hierarchy, as well as access to and interaction with UNC politicians such as Nizam Baksh, minister of public utilities and member of parliament for Naparima; Glenn Ramadharsingh, former minister of the People and Social Development and member of Parliament for Caroni Central; Ramona Ramdial, minister of state in the ministry of the environment and water resources and member of parliament for Couva North; Stacy Roopnarine, minister of state in the ministry of works and Infrastructure and member of parliament for Oropouche West; Senator Bhoendradatt Tewarie, minister of planning and sustainable development; Stephen Cadiz, minister of transport and member of parliament for Chaguanas East; Dr. Roodal Moonilal, minister of housing and urban development and member of parliament for Oropouche East, Senator Marlene Coudray, former minister of gender, youth and child development, and current

minister of local government; Attorney General Anan Ramlogan; and Chandresh Sharma, member of parliament for Fyzabad and minister of tourism.

The authors also conducted interviews with women who were involved in local government as councilors or aldermen and represented different political affiliations and geographical locations in Trinidad, including Ms. Katty Christopher, PNM councillor for Richplain/Covigne of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation; Ms. Janelle St. Hillaire, PNM councillor for Newlands, Mahaica of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation; Ms. Rosanna Sookedeo, former vice chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and former COP councilor for Curepe/Pasea (presently an ILP member); Ms. Patricia Cedeno-Metivier, former deputy mayor of Arima (COP); and Ms. Sabrina-Mowlahh-Baksh, former deputy mayor of San Fernando (UNC).

In order to get the viewpoints of women serving as members of parliament in the house of representatives, the authors also conducted interviews with Ms. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, minister of public administration, member of parliament for San Fernando West and chairman of the COP. As one of the few women in the cabinet of Persad-Bissessar's government, and a woman in political leadership with the COP, one of the political parties that supported and allowed Persad-Bissessar political power, Ms. Seepersad-Bachan's understandings of being a woman in power were instrumental to understanding the limitations, opportunities and expectations that women face in politics, especially as they begin to ascend the political hierarchy. Interviews were also conducted with Ms. Joanne Thomas, member of parliament for St. Anns East (PNM); and Ms. Patricia McIntosh, member of parliament for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West (PNM). The authors also interviewed senators including Mrs. Corinne Baptiste McKnight¹¹ and Mrs. Nicole Dyer Griffith, deputy chairman of the COP. It must be noted that President Carmona revoked Mrs. Baptiste-McKnight's appointment on July 31, 2013,¹² and Mrs. Dyer-Griffith was removed from the cabinet after the prime minister's second cabinet reshuffle in 2012.¹³

The number of interviews the authors conducted for this research is relatively small due to issues incurred with making appointments or, not having appointments kept by especially MPs and those who hold ministerial positions. Women in local government were much more open to the research project and in scheduling face-to-face interviews. On the other hand, women MPs and those who hold ministerial posts were often more difficult to contact and most

¹¹ Mrs. Baptiste McKnight passed away on March 7, 2014 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

¹² Trinidad and Tobago Gazette. Thursday 15, August 2013. Vol. 52. No. 103. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive//E-Gazette/Gazette%202013/Gazette/Gazette%20No.%20103%20of%202013.pdf>

¹³ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette. Monday 25 June, 2012. Vol. 51. No. 112. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive//E-Gazette/Gazette%202012/Gazette/Gazette%20No.%20112%20of%202012.pdf>

times, multiple calls and emails were needed. Studying *up* has therefore been fraught with many difficulties, specifically in terms of accessing those with power. While anthropologist Laura Nader advocates studying *up*, along with studying *down*, as a means to understanding how power is produced, valued and distributed (Nader 1969, 301) and the relationships among individuals and groups, a power dynamic surfaces during this process that presents differently than studying down. Access to those higher up in the political hierarchy thus proved problematic to the research and limited the number of face-to-face interviews the authors conducted.

In light of the above limitation, researchers attended campaign walk-about held by Khadijah Ameen as stated above, and also four walk-about, one cottage meeting and two rallies held by her opponent and victor of the Chaguanas West by-election Mr., Jack Warner. These were held in Pierre Road, Felicity on July 5, 2013, La Paille, Caroni Village in July 10, 2013, Frederick Settlement, Caroni on July 12, 2013, Warner Village on July 15, 2013 and Felicity on July 17, 2013. Attendance to these allowed for comparisons to be made with regard to the gendered nature of campaigning, speeches and party politics. In addition, researchers attended two meetings of the UNC Monday Night People's Forum held on May 13, 2013 and July 8, 2013 at the Tunapuna Hindu School, Tunapuna and the Warrenville Regional Complex, Warrenville, Cunupia respectively. The researchers also attended the third anniversary celebrations of the People's Partnership which was held on May 24, 2013 at Mid Centre Mall, Chaguanas. These scheduled community public meetings that involved the UNC government reporting to the citizenry, provided the space for researchers to observe the prime minister interact with ministers, UNC members and the public. It also allowed the opportunity to hear the Prime Minister speak in person and conduct several interviews with members of the public in order to gauge their understandings of politics in Trinidad and Tobago and most importantly their opinions on the Prime Minister as a woman political leader. Researchers used discourse analysis, the examination of how humans use language to communicate and convey messages (Brown and Yule 1983) to analyze all her speeches. The use of discourse analysis found its place in research focused on women and gender because it allows for epistemological understandings of how language constructs and contests gender.

The authors tape recorded all interviews with permission from the interviewees, and coded all field notes with the software Atlas TI. Themes created from the data included: "women's need to negotiate the political space," "sexual politics," "gendered spaces," "masculinism in political parties," and "just hold strong, those men aren't easy, just hold strong." All these themes directly described women's experiences and understandings of political contestation and political life. In addition to interviews and participant and non-participant

observation, the authors used content analysis to analyze secondary data sources such as newspaper articles, speeches and the Hansard from the period of December 2009 to January 2014 as well as journal articles and related texts.

Findings

The Prime Minister as a Woman

Prior to her election on May 24, 2010, Persad-Bissessar sat as leader of the opposition in the house of representatives (HOR) of the Office of the Parliament in February 2010. She was one of eleven women in the forty-one member HOR. Women comprised 26.8% of members in the HOR and in the senate, and out of thirty-one appointed senators, thirteen or 41.9 % of them were women.¹⁴ Her rise to UNC political leader came after her victorious election over party founder Basdeo Panday. Persad-Bissessar won this election by a margin of 13,493 votes to Panday's 1,359 votes. For her, Panday was a patron of sorts---the male leader and father of the UNC---as she quickly rose through the party ranks from alderman for the St. Patrick County Council from 1987-1991, to senator in 1994, member of parliament for the Siparia constituency since 1995, attorney general in 1995 and in 2001, and then minister of education when the UNC won the national election in 2000. It thus took approximately twenty-three years, from 1987 to 2010, for Persad-Bissessar to ascend the party hierarchy and become political leader of the UNC.

The UNC internal election of 2010 was not only instrumental in Persad-Bissessar's rise to prime minister, but it also signaled a shift within the UNC---a party held together by a masculinist and predominantly Hindu and Indian political culture, infused by party loyalty to the male party founder. The 2010 internal elections saw Persad-Bissessar challenge her mentor and in doing so, publicly question Panday's leadership style and ability to lead the UNC to victory against the PNM in a national election. As she campaigned in central Trinidad in January 2010, she hailed her mentor as the "best prime minister in T&T" but as she continued, she stated, "to the chief, I salute you and I thank you, but the time has come....we can no longer stay in opposition. Our leader is continuing to lose support, even within our own party base."¹⁵ Persad-Bissessar's "nationalist" slate also swept the 2012 UNC internal elections. Young

¹⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in National Parliaments. February 28, 2010. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif311209.htm>

¹⁵ Sascha Wilson. "Kamla: Panday Can't Win Another Election." *Trinidad Guardian*. January 9, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/archives/news/politics/2010/01/09/kamla-panday-can-t-win-another-election>

women such as Khadijah Ameen and Ramona Ramdial challenged the party structures and subsequently won the seats of deputy chairman and election officer respectively. Thus, since 2010, when Persad-Bissessar won the party's leadership, women of the UNC began ascending the hierarchy of the male dominated political party and according to Hosein (2010), Persad Bissessar "had done something few women, and no Indian woman¹⁶, had ever done in politics globally. She came into power independently and on her own terms with no family connections to legitimize her name."¹⁷ This ascension did not take place, however, without gender negotiations and masculinist resistances characterizing the opportunities and limitations of 'woman power'.

Such negotiations and resistances were implicit in the 2010 national elections where Persad-Bissessar and her coalition party, the People's Partnership (PP), which comprised the UNC, the Congress of the People (COP), the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), the Movement for Social Justice (MSJ)¹⁸ and the Tobago Organization of the People (TOP), faced Mr. Patrick Manning, political leader of the PNM. Persad-Bissessar openly ran as the 'woman candidate' and in this way she appealed to women constituents. Persad-Bissessar also campaigned as politician, wife, mother and grandmother. Appearing on political platforms all over Trinidad and Tobago to the sounds of Helen Reddy's 1975 women's anthem, *I am Woman*, Persad-Bissessar reminded those present and the nation of her positionality as wife and mother, and because of this campaigned as a new type of leader---one who would foster change in Trinidad and Tobago, and who would bring unity to the coalition of parties and thus the country. This began a shift in the political discursive space. Images and stories that had never encroached political space before emerged, such as Persad-Bissessar as a doting grandmother. This feminizing of the political discursive space not only challenged the "rural, Indian, working class"¹⁹ UNC, but it also transcended what Gilkes (2010) described as the "patricentric Hindu cultural ideas" of a Hindu woman ascending to political power in the male dominated Hindu political party. In running to be prime minister, she also aimed to receive the acceptance of not only the large Indo-Trinidadian electorate, but the equally large Afro-Trinidadian one. As unifier and leader of the PP, which comprised of political parties that included a different racial, class and issue-centered electorate than the mostly Indo-Trinidadian UNC, Persad-Bissessar campaigned as a candidate whose experience as a wife, mother and grandmother, coupled by her long political career, would bring change to Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁶ That is, a Trinidadian woman of East Indian descent.

¹⁷ Gabrielle Hosein. "Looking Back at the 2010 Trinidad and Tobago General Election." *StarbroekNews.com*. May 31, 2010, <http://www.starbroeknews.com/2010/features/05/31/looking-back-at-the-2010-trinidad-and-tobago-general-election/>.

¹⁸ The MSJ officially withdrew from the PP on June 17, 2012.

¹⁹ Hosein, "Looking Back at the 2010 Trinidad and Tobago General Election."

She campaigned as the woman candidate, the caring candidate, the candidate to cross all racial, ethnic and religious lines, which appealed to many Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian females, mothers and grandmothers who understood and respected the power of a strong female figure. Her humble, rural upbringing in south Trinidad, and her steady upward mobility through education also appealed to a range of constituents who saw she had the potential to be a different leader than the male figures who ruled Trinidad and Tobago since independence.

The invoking of Persad-Bissessar's womanhood, femininity and motherhood, proved to be a source of power and vulnerability for her. The 'woman candidate,' referred to as 'the lady' by her opponent Manning, Persad-Bissessar was often openly criticized as being weak and unable to lead and make decisions---"the kind of veiled sexism often directed at women" (Hosein, 2010). Before her election however, Persad-Bissessar was already privy to such accusations based on her gender. During the campaign for UNC political leader in January 2010 as Persad-Bissessar campaigned and called for a stronger UNC, Panday centered national discussions on her character, and painted Persad Bissessar as a woman who drank heavily. While campaigning, Panday stated, "She is not yet ready. She has to get rid of that serious problem she has. I empathize with her. But the leadership of your party at this time is of overriding concern."²⁰ While such an accusation was not unheard of in the public realm, the accusations held more weight in this case because they were directed at a woman for whom considerations of class, religion and respectability were significant. The accusations further questioned Persad-Bissessar's ability to lead. Such questioning continues to characterize Persad-Bissessar's political life up until today.

Persad-Bissessar's victory in the 2010 UNC internal election, and then candidacy in the 2010 general elections was greatly applauded by political analysts, feminists and women activists in Trinidad and Tobago and the region. Social activist Hazel Brown, founding member of the Network of NGO's of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women, publicly endorsed Persad-Bissessar, and her campaign formed part of the Network of NGOs 'Put a Woman' project with the slogan 'A Woman's Place is in the House---of Parliament.' The Network of NGOs' 'Put a Woman' project stemmed from the Network's 'Engendering Local Government' project which commenced in 1996, and the subsequent 'Women's Parliament Forum' in 1998. Its aim was to get one hundred women to run in the local government elections, and to bring a 50/50 representation on all levels of government, that is, fifty percent of women to hold parliament seats, fifty percent of women to be local chairmen and deputies, and to have a

²⁰ Maxie Cuffie. "The PM's Alleged Drinking Problem---the perception." *Trinidad Guardian*. December 9, 2012, <https://guardian.co.tt/columnist/2012-12-09/pm%E2%80%99s-alleged-drinking-problem%E2%80%94-perception>

woman elected as mayor of Port of Spain. Brown and the Network of NGOs would thus rally behind Persad- Bissessar, with Brown often publicly speaking out against Persad-Bissessar's detractors and urging women of Trinidad and Tobago to support a woman for prime minister. James-Sebro (2010) would thus describe Persad-Bissessar's victory in the general election as "Hazel Brown's everlasting 'Put a Woman' campaign" bearing "its first full fruit."²¹

Male stalwarts of her political party also endorsed Persad-Bissessar---many of whom had campaigned against her in the 2010 UNC internal elections. UNC stalwarts and newer members such as Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Chandresh Sharma, Dr. Rupert Griffith, Vasant Bharrath and Jack Warner heavily campaigned for the UNC and for Persad-Bissessar. Warner especially, who had campaigned against Persad-Bissessar's slate in the 2010 internal election to win the post of deputy chairman of the UNC and was re-elected again in the UNC's March 24, 2012 election, (he would later resign from this position on April 23, 2012) was often at the side of Persad-Bissessar, speaking vociferously on her behalf. Patricia Mohammed, professor of gender and cultural studies at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, argued that Persad-Bissessar's running "showed there was a much greater acceptance of women being empowered in society" (Matroo 2010)²². She further stated:

...I think it's a reflection of the times. Women have the capacity to bring about change, but it depends on whether they sufficiently connect with the concerns that people have. I hope they would take up the gender policy and drive it home because it is something we have been pushing for some time.²³

After Persad-Bissessar's victory, Hosein as cited in McIntosh (2010) also commented: "having a female PM is highly inspiring for a younger generation of women and socializes younger men to grow up in a world where women's leadership is more accepted. Having a female PM means that we may get policies that are more gender sensitive, but this is more based on the leader's politics and ideology rather than her sex or biology."²⁴ Hazel Brown also continued to call on women of Trinidad and Tobago to support the new prime minister. Lauding her and the eleven out of twenty-six women who were elected into parliament during this time (five women from the PP and six from the PNM), Brown expressed: "her victory is a very

²¹ Meryl James-Sebro. "Woman Power and Leadership Styles: Lessons from Trinidad and Tobago." *Caribbean Political Economy, normangirvan.info*. June 24, 2010, <http://www.normangirvan.info/james-sebro-woman-power/>

²² Carol Matroo. "Can Women in the Election Make a Difference?" *Trinidad Newsday*. May 6, 2010, <http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0.120254.html>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Karel McIntosh. "Broken Ceilings and Woman Power in T&T." *Outlish Magazine*. June 7, 2010, <http://www.outlish.com/broken-ceilings-and-woman-power-in-tat/>

important milestone that has been met in this country. There has always been doubt out there, over the capacity of a woman to lead, and it is natural to doubt” (Asson 2010).²⁵ Political analyst Dr. Indira Rampersad also commented on Persad-Bissessar’s general election victory in 2010 stating that: “...she will be under intense scrutiny. The focus now will be on her and her performance.”²⁶ Thus for many supporters, analysts and the country at large, “woman power” had prevailed. But now it was a matter of what was going to happen next. Who would she appoint to her cabinet and to state boards, and would women figure greatly in her administration?

Soon after her victory, Persad-Bissessar appointed her first cabinet. Of the thirty-one member cabinet (excluding the prime minister), only five were women. They included Ms. Therese Baptiste Cornelis, minister of health; Ms. Rudrawatee Ramgoolam, minister of public administration; Ms. Mary King, minister of planning and gender affairs; Ms. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, minister of energy and Ms. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, minister of Tobago development. This was a decrease from the number of women in the cabinet under the PNM after the 2007 general elections. (Former PM Manning appointed eleven women to the cabinet after the PNM’s victory in 2007).²⁷

Between 2010 and 2013, however, Persad Bissessar reshuffled the cabinet three times. In June 2011, a little over a year after her first cabinet was sworn in, Persad-Bissessar undertook the first reshuffle. At this time, Baptiste-Cornelis and Ramgoolam were stripped of their portfolios. Dr. Fuad Khan, the MP for Barataria/San Juan and a high-ranking UNC figure replaced Baptiste-Cornelis because of bad reviews of the health care sector and health delivery in the nation. Baptiste-Cornelis was then offered the position of Trinidad and Tobago’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland; a post which she accepted, but then was recalled from in 2012. During this period, the ministry of planning and gender affairs saw great changes as well. In May 2011, Persad-Bissessar revoked the appointment of minister from Mary King due to King’s implication in the improper award of a particular contract. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie replaced her. Persad-Bissessar then split the ministry and appointed Dr. Tewari to be minister of planning and sustainable development and Ms. Verna St. Rose, a social worker and child and women’s rights activist who had greatly supported Persad-Bissessar

²⁵ Cecily Asson. “Kamla’s Victory: An ‘Important Milestone.’” *Trinidad Newsday*. May 26, 2010, <http://newsday.co.tt/news/0,121413.html>

²⁶ Peter Richards. “First Woman PM takes the Helm in Trinidad.” *Inter Press Service News Agency*. May 25, 2010, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/05/first-woman-pm-takes-the-helm-in-trinidad/>.

²⁷ See Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*. December 31, 2007. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif311207.htm>

during her election campaign, to be minister of the ministry of gender, youth and child development.²⁸

Women's rights activists, academics and feminists hoped that Trinidad and Tobago's National Gender Policy would surpass the policy evaporation it suffered since it was laid as a green paper in the Office of the Parliament in 2009.²⁹ Especially with a woman at the helm, and one who campaigned on the platform of "woman power," key stakeholders waited to see if the stalled policy would experience some traction and passed in the parliament. Many believed that part of the reason why the national gender policy did not gain the expected momentum was due to the constant changes to the appointment of minister of gender, youth and child development. The ministry saw three people appointed as minister between 2011 and 2013. St. Rose, an avid supporter of the national gender policy strongly felt that a national policy on gender in Trinidad and Tobago should include a woman's right to choose whether to have an abortion, and gay/homosexual rights. She made this very clear at the ministry's gender stakeholder consultation, which was held at Cascadia Hotel, St. Anns, Trinidad on May 16, 2012.

....One has to do with the issue of sexuality, the other one has to do with termination of pregnancy. We as a ministry at the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, our approach is a rights-based approach. Human rights must be at the core of whatever we do. So while we may not agree on issues, let us keep in our focus the rights of citizens in this country.³⁰

Persad-Bissessar however fired St. Rose in June 2012.³¹ While Persad-Bissessar gave no official reason for the action, Anil Roberts, Minister of Sport, revealed during a press conference in December 2012 that the prime minister fired St. Rose due to her own deep conviction on gay and reproductive rights---rights which she wanted included in the national gender policy and which put in her in contention with her fellow members of cabinet. "She wanted her own way or the highway. Hell hath no fury like a woman fired!," explained Roberts³² as he spoke to St. Rose's accusations after Persad-Bissessar fired her that the prime minister had a substance abuse problem. It should be pointed out that St. Rose strongly defended Persad-Bissessar on this issue prior to being fired.

²⁸ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette. Wednesday 13 July, 2011. Vol. 50. No. 89. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive//E-Gazette/Gazette%202011/Gazette/Gazette%20No.%2089%20of%202011.pdf>

²⁹ See Deborah McFee's chapter in this edited collection on the creation and implementation of national gender policies in the Anglophone Caribbean.

³⁰ Sean Douglas. "Verna Backs Gay-Rights, Abortion in Gender Policy." *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. May 17, 2012, <http://newsday.co.tt/politics/0.160230.html>

³¹ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette. Monday 25 June, 2012. Vol. 51. No 112. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive//E-Gazette/Gazette%202012/Gazette/Gazette%20No.%20112%20of%202012.pdf>

³² See Ramdass, 2012.

Ms. Marlene Coudray, former COP member and former mayor of San Fernando replaced St. Rose. In September 2013, however, Coudray was reappointed to the ministry of local government, and Persad-Bissessar appointed Mr. Clifton De Coteau to be the new minister of gender, youth and child development. At this time, the prime minister also appointed Ms. Raziah Ahmed to be the new minister of state in the ministry of gender, youth and child development.³³

During these appointment changes, the national gender policy was presented to the cabinet, but to date, even after a number of public consultations led by Professor Patricia Mohammed and gender machinery consultant Dr. Rawwida Baksh, who worked as head of the gender section at the Commonwealth Secretariat, the policy document remains stalled. Dr. Baksh believes the issue of gay rights is the most controversial. She feels that while there was support for sexual choice (not same-sex marriage) by faith-based stakeholders, the government should be cognizant of this difference and agree to free choice between consenting adults, while not sanctioning same-sex marriage. This would “allow individuals the right to choose, and go a long way to preventing gender-based violence and discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual identity or orientation.”³⁴

It is clear that Persad-Bissessar’s engagement with feminist issues has been quite uneven, most notably given the many appointment changes in the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, and its impact on the ability to push the gender agenda forward. Splitting the Ministry of Planning and Gender Affairs into two separate ministries was lauded by women activists because the new Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development promoted the issues of gender, youth and child affairs and women’s empowerment as national issues worthy of its own budget, staff and ministerial portfolio. However, the firing and subsequent replacement of three ministers since the ministry’s birth forces one to reconsider Persad-Bissessar’s commitment to gender equality in Trinidad and Tobago. Furthermore, Persad-Bissessar publicly assured that gay rights would be included in the national gender policy and that the country would protect the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community against discrimination, it seems her cabinet and her own electorate hold her captive on this issue. She seems entrapped on this issue by her promise of a gentler, kinder “integrative leadership” as described by Rosenthal (1998, 4) in her work on gender and state legislatures in the United States---one which “emphasizes collaboration and consensus and sees politics as

³³ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette. Wednesday 16 October, 2013. Vol. 52. No. 136. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive//E-Gazette/Gazette%202002/Gazette%20No.%20136%20of%202013.pdf>

³⁴ Rhonda Krystal Rambally. “Gender Policy Not Just for Women Only.” *Trinidad Guardian*. May 20, 2012, <http://guardian.co.tt/news/2012-05-20/gender-policy-not-just-women-only>

something more than satisfying particular interests.”³⁵ As head of a coalition of parties, Persad-Bissessar’s leadership style must be collaborative as she must seek to find a balance in the varying interests of each party represented in the PP. However, it is impossible to make any headway with the national gender policy if members of her own party, coalition government and especially her male-dominated cabinet have no, or limited understandings of gender justice and thus have not supported any policy which to them, undermines the meanings that society gives to masculinity and femininity in Trinidad and Tobago. This resistance is structural and ideological, and therefore politics itself become a form of resistance for Persad-Bissessar in terms of championing a truly equitable and gender-just national gender policy. While women such as Hazel Brown and members of the Network of NGOs, and university groups such as Support for Change, which organized on the UWI, St. Augustine campus to lobby on behalf of this policy, the prime minister herself needs to make a similar intervention on the matter to push the policy-agenda forward.³⁶

On International Women’s Day in March 2011, however, Persad-Bissessar appointed Hazel Brown and Ms. Brenda Gopeesingh, founding member and former president of the Hindu Women’s Organization of Trinidad and Tobago, as special envoys to look at women and children’s issues in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The appointments aligned “with mandates from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2009, which directly address[ed] matters relating to women and children” (Ramdass 2011).³⁷ During this time, Persad-Bissessar also announced that a National Commission on the Status of Women in Trinidad and Tobago would be created. To date, no commission has been created.

In 2010, Persad-Bissessar officially set a goal to have 40 percent female representation on all state boards. However, after Persad-Bissessar announced the state board appointees on October 8, 2010, Brown and the Network of NGOs publicly expressed their disappointment in the absence of women as chairs of these boards. While in November 2010, the administration officially stated that 31 percent of those appointed to state boards between October 2010 and November 2010, were women, this still fell shy of Persad-Bissessar’s 40 percent vision. At the time, according to then minister of planning, economic restructuring and gender affairs, Ms. Mary King, 198 appointees to 79 state boards (20 boards still needed to be appointed) were women---an improvement from the PNM administration in which women comprised 26 percent

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ It must be noted with regard to legislation which has a strong gender component the following Bills were passed under the Persad-Bissessar’s administration: The Children’s Life Fund Bill, 2010; The Senior Citizens Grant (Amendment) Bill, 2010; The Trafficking in Persons Bill, 2011; The Children Bill, 2012 (which had lapsed under the PNM administration since 2009); The Legal Aid and Advice (Amendment) Bill, 2012.

³⁷ Anna Ramdass. “Anil: Verna Fired for Aay/Abortion rights.” *Trinidad Express*. December 6, 2012, http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/anil_verna_fired_for_gay_abortion_rights_-182475091.html

of state boards. King also stated that ten women headed these boards, an increase of four from the PNM administration previously (Douglas, 2010). Thus, under Persad-Bissessar's administration the number of women appointed to state boards has increased. It must be noted however that appointments to state boards was not solely decided by Persad-Bissessar or the UNC. Appointments were made in conjunction with all parties of the PP. Members of the PP submitted recommendations, which cabinet reviewed and decided upon.³⁸ State board appointment recommendations by each party are closed to the public, however, so it is impossible to know the ratio of women to men which the PP and/or Persad-Bissessar herself recommended.

While it was Persad-Bissessar's goal to have 40 percent of women represent seats on state boards, such an increase in the number of women appointed under her administration can be accounted for due to interventions by Brown and the Network of NGOs. After cabinet made the first appointments in October 2010, Brown, on behalf of the Network, released a press statement stating that the lack of women as chairs on state boards was

*....not a trend we want to see continued. It cannot be that there are no competent women who are willing to serve, especially given our boast about the numbers of our women who are graduating from national and other universities....Correcting this matter of female marginalization will not happen on its own....It requires a commitment at the highest level to achieving this, backed up by firm action.*³⁹

In her statement to the press, Brown reminded the public of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality statutes, and demanded that the prime minister and king "provide leadership on this issue of gender equality." After this intervention the number of women on state boards increased.

Furthermore, in 2011 the prime minister announced that the 2012 national budget would be a "gender responsive budget"---one to "enhance a gender-responsive national development plan to support the allocation of funding to all ministries and sectors" (Lord 2011).⁴⁰ Making this announcement during her presentation to the UN debate on Women in Politics in New York on September 19, 2011, Persad-Bissessar further commented that she intended to "enhance a gender-responsive national development plan to support the allocation of funding to all ministries and sectors."⁴¹ She continued: "I would like to see women comprising half of the

³⁸ Corey, Connelly. "PM stands by PP state board appointments." *Trinidad Express*. October 17, 2010. <http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0.129247.html>

³⁹ As quoted in the Trinidad Express Newspapers. October 8, 2012. "...Group Calls for More Female Representation," http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/___Group_calls_for_more_female_representation-104616639.html.

⁴⁰ Richard Lord. "PM: Budget to Focus on Gender Issues." *Trinidad Guardian*. September 20, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2011/09/20/pm-budget-focus-gender-issues>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

legislature, half of the local government bodies, half of our state boards, half the private sector board rooms, half our leaders in civil society and community organisations.”⁴² The \$58 billion 2012 budget thus included more social programs that created grants for poor, single mothers with special needs children, for families with children with disabilities, and other allowances for individuals with disabilities.⁴³ To date the administration is yet to truly develop a gender-responsive budget, or even guidelines for the budget that needed to be developed first.

As of 2013, however, training was provided to government ministries on gender-responsive budgeting. During his 2013 budget address, Minister of Finance and the Economy Larry Howai stated that guidelines for a gender-responsive budget

*....will be drafted to capture the unique needs and vision of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The guidelines will make the case for the need to allocate sufficient financial resources to achieve gender equality, equity and women’s empowerment in all economic and social sectors of Trinidad and Tobago.*⁴⁴

Ms. Folade Mutota of the Women’s Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD), however, stated that in order for such guidelines on gender-responsive budgeting to be created and implemented, that is, “If government accepts that matters related to gender equity and equality must be addressed,” it must first implement the national gender policy (Doughty 2013).⁴⁵

After three years in office, Persad-Bissessar’s record on advancing women’s rights and gender equality remains largely uneven. While her presence in the parliament as prime minister is a showcase of ‘woman power,’ the negotiations and contestations which seek to limit this power remain unseen, especially in terms of advancing gender justice. An overview of her first three years in office, and especially examining her journey to being elected prime minister, has thus been necessary to understand how Persad-Bissessar’s lived political reality and experiences (as she invoked femininity, womanhood and motherhood within a patriarchal space which was historically lauded as the ‘father of the nation’), constrained her ability to engage in feminist issues. Furthermore her journey also reveals how interventions by women and feminists activists can be an important strategy in implementing policies and creating discourse toward real qualitative and quantitative change for women and men toward greater gender justice. The authors, however, question whether and if, the experiences of political life for a female politician in Trinidad and Tobago is a homologous one.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. *Budget Statement 2013. Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity*. Presented by Minister of Finance and the Economy, Larry Howai, October 1 2012. <https://guardian.co.tt/sites/default/files/story/Budget-Statement-2013.pdf>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Melissa Doughty. “Activist: Budget Not Sensitive to Gender.” *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*. September 13, 2013, <http://guardian.co.tt/news/2013-09-13/activist-budget-not-sensitive-gender>.

Women's Experience with Politics and Power

Existing scholarship proves that gender impacts how women enter into politics, and once there, how they present themselves and behave in the public space. This is further supported by what Barriteau (1997) described as “the value systems of states” in the Caribbean region⁴⁶ and society, which perpetuate unequal power and gender relations between men and women and “contribute to maintaining inequalities that are inimical for women, children and men.”⁴⁷ Such “value systems” or what Barriteau (2001, 30) would term the “ideological relations of gender,” ... “reveal what is appropriate or expected of the socially constructed beings of ‘women’ and ‘men,’” how society forms gender identities and how such gendered hierarchies create gender ideologies within a society which influence/shape women's experiences of political life.

The role that women play in the gendered division of labor permeates the political experiences and understandings of women in politics in Trinidad and Tobago. Research shows that women as mothers, wives, sisters and members of communities and civic organizations experience political life differently than men. While they must do their work in the political or public sphere just as their male counterparts, it does not negate the widely held assumption that woman play a pivotal role in the household. The authors interviewed former Deputy Mayor of Arima, Patricia Cedeno-Metivier (COP) and mother of two, for instance, after coming from the supermarket. When asked about her experiences as a senator in the Office of the Parliament, Deputy Chairman of the COP, and former Senator Nicole Dyer-Griffith, responded:

...When our sittings would go from 1:30 pm straight through to 5:00 am the next morning many issues of personal life management would come to fore. Many times would be a challenge not only for me, but for the many other young mothers who had to be present in the Parliament for these extended sittings including the Parliamentary Police, beverage and catering staff, Parliamentary staff etc. I have always maintained we need to look into the real value of such extended sittings.⁴⁸

Khadijah Ameen, former chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and a divorced mother of one son, described part of her life as a councillor and chairman:

⁴⁶ Barriteau 1997, 11.

⁴⁷ Barriteau 1997, 14.

⁴⁸ Nicole Dyer-Griffith, interview, June 7, 2013.

....So sometimes you have to go visit a project site early in the morning or go on a television or radio show very early in the morning. That means my mother would have to get [my son] ready for school on evenings most times. I can't normally leave work at two o'clock or three o'clock to pick him up. His bedtime is half seven and I don't get home until nine o'clock in the night. So it's easy to not even see your child in this kind of work. So you have to schedule a system, some make it their duty to drop their children to school in the morning, or you know find a way. Make it a routine so the children begin to rely on it so that you get to spend quality time with your children because it very easy to squeeze them out. So for me, I make a point to wake him up in the morning for us to read together on a morning, spend snuggle time on a morning because I know I won't be there to put him to bed at night. Due to the cultural expectations men expect their wives to cook for them, I was married for two years and one of the issues that my husband had was not that I couldn't cook, but that I didn't cook often enough. I would cook on a Sunday but I didn't cook during the week. My mother lives right next door and she cooks for everyone. Her food taste good but he wanted his wife to cook for him and that was one his issues. I know some of my female colleagues have that problem, they have to go home and cook for their husbands so that prevents you from getting involve in certain meeting, participating in certain committee as well as in things that could readily advance you in politics. When you end up on committees that deal with sensitive issues, if you don't have time for the committee, you're out.⁴⁹

During her interview for this chapter, former COP Deputy Mayor of Arima Cedeno-Metivier also spoke about her children and the fact that they are understanding of her work and her commitments outside of the home now that they are older. The word "balance" has thus become quite useful for women politicians to describe their lives. The prime minister herself shows publicly that "balance" is needed, as she has not shied away from her duties as mother, wife and grandmother. Pictures of her and her grandson flood local newspaper, making the general public aware that in addition to being the prime minister she is also a mother and a grandmother. For some, like PNM Councillor Janelle St. Hillaire, Councillor for Newlands, Mahaica within the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, such a show of family, familial space and the prime minister's private life is positive.

Different people respond differently. Some people will say that cool, some people will say "why she children have to be on the papers in public life....That's who she is a mother,

⁴⁹ Khadijah Ameen, interview, March 13, 2013.

*she speaks about being a mother, grandmother. I don't see anything wrong with it, to me that sets a trend for the younger generation....they see how important family is.*⁵⁰

For St. Hillaire, such a show of motherhood expresses how important family is important to the prime minister. But for others, like former Independent Senator Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, such a show of family falls short. According to Baptiste-Knight, “[the prime minister] isn’t lying, she is a mother she is a grandmother but that has absolutely nothing to do with what happens thereafter.”⁵¹ When asked to expound, the Senator replied, “because I would be surprised to discover that she or anybody on her staff is particularly mandated to look carefully at legislation to see how it is supposed to impact families, children, et cetera, et cetera.”⁵² When asked if she was referring specifically about the Trinidad and Tobago National Gender Policy, the senator stated:

I can't have any thoughts on a policy that doesn't exist....that green paper⁵³ ... nobody even behaves as if it ever existed, and now whatever is there doesn't even have a color, all they keep saying is it's been to Cabinet, it's been to this, it's been to that, but you know? And I find that here the, how should I put this, the noisy lobby behaves as if gender in Trinidad politics is feminine... that's the only gender, you have, I'm not saying that there aren't problems that particularly impact women, but the social situation right now makes me worry more about the young boys... and you can't tell me that you have a gender policy in the twenty first century and you want to skirt the problems of the rights of gays, lesbians and transsexuals come on. You pick up the papers and you see two, two women coming out of court and to tell them that they're actually transvestites. This is not a situation that exists and that must be dealt with? When in your constitution you say that every single citizen is entitled to full human rights, are these citizens?⁵⁴

Such disappointment in the prime minister with regard to setting policies in place that target women is also shared by the member of parliament for San Fernando West and Minister of Public Administration and Chairman of the COP, Ms. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan. Speaking with her on January 20, 2013, the authors asked if she experienced or noticed any positive changes for women especially in politics due to a female prime minister. Ms. Seepersad-Bachan was adamant that nothing had changed. She expressed her frustration in the prime minister and explained that when Persad-Bissessar was elected she was elated and hoped for great change, especially for women in positions of political power. Ms. Seepersad-Bachan pointed out that

⁵⁰ Janelle St. Hillaire, interview, April 9, 2013.

⁵¹ Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, interview, May 11, 2013.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ A version of the Trinidad and Tobago National Gender Policy was laid as a green paper in the Office of the Parliament in 2009.

⁵⁴ Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, interview, May 11, 2013.

despite the prime minister appealing to women constituents on the platform that there would be change for women, change had not happened.

The reality is that Persad-Bissessar's invocation of femininity, womanhood and motherhood is not able to transform gendered relations of power to the extent that she could make the changes that she campaigned for, and which were expected by Ms. Seepersad-Bachan and other constituents. Such a trend continues for women in politics due to the ideological and structural confines of political parties, cabinet and the continuous need for wider party and electorate support---especially for Persad-Bissessar who must lead a coalition of different political parties.

Married woman in politics such as Persad-Bissessar, however, beget respect or an understanding which unmarried or single woman do not receive in political parties and political spaces. Councillor St. Hillaire, for example, complained that there is always the assumption by fellow politicians and constituents that she is married. Within the council there is a male councillor with the same last name and she often receives invitations to political and community events to her office addressed to 'Mr. and Mrs. St. Hillaire.' She cannot understand why there exists an assumption that as a young woman in politics, she is automatically married.⁵⁵ PNM councillor Katty Christopher, Councillor for Covigne/Richplain within the Diego Martin Regional Corporation also receives similar treatment. Single and young like St. Hillaire, Christopher maintains that colleagues, especially male colleagues, describe her as "hard." In addition, she overhears comments about herself such as "she needs to give more honey and less vinegar." Councillor Christopher believes that this stems from her being the only young, unmarried female among other female councilors who are married with children. She also revealed in her interview for this chapter that colleagues make assumptions that she is soft and quiet, and because of this , she has had to and continues to work harder.⁵⁶ Another example is Ameen who was verbally attacked by a speaker at Jack Warner's cottage meeting in Warner Village, Chaguanas on July 15, 2013 because she is divorced. The speaker, the first on the platform, loudly stated that Ameen was not married, but divorced. While this is a fact, the speaker aimed to deride Ameen and cast doubt on her character. The logic was that if she cannot have a husband and be a good wife, then how can she lead. Such notions are difficult to challenge as they speak to the gendered assumptions of men and women---especially how society in Trinidad and Tobago understand women's roles outside the home and in the public sphere. These notions shape gender relations and hierarchies in political spheres.

⁵⁵ Janelle St. Hillaire, interview, April 9, 2013.

⁵⁶ Katty Christopher, interview, March 19, 2013.

Women politicians have a general understanding of the gendered constraints of political life. They understand that the type of leadership strategy they employ is highly visible, especially given that society views leadership as a masculine trait and thus often undermines women's effectiveness as politicians. Gendered assumptions about leadership and the challenges it poses for women presents itself during the campaign when a woman presents herself as a political candidate and potential leader. Ameen explained the tight rope that women must walk when it comes to political campaigning. Like Persad-Bissessar, Ameen had to tout her political experience and her womanhood, especially during the 2013 Chaguanas by-election campaigns for which she was the UNC candidate when her status as a divorced mother of one entered into the campaign discourse. Campaigning, especially in its often veiled and sometimes very open sexist discourse, is a very gendered activity. For example, Ameen explained that she will not campaign in a bar because citizens view a bar as male or masculine space. Furthermore she stated she would not publicly drink a beer, because some social, political and religious circles view a woman drinking or even holding a beer as unacceptable. She explained:

*Some of the things that a male candidate would get licks for that a female candidate would not get licks for, using myself as an example, I have had people including ministers tell me that or say that they believe I'm only on glamour, because that's their impression. They are people from the area as well normal citizens who would say that as well, that's their impression, but there are also people who know that I work very hard. As a woman if you look too good they'd say you're only on glamour and if you don't look too good they'll say why she don't go an sell in Tunapuna Market. They'll say derogatory things about you, so you have to find a balance where you're well groomed, you look neat but you cant look too glamorous...*⁵⁷

The campaign and political rules are thus very different for male and female political candidates. Campaigning and political spaces are gendered. While society expects and even excuses to learn that a male political candidate retreats to the bar after a hard day on the job or a hard day of campaigning, they do not accept a woman candidate drinking, especially in male or masculine spaces, such as bars. Such an expectation or "value system" is based on social and cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity, and the unequal allocation of power given to each. Therefore, while the former UNC political leader labeled Persad-Bissessar as a drinker during the 2010 internal election campaigns, the fact that many men of the political party indulged in drinking together was not relevant. As a woman, and especially as a respectable Hindu, East Indian woman, drinking is unacceptable. Maxie Cuffie (2012), expressed that the

⁵⁷ Khadijah Ameen, interview. March 13, 2013.

allegations that Persad-Bissessar is a heavy drinker is further problematic due to the perception that such a problem affects her ability to lead---as seen in the November 2, 2012 march in Port Spain against the passage of Section 34 of the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act 2011. The passage of Section 34, which “provided for the acquittal of an accused “after the expiration of ten years from the date on which an offence is alleged to have been committed,”⁵⁸ sparked great outrage throughout Trinidad and Tobago as it meant that those indicted in the famed Piarco Airport corruption cases,⁵⁹ would be free from all charges. According to Cuffie (2012), during this march, participants sang to the tune of calypsonian Beginner’s 1940 road march calypso *Run Yuh Run*, but instead replaced the lyrics with “Drink yuh rum, Kamla, drink yuh rum” thus “making a clear link between the Section 34 fiasco and the prime minister’s alleged drinking problem” and her ability to lead.

Such allegations of heavy drinking and questioning of her leadership were so strong and widespread that Persad-Bissessar, amid allegations of same by former Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development Verna St. Rose, saw fit to publicly denounce such charges. Persad Bissessar announced:

*I have no such problem and I have nothing further to say with respect to that...It would be most interesting if with every allegation that is made I need to defend myself personally. I serve my country well, I have nothing to be afraid of. I have nothing to be ashamed of, and absolutely no substance abuse whatsoever.*⁶⁰

Even before he was a part of her cabinet, Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Member for Oropouche East, Dr. Roodal Moonilal also alluded to Persad’s Bissessar possible substance abuse problem. So too did former UNC funder and former Minister of National Security Jack Warner. He recanted all allegations as he teamed with Persad-Bissessar to beat Panday in the UNC internal elections, and then to face the PNM in the general elections. However, as the relationship soured between the two amid the very public allegations of fraud and money laundering against Warner, Warner, now the political leader of his own Independent Liberal Party (ILP) again accused the prime minister of a heavy drinking habit.

Such accusations and discourse surrounding Persad-Bissessar not only clearly describes the gendered nature of political life, but also demonstrates the inherent gendered contradictions of what society says a female and male politician can do. Many view drinking

⁵⁸Dana Seethahal. “The Scandal of Section 34.” *Trinidad Express*. September 14, 2012. http://www.trinidadexpress.com/commentaries/The_scandal_of_Section_34-169864216.html

⁵⁹ See Khrystal Rawlins. “\$11.5M bail for Piarco Airport 8.” *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. May 19, 2004. http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0_18300.html

⁶⁰ Keino Swamber. “Kamla: I Don’t Have a Substance Abuse Problem.” *Trinidad Express*. December 6, 2012. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Kamla-I-dont-have-a-substance-abuse-problem-182308571.html>

alcohol and campaigning in bars as masculine in Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, and therefore an encroachment on the notions of femininity and respectability, especially for a Hindu, Indo-Trinidadian woman like Persad-Bissessar. But they don't link alcohol consumption by men to their ability to lead. This further proves that the "ideological relations of gender have not kept pace with the material relations of gender (Vassell 2006, 53). According to Barritteau, "the material relations of gender reveal how women and men gain access to, are allocated or allowed to benefit from material and non-material, such as status and power in a state and society" (Barritteau 2001, 30). Thus, while some women such as Persad-Bissessar and Ameen enter into the political space, society still judges them by and demands they operate within the inherent gender ideologies which determine gender and power relations. These gender ideologies force woman political leaders and politicians to operate within the confines of femininity and masculinity, and to defend themselves, as Persad-Bissessar did with her drinking, or to avoid activities all together, such as drinking beer or campaigning in bars as Ameen did, to maintain political life.

Not all women politicians, however, resign themselves to operating within the confines that masculinist ideologies create for them. For example, while Ms. Sabrina Mowlah Baksh, former deputy mayor of San Fernando, recognized the different expectations for male and female political candidates, she took a different approach to the question of gendered spaces for male and female politicians. Questioned about her first campaign experience in local government in the San Fernando West constituency, she stated:

I feel, you can run a campaign of integrity vis a vis dealing with the issues, not going into the old way of bashing the opponent and bad mouthing everything and everything...Of course one of the big things was the spaces you would have gone into as a gender, as a person. Now as a male, you would have been allowed to go into bars. Now that was a big thing for me because I am not a drinking person and of course it was a big thing whether I should go into bars and campaign or not. I felt that I needed to because I felt that it was a space in which I had to meet with some of the potential voters and I should not be barred from going into those places. So I would have gone in, I would have sat down, I would have drunk a soft drink with some of them, old talked with some of them. And I found that was a valuable strategy as well, because people will look even if they see you going into a bar as a woman. And do you know sometimes, a very good strategy was that after we had finished campaigning in the night, a lot of the people around me were drinkers, so they would go to the bar afterwards. And they would sit down and relax and

*laugh afterwards and I went in with them. We had limes in the bars after although I was not a drinker, I am not a drinker.*⁶¹

When asked if she suffered any backlash from decision she replied, “Yes there would have been some backlash from that. Of course, you know people say, ‘well she’s the candidate with all those men in the bar drinking.’” Mowlah-Baksh, however, was unfazed. Her presence in bars while campaigning, therefore, was a direct rebuttal of what was allocated as a masculine gendered space. What has thus been problematic for women in political life, and what impedes many women from entering into the world is what Vassell (2006, 60) described as an internalizing of gender roles by women, and furthermore, an acceptance of the dominant ideologies which identify and allocate spaces for women and women. There thus needs to be a shift in not only the material relations of gender, but also the ideological---a shifting that can begin with women politicians through shifting the political discursive space and gendered spaces and creating new spaces.

However, what cannot be denied is the notion that amid masculine, “dirty politics,” women who run for office carry out clean campaigns. According to Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, “empirical observations have been made that women less frequently take bribes, and are less often involved in shady political deals. This is thus explained by the idea that women are more moral than men, either because of their dominant social roles, or because of their implied intrinsic qualities” (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2007, 10). Such understandings permeate political life in Trinidad and Tobago. They can be seen in Persad-Bissessar’s boasting of a clean campaign at the start and throughout the general elections campaigns. While carrying out a clean campaign (or at least boasting of one) is not new when it comes to political campaigns, Persad- Bissessar’s clean campaign “called on her identity as a politician, mother, grandmother and woman.”⁶² Similarly when former Deputy Mayor of San Fernando Sabrina Mowlah-Baksh, explained first ran for political office, she ran a clean campaign, even as her opponent publicly referred to her as “a donkey in a thoroughbred race.” She did not respond to this insult, and explained that her opponent and others on his side began to spew accusations of infidelity aimed towards her. Mowlah- Baksh thus contends:

.... it is my firm belief...that to ruin a politician’s reputation for men it’s corruption and other issues; for women it’s damaging their reputation as a woman....So those kinds of moral issues, vis a vis what the society holds as acceptable behavior for men and women, women are judged based on adultery, infidelity greater. And that does more

⁶¹ Sabrina Mowlah Baksh, interview, March 15, 2013.

⁶² Gabrielle Hosein, “Looking Back at the 2010 Trinidad and Tobago General Election.”

*harm to women, as opposed to men. And that happens in the political arena as well. So the minute you want to destroy a woman, you don't say she's corrupt that wouldn't, you give her some men, and that case of adultery and infidelity, that does more harm than good.*⁶³

Goetz points out, “this idea of linking notions of womanly virtue with incorruptibility is not new. It is based upon essentialist notions of women’s higher moral nature and their propensity to bring their finer moral sensibilities to bear on public life, and particularly on the conduct of politics” (Goetz 2008, 90). While the authors do not question an anti-corruption agenda or clean campaign, what is implicated in such understandings is the power to unravel women’s political lives and worth. By invoking their femininity and linking this with morality, unravelling only needs to touch upon allegations of infidelity. Women are also privy to such a packing and unpacking of femininity, morality during their political life, and while it may give them political power, it can also create a vulnerability that male political leaders do fall victim to as well, though many have survived and resurrected their political careers.

The messy relationship between gender, morality and political power can be clearly seen in the political campaigns of the two major candidates in the Chaguanas-West by-election which took place on July 29, 2013. Mr. Warner and the ILP emerged victorious over his closet rival Ameen and the UNC. Both campaigns were hard-fought, though differently. During data collection for this chapter during walk-about by Ameen and Warner in different communities in the Chaguanas-West constituency and within the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, the authors observed marked differences in campaign tactics, and party management and support. These differences reveal much as they allow us to understand the gendered experiences of political contestation and campaigning, how men and women in the political party and on the ground negotiate masculinist political ideologies, and negotiations around dominant gender ideologies, and inherent power relations. Given that this election was truly a fight for the UNC to remain strong and united amid a seemingly far off but soon coming national election, Persad-Bissessar campaigned heavily with and for Ameen, and was the key-note speaker on her platform amid songs like “Girl on Fire” by Alicia Keys. This performance aimed to reveal Persad-Bissessar’s political might as a woman leader of the UNC and the country. With Ameen at her side, she aimed to guide Ameen to victory---two women; two sisters; a mother and daughter. When speaking during the campaign, Ameen made a habit to state publicly that she

⁶³ Gabrielle Hosein, “Looking Back at the 2010 Trinidad and Tobago General Election.”

would keep her campaign “clean.” Her speeches, though short, were often issue based and party based---a vote for Khadijah Ameen meant a vote for the UNC, and thus the country.

However, not many supported Persad-Bissessar’s strong and very public support of Ameen. In this respect, the discourse on Ameen was very gendered. Describing her as a “child” or “little girl” during his campaign rally in La Paille, Caroni Village on July 10, 2012, Warner publicly stated that Ameen “only has value when she holds on to the PM coat tails.” This raises a number of issues. First, especially on the campaign trail, the political discourse is a very gendered one especially when one or more of the candidates is a woman. The implications of phrases such as “little girl” to describe a woman (and many times to describe men who seemingly do not act within the confines of society’s construct of masculinity) are great. While the term “girl” has been somewhat contested according to Brown (2011, 108), and while many young women have reclaimed the term “girl,” in order “to make distinctions of their own, within the public sphere,” what is meant here by the terms “girl” and “little girl” is an accusation that Ameen is not “a mature and serious contributor to adult life,”⁶⁴ and therefore has no place in politics or in a political race against a powerful man (powerful in terms of party finance and support). Second, it raises the issue of the strategic alliance between two women---the prime minister and Ameen---excluding the need for male public support. While patronage of this sort are not new to political parties, as seen in Trinidad and Tobago, they often involve male-female patronage or male-male patronage.

For many women who either aspire to the party hierarchy, to serve in the party or to lead like Persad-Bissessar, there must be a negotiation with the male networks. In this way, many male allies or patrons support female politicians since these are the men who wield the most power---especially financially---within the political party. For example, Rosanna Sookdeo, former COP Vice-Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation area recalls she was recognized for the extensive work that she was doing in a community and because of this, she was approached by a gentleman in a political party to consider running as a councillor on the party ticket. She recalled:

...from there on, people start to recognise what I am doing, and I joined with the Rotary Club. I was not a member of the Club, but they asked me to assist them in the community to identify poor people. Immediately I set to get poor persons from each community. I did it out of passion and a love....and they asked me, they said “Rosanna, you are a people’s person, Politics is all about People”, they asked me to run for local government elections. So I said, “No, no, no! I am not qualified. I am not competent. I don’t know what are my

⁶⁴ Brown 2011, 108.

roles and functions. I don't have money for a campaign". One of the gentlemen said, "Because of your work, and your goodness, I will fund your campaign-profiles, posters, banners, flyers, election-day machinery, meals, what have we, I will take care of that. Paying polling agents and doing everything for you, and managing your campaign, spot meetings, I will organise all of that, I am going to do that. I want you". And I thought about it and I said, "Yes. It's for a community", and I got into it.⁶⁵

Though Sookdeo did not reveal who this gentleman was, she expressed admiration towards him and also to Mr. Winston Dookeran, former political leader of the Congress of the People (COP), the political party to which Sookdeo belonged at the time of this research. With regard to her allegiance to Dookeran, Sookdeo further expressed:

I came under the banners of the UNC in 1999 and again in 2003, and then because of Mr. Panday's behaviour and not allowing Mr. Dookeran to take his rightful position as political leader. He was my MP, my allegiance was to him because he allowed me his office and services free of charge, and as he walked and he cried, I walked with him. And then the party COP was formed and I stood by his side, and my allegiance is with him presently and that's why I'm here with the COP.⁶⁶

For women like Mowlah-Baksh and Cedeno-Metivier---powerful women in politics in their own rights---their entrance into the political sphere resulted from their husbands' support. Mowlah-Baksh, for example, recalled that her husband was the one who was first involved in politics and because of him, she was invited to speak at her first political meeting in Marabella many years ago. Cedeno-Metevier is the wife of Mr. Edward Mettevier, former mayor of Arima (1987-1989). While her political life began early in 1987 as an alderman in the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) government---the youngest Alderman at the time---having a male political ally in her husband, (who also acts as her campaign manager) was beneficial for a number of reasons, namely political and emotional support, and a mutual understanding of what it means to be in local government while navigating the political waters. Cedeno-Metevier described her husband as her "mentor."⁶⁷ For Christopher, though her mother is a member of a party group in Diego Martin, she was personally asked by Dr. Keith Rowley, Political Leader of the People's National Movement and the Leader of the Opposition to campaign in the 2010 local government election.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Rosanna Sookdeo, interview. March 4, 2013.

⁶⁶ Ibid. ; It must be noted that before the 2013 local government elections, Sookdeo resigned from the COP, and join with Warner and the ILP

⁶⁷ Patricia Cedeno-Metevier, interview. April 9, 2013.

⁶⁸ Katty Christopher, interview. March 19, 2013.

When asked about women's patronage by powerful men in political parties, Ameen explained that the same often applies to men in the party. According to Ameen:

...there are male candidates who would feel indebted to the first man or businessmen who sponsored them, so I think it's the same once they're not personally involved, but if you were sponsored by someone you're personally involved with that brings a different element. Men and women it both happens.⁶⁹

While male-male patronage and male-female patronage may be the norm in the political party culture throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the Chaguanas by-election brought to the forefront the concept of female-female patronage. Due to the nature of the race and what it meant to the prime minister and the UNC to keep the Chaguanas-West constituency under the helm of the UNC, a strategic alliance was formed between Persad-Bissessar and Ameen. Ameen, with the vocal and public support of the prime minister, and backed by key members of the UNC party, ascended from local government to a seat in the Office of the Parliament as an MP. Through this action, the prime minister tried to prove she had power, especially over her party, and over all opponents, especially Warner. As previously stated, many saw this female-female patronage as problematic---not the show of 'woman power' or 'UNC power' that Persad-Bissessar and the UNC aimed to showcase.

At one of Jack Warner's campaign walk-about in Warner Village, Charlieville on July 15, 2013, when asked about her thoughts on Khadijah Ameen going up against the incumbent Warner, a mixed-race self-described Christian woman stated that the prime minister's vocal and public support for Ameen had not necessarily helped Ameen in the election. Instead, she argued it was doing quite the opposite. This outward show of support actually showed that women cannot rule without being controlled, she believed. So even though the prime minister aimed to show that she never was controlled by men in cabinet by providing Ameen support, she was exercising a form of control over Ameen by speaking on her behalf, walking with her on her campaign walk-about and most importantly, many in the public saw her as dominating the face of the UNC/Khadijah Ameen campaign.⁷⁰ Understandings of the gendered nature of such political relationships is therefore vital. Male-male patronage seems less apt to elicit accusations of control, but society regards highly visible female-female patronage with concern. It is seen as problematic, and questions the abilities of the women candidates to lead. This female-female patronage is therefore seen as problematic within the masculinist political space, because it disturbs the common notion that leadership in political realms is naturally masculine and best

⁶⁹ Khadijah Ameen, interview. March 13, 2013.

⁷⁰ Interview, July 15, 2013. Warner Village, Charlieville.

undertaken by men. When women assume such behavior it thus undermines long-held notions of gendered definitions of leadership. Hutchings terms such thinking as a “cognitive short cut.” She explains that masculinity operates as a resource for thought in theorizing international relations, and by extension government. Therefore, masculinity as a “cognitive short cut” shapes and limits our thoughts where these are concerned, and in doing so, it incorporates a “hierarchical logic” of the exclusion of women (Hutchings 2008, 25).

This further proves the public’s understandings of leadership, that is, that leadership is a masculine trait and given the male breadwinner/female housewife ideal, it is therefore acceptable for a man to be a patron to a woman, but not vice versa. Ironically, the issue of female-female patronage seems to have taken much more time and discussion during the campaign than any discussions about the serious accusations of fraud and misappropriation of funds against Warner while he was the president of the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF).⁷¹ This issue barely made it into the political discursive space. In fact, supporters of Warner and the ILP did not even see fraud and corruption as an issue or concern due to these gendered assumptions about masculinity, femininity, power and leadership. Warner, the male, powerful leader survived the electoral campaign unscathed.

In 1985 Nancy Pelosi, the current Minority Leader of the United States House of Representatives stated: “the word ‘campaign’ is a war term. So when you go into a campaign you just prepare to go to war. If you think this is an exercise in civic activity...then you are going to be surprised.” This does not mean that women candidates are not ready to campaign for a position but what must be understood within this statement is that the war has different rules for men and women and notions of masculinity, femininity and power. These differences can also be seen when taking into consideration the dress code discussed above. Ameen, for example, explained that women candidates must find a balance between looking neat, but not too glamorous. St. Hillaire expressed similar sentiments. When asked about the impact of a woman prime minister on women who have political aspirations or those who are already involved in some level of national or local government politics, St. Hillaire explained that there are indeed more women in politics because of the prime minister. However women are not judged by what they deliver, but by how they dress and how they style their hair. Attending to this balance of neat, but not too glamorous, adds to the already busy schedules of women office holders. With her nails and hair meticulously done, St. Hillaire stated that she does these

⁷¹ Clydeen McDonald. “Jack Warner resigns as FIFA VP.” *Trinidad Guardian*. June 20, 2011. <https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2011/06/20/jack-warner-resigns-fifa-vp>

tasks herself. She further explained that because she often leaves the office after 10 pm, it became impossible to visit the hair and nail salon to upkeep the image of a “neat” women. Her solution was to enroll in a nail technician and hairdressing course so she could learn to do her nails and her hair herself on her own schedule.⁷²

Persad-Bissessar’s dress code and style of dress has also been open to public scrutiny. The media especially, commented on her apparent change of dress since becoming prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Her array of pants suits has made it into daily news stories in a way that the former male prime minister’s style and choice of dress were not. St. Hillaire said it best when she stated:

*When a woman is in a male dominated arena it's harder for them because you're being judged on so many different things. You are not just judged on what you deliver, your performance, they judge you for your dress code, all kind of different silly things. If your hair in a mess. What does that have to do with my serving my people?*⁷³

This reveals the internalizing of assigned gender roles (Vassell, 2006, 60) by women and women politicians, as well as the need to “play” fair within the political space, or play by the gendered rules of politics, amid what society and politicians themselves view as the messy contradictions of manicured nails, well done hair and being a doting grandmother and caring wife. For Persad-Bissessar, it was also to wear an array of pant suits in her declaration of a limited state of emergency for Trinidad and Tobago on August 21, 2011 to reveal a sense of power to the public. Such contradictions, which call for a balance between the acceptable and respectable notions of femininity within a field long dominated by men and masculine notions of power have reinforced unequal power relations, and has greatly impacted women politician’s experience of and understandings of political spaces. Furthermore, women political leaders who have entered into this space believe that they should work harder than their male colleagues. “Working harder” has thus come to mean that if they are to be deemed successful in their political careers, they must work harder than their male counterparts and thus prove to be more visible and most importantly, able to lead and hold a political position. However, women like Christopher, St. Hillaire, Cedeno-Metivier and PNM MP’s Joanne Thomas and Patricia McIntosh, believe that women by virtue of their gender, are able to be the type of political leaders which are able to “deliver”⁷⁴ to their constituents. According to Christopher, “women feel more, so they give more.”⁷⁵ It is understandings like these which opened up the discourse around women’s political power and leadership, and raised questions about whether women in

⁷² Janelle St. Hillaire, interview, April 9, 2013.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Katty Christopher, interview, April 9, 2013.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

politics should be required to do more, or are expected to perform differently than their male counterpoints. Furthermore, the backlash incurred in the hiring of her sister Vidwatee Newton as her personal assistant and especially the \$868,268.11TTD cost for overseas travel incurred, forced Persad-Bissessar to speak openly about what it means to be a woman prime minister. "I trust my sister," Persad-Bissessar stated in March 2012. "I feel comfortable with having her handling my personal matters like food and medication. It is vital. It allows me to spend more time on my job" (Javeed 2012).⁷⁶ With such matters unheard of during the administrations of the former male prime ministers, the election of Persad-Bissessar presented an opportunity for new discourse around campaigning political leadership, politics and power.

In examining women's experiences from the campaign ground to political office, it is clear gendered assumptions on leadership, and masculinity and femininity permeates political life, especially for women in politics. It dictates the spaces in which they can campaign, their campaign strategies, dress code, their relationship with other women in politics and expectations by the general public. The privileging of men and masculine behavior in political spaces thus impacts and limits how women in politics are able to lead and what they are able to achieve, especially with regard to transformational policies. Given this, women's roles as politician, mother, wife, sister and grandmother bring different experiences, negotiations, interactions and most importantly, expectations. However, certain expectations exist, especially of the prime minister, that she, as a mother, wife and grandmother would be able to begin to change the patriarchal political space, and create and implement policies and legislation that empower women, and increase women's political participation and political leadership. While her presence has begun to change the discursive space around women and political leadership, this, she has yet to fully do.

Has the Patriarchal Landscape Changed?

Without argument, the election of Persad-Bissessar proved that a woman can successfully contest national elections to become a country's leader, and proved to women everywhere that political leadership was and is possible. However, while the leader has changed, we are reminded that her leadership exists within a political sphere and through political processes that permeate unequal power relations between men and women. It is because of this that men have dominated the political space and have had an easier

⁷⁶ Asha Javeed. "I Need My Sister. PM Defends Relative's Foreign Travel Costs." *Trinidad Express*. March 10, 2012, <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/I-NEED-MY-SISTER-142214755.html>

relationship with power and politics. For many young and new women politicians, the invoking of femininity and womanhood and the presence of a female body in what has predominantly been seen as a male space, is powerful and problematic as both possibilities and limitations to women's political leadership exist.

Women, especially those within the UNC, the PP and the PNM do see it as "inspirational" that a woman has become the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, as of 2013, women hold high positions in the three main political parties in Trinidad and Tobago. Besides Persad-Bissessar, in October 2012 Seepersad-Bachan was elected chairman and former senator Nicole Dyer-Griffith was elected deputy chairman of the COP and; former senator Penelope Beckles-Robinson was elected female vice chairman of the PNM, defeating member of parliament for Laventille East/Morvant Donna Cox for this position. Many viewed such a showing as evidence of "woman power" or women taking the frontlines in politics as reported by the *Trinidad Guardian* newspapers on November 1, 2012 especially given Persad-Bissessar's political power.⁷⁷ However, as we have seen, women's political power comes with different experiences of political power, experiences that are highly gendered, and in this way power has to be negotiated or even challenged.

Such experiences are relevant to discourse on political leadership as they not only reveal the role of sex and gender in political life in Trinidad and Tobago, but also allow us to understand the larger implications of having women in political positions of power and the possibility that this can be a means towards gender justice. The Trinidad and Tobago example offers a picture Persad-Bissessar as a mother, grandmother and wife in power who campaigned as the woman candidate and who promised a new, fresh style of leadership. However, as seen from her experiences and those of other women in national and local government in Trinidad and Tobago, it appears that the inspiration that many have seen in Persad-Bissessar's triumph has not trickle down to the political parties and the politics itself.

Many question Persad-Bissessar's power amid accusations that she is not really in charge of her political party, the Cabinet and thus the country. She has therefore throughout her term had to give pause and address claims that there is a *cabal* or secret political faction of men within her party---one which holds the true reins of power in the UNC. Accusations such as these not only work against Persad-Bissessar as political leader and prime minister, but also undermine her role to a number of powerful men who are stalwarts and financiers of her UNC party. Defending her leadership has therefore had to be consistent and strong, as she did on

⁷⁷ Beckles-Robinson has maintained that Persad-Bissessar's ascension to political power was due to the work of the PNM Women's League. As seen in this edited collection, the work of the PNM Women's League was and continues to be very instrumental in propelling women to the political fore.

December 3, 2012 during the UNC's Monday night forum at the Tulsa Trace Hindu School in Penal. Persad-Bissessar announced:

*....You have been hearing our detractors say that I am not in charge, that I am being manipulated. I want to tell you why they are pushing that kind of propaganda. They thought that as a woman, I would have succumbed to the challenges of leading this country. They said that I could not hold the Government together. The results are there for all to see.*⁷⁸

Such a challenge did not only speak to Persad-Bissessar as a woman, but also as woman of East Indian descent leading a mostly male East Indian party amid deeply rooted Hindu religious and cultural ideals. Her race has therefore significantly affected her experiences of political leadership as she continues to traverse UNC party politics. It is in this way that while she has met with resistance from some, many laud her as an educated, Indo-Trinidadian woman in power---one who has come from poverty to achieve an upper/middle class lifestyle. These intersectional factors all affect how she is regarded in the political arena. The political terrain that Persad-Bissessar faces today is much different than that faced by Basdeo Panday when he became the country's first Indo-Trinidadian and Hindu prime minister in 1995, especially given the gendered assumptions about leadership and power, and furthermore what has been described earlier as in this chapter as "patricentric Hindu cultural ideas." Factors like these inform how women lead and how they view their own style of leadership. Some women politicians, for instance, believe that women in politics are better at certain tasks such as community work and walk-about, by virtue of their gender. Thus, their own understanding of political power is gendered, as well as their understanding of political spaces.

While the discursive space changed throughout the years, Barriteau explained that in order to achieve a gender-just society, while "critical mass of women in politics is necessary," it is not sufficient (Barriteau 1997, 14). A system of governance must develop that not only responds to the needs of women, but also allows them to better experience and articulate power. In this way, women will understand that not only is access to political power important, but this access empowers one to change political systems and cultures which have created a power vacuum for women (Barriteau 1997,11) and, which have left women out of policy. It is only in this way that feminist goals and gender justice can be achieved. Under the leadership of

⁷⁸ Speaking notes of the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, UNC Monday Night Forum. Tulsa Trace Hindu School, December 3, 2012. http://www.unitedvoiceblog.com/2012_12_01_archive.html

Persad-Bissessar, despite the increase of women running in campaigns and holding political seats, the ideological shift concerning women, politics and power remains a slow one.

Thus, while having a female political leader has advanced the numbers, as seen above, negotiations and challenges to prevailing political processes must take place. According to Rao and Kelleher such negotiations and challenges must occur at the personal and social levels, as well as within formal and informal relations before any changes to “inequitable social systems and institutions” can take place (Rao and Kelleher 2005, 60). This may seem to be unlikely for a society that rests greatly on religious and cultural ideals about gender assumptions on the roles of men and women that underscore social and economic contexts. While Persad-Bissessar can initiate such changes through policies and appointments for instance, she cannot do it on her own. The political structures that exist, and the politics themselves prove limiting. Interventions by women’s and feminist’s NGOs to strengthen policies and programs that seek to advance women rights and gender justice are needed. Hazel Brown and the Network of NGOs continue to support the prime minister as the Network works to broker new policies and programmes, and reveal loopholes and inconsistencies in government that contain blatant gender biases and gender inequalities. More of this is necessary.

The election of Persad-Bissessar as prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago is a great start toward the nation achieving greater gender justice, as women begin to see political life as a real option. However, this reality is fraught with challenges and limitations to successful leadership. Therefore, while women’s political leadership can be a successful strategy to advancing democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Anglophone Caribbean, feminist activism and organizational advocacy must be built and strengthened so as to continue to support those women currently in power⁷⁹ so that they are able to not just be leaders, but be transformational leaders and act to transform the very structures, bureaucracies and ideals which seek to keep them out of politics. However, as Blackstock’s (2014) chapter in this edited collected reminds us, transformational leadership of this sort requires a feminist understanding and an engagement with political power for gender justice to be achieved in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean region.

⁷⁹ Rawwida Baksh and Linnette Vassell. 2013. *Women’s Citizenship in the democracies of the Americas. The English-speaking Caribbean*. Inter-American Commission of Women, OAS, 2013

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