

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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Crossing Over the Barriers: A Historical Journey of Women's Political Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean

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List of Acronyms

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIWIL	Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership
CWP	Concerned Women for Progress
DLP	Dominica Labour Party
HATT	Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago
IDRC	International Development Centre
IGDS	Institute for Gender and Development Studies
NAJASO	National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations
PNP	Peoples' National Party
UWI	University of West Indies
WPA Women	Working People Alliance - Women
WPEO	Women's Political and Economic Organization
WPO	Women's Progressive Organization Women's
WRSM	Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM)

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 transforms 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:

- "Women's Political Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, Understandings, Experiences and Negotiations" by Aleah N. Ranjitsingh
- "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;
- "Feminist/Womanist Advocacy Toward Transformational Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean: The Interplay of Individual and Collective Agency" by Shirley Campbell;
- "The Patriarchal State and the Development of Gender Policy in Jamaica by Maziki Thame and Dhanaraj Thakur;
- "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

Background:

The paper examines the challenges endemic to Caribbean women's entry into representational politics and discusses the journey from a historical perspective. The paper is framed against the background of suffrage, politics, state patriarchy and underscores the gains women made through activism. It also highlights the challenges and the different ways in which opportunities were created and how women took advantage of those opportunities. The paper used the Global Gender Gap Report developed by the World Economic Forum as a benchmark for progress but considered progress in terms of past gains, how women consolidated these gains in the contemporary, and what the future holds for women's entry into political leadership positions. The paper looks at the incrementally of these gains and the implications for women in the Anglophone Caribbean by assessing Caribbean women's progress against the progress of women in the selected outliers---Switzerland, Finland and Rwanda. It is an attempt to theoretically explain the challenges so that they may be understood with a view towards the development of strategies that may assist in the dealing with the existing and emerging issues.

Rationale:

As women still remain a statistical minority in parliaments across the Caribbean and in positions of political power, it is imperative that the issues that hinder their entry into representational politics be understood. Understanding the difficulties has become increasingly important if women were to overcome the challenges so that their presence in political leadership may be expanded. Although Caribbean states are similar in terms of a shared historical experience of colonialism and slavery, there are particular cultural and socio-political specificities that are unique to different Caribbean states. As a result, Caribbean women's trans-situational circumstances will affect the experiences of different women in different countries, which hold implications for the different strategies different women may adopt in addressing the difficulties.

Methodology:

The study treats the experiences of women as epistemological and draws on their testimonies as a means of understanding and contextualizing their realities. As the study is tangential to a larger research project, elite interviews conducted fin 2003 for the

larger work provided useful information for this work. Women involved in key positions in activism for social change were selected as it was envisioned that others could learn from these experiences. Information gleaned from newspapers, journals and other primary sources were integrated into the research. Secondary materials such as texts, reports, readers, other research completed in the subject area, among others, were used to substantiate the discussions. These source materials provided the opportunity to explore the relationship between the historical past and the present in the context of the challenges, the accomplishments and failures.

Findings:

The research revealed that there were hindrances to women's entry into representational politics that were not necessarily faced by their male counterparts. Consequently, parliaments and other structures of governance continue to experience a nominal presence of women within political leadership positions. The patriarchal order coupled with other endemic cultural idiosyncrasies and traditional understandings of gender relations continue to be played out in determining the gender of leadership.

Conclusion:

Patriarchy will always seek to reserve leadership for men and will try to validate the 'appropriateness' of male leadership in a highly masculinized political sphere, The fact that a few women have slipped through the tiny fissures in the glass ceiling means that there is still hope for women, but importantly, that there are real challenges that stymie women's entry into political leadership positions. It is therefore important that women understand the underpinnings of gender and power relations with a view towards the development of effective strategies to expand their presence within the structures.

Introduction

Despite the expansion of feminist scholarship over the years, still very little is known concerning the activist strategies women adopted, or the kinds of obstacles they faced, in their attempt to enter into representational politics. Today, women still occupy a statistical minority in the parliaments across Caribbean states and in the majority of countries external to the Caribbean. In the Anglophone Caribbean, only four countries, Guyana, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica have had female prime ministers in their political history. The fact that there are women, however nominal, within the structures of governance indicates that there is still little progress in terms of public attitudes and the effectiveness of women's rights policies. But their meager entry into representational politics suggests that states are not gender neutral constructs especially since in most countries, more than half of the electorate is comprised of women. It may however be debated as to whether their statistical minority within the structures can provide them with sufficient autonomy for substantive representation, or whether it holds only symbolic value since they may be forced to genuflect to the dictates of men or to the larger male hegemonic political party to which they belong. Many questions remain unanswered and seem to beckon further research beyond the scope of this work. The significant disparity in female presence in parliament in relation to males also indicates that there are ideological and structural barriers that seemed to influence the gender of political leadership.

Methodology

The study treats the experiences of women as epistemological and draws on their testimonies as a means of understanding and contextualizing their realities. As the study is tangential to a larger research project, elite interviews conducted in 2003 for the larger work provided useful information for this work. Women involved in key positions in activism for social change were selected as it was envisioned that others could learn from these experiences. Information gleaned from newspapers, journals and other primary sources were integrated into the research. Secondary materials such as texts, reports, readers, other research completed in the subject area, among others, were used

to substantiate the discussions. These source materials provided the opportunity to explore the relationship between the historical past and the present in the context of the challenges, the accomplishments and failures.

Findings

Putting a Foot through the Door: Understanding the Milestones of Women's Suffrage

Women's progress within the political structures of the Anglophone Caribbean should be understood within the context of the past but in view of the present, and in relation to the where they want to go. In charting the cartography of women's historical journey, it is important to develop a frame of reference from the lessons learnt so that new generations of women will have the tools to succeed where the past may have failed. Suffrage for example, is a useful point of inflection as it was a historic milestone in women's journey towards full political inclusion. It brought recognition to, and legitimized women's citizenship, imbedded in the right to vote and the right to participate in local democratic electoral processes. Suffrage redefined gendered ideological perceptions of women's political worth and re-valued femininity. Kent (2005, 1, 146-147, 162) believed that suffrage re-purposed the sexual politics by shifting the conversation from a simple share in enfranchisement to an attempt to transform women's public and private spheres. She argued that 'a monopoly on power in the public sphere can create a tyranny of power in every sphere as well....' Suffrage therefore, signifies political liberation at one level and would have impacted not only women's political participation, but also power relations within the public and the private spheres, at another level. Although Kent (2005) did not focus on how the barriers may be removed so that that women's initial entry may metamorphose into greater participation within the political structures, the work rationalized the importance of this first step outside of its seeming symbolic context. Jean Baker (2002, 1-7) in analyzing the activism of early suffragettes noted that the advocacy of Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony of the United States, transcended mere demand for the vote but was a 'necessary transaction' for revaluing women's political worth. More importantly, early activism taught women how to create and develop local and international networks, necessary for collective organizing. This was evident in the coalition of women 'in 1830 which brought women from Great Britain, France, and Germany together in a common cause (suffrage)' (Baker 2002, 1-7).

The passing of suffrage however, did not provide women with *carte blanche* access to the political process. There were discriminatory principles entrenched within the suffrage laws of most countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean and others. These laws set standards for women that differed for their male counterparts. In Jamaica for example, women had to reach age 25 years, pay property tax of Two Pounds and had to be literate in order to qualify for the vote. But the men voted at age 21 years and were required to pay property tax of only One Pound. There was no literacy requirement for men. In addition, women were barred from sitting on the Legislative Council and on parochial boards (Vassell 1993). The situation was similar for women in Trinidad.

The work of Reddock (1994, 178-181) did not depict the early advocates as passive victims of prescriptive oppressive relations but as individuals who understood what it would mean for other groups of women to be able to access the vote. The early advocates understood the importance of permeating state monolith in situating themselves within male hegemonic political structures. In her address to the graduation ceremony of the Women in Politics Programme of the Belizean National Commission in 2011, she stated:

In 1891 electoral reforms in Guyana, lowered property and income qualifications and diversified the racial-ethnic composition of the still limited electorate but women were still excluded until well into the 1920s...In Jamaica in July 1919, the franchise was extended to women over twenty-five who earned income of 50 Pounds or paid taxes over 2 Pounds per year. Men could vote at the age of 21 if their annual income was 40 Pounds... In Crown Colony Trinidad and Tobago in 1924...the franchise was extended to men over 21 who understood and spoke English... To a greater extent than their male counterparts, women were denied the franchise through unattainable voting requirements... women were barred from seeking elected office in the Legislative Council until as late as the 1950s. The experience is varied though, for in St. Vincent, women received the same voting rights as men as late as 1951. In Trinidad, universal adult suffrage was obtained in 1946, but women still could not be candidates until 1951 (Reddock 2011)¹.

The same held true for women of the United Kingdom and several other countries around the world. The suffrage laws set the stage for the unequal participation of women in the political process and posed challenges to their entry into

representational politics. It also legitimized men's claim of superiority, downplayed women's citizenship and reinforced the notion of women being subordinates to men, which pointed out that there were restrictions on the extent to which women would be accommodated within the political structures despite suffrage. Understanding the control placed on the accommodation of women within the structures helps us to further understand the contemporary issue of women's nominal presence in parliament as well as in political leadership positions.

Looking Outwards: Women's Political Progress in Countries External to the Caribbean

In order to comprehensively assess the gains made by Caribbean women, it seems useful to do this in relation to the progress of women in countries external to the Caribbean. Outliers were selected based on their rankings on the Global Gender Gap Report. This Report was first published in 2006 and developed by the World Economic Forum based in Geneva, Switzerland. Using researched data, the Global Gender Gap Report captures the disproportionate participation of women in the economic, political, education, health systems, *inter alia*, and provides a framework for comparison between countries and across regions over time². The outliers will help us to see differences and similarities, patterns and trends, in terms of the progress of women in relation to the Caribbean. Although theories and methodologies established by other societies external to the Caribbean might not necessarily fit neatly within the socio-political and cultural context of Caribbean states, this does not mean that Caribbean states cannot learn from the successes and failures of others.

Out of the 196 countries of the world, only approximately 50 countries or twenty five per cent (25%) of countries have had female prime ministers or leaders. Several countries have had women serving in parliament or in the executive at some point or another, but the numbers dwindle significantly in the top leadership positions. There are however three countries, Switzerland, Finland and Rwanda in which women outnumber men in political representation, but only two, Switzerland and Finland, were ranked high on the Gender Gap Report. In Rwanda women outnumber men in political leadership but the abysmal structural gender inequalities has caused them to be unranked on the Gender Gap Report (Rwanda News Agency, October 29, 2009). For these reasons, these three countries were selected as the outliers.

Riding the Waves of Progress: Women Making Strides in Switzerland

Switzerland is ranked 9th on the 2013 Global Gender Gap Report out of 135 countries studied for gender-based disparities by the World Economic Forum. This is a country that granted suffrage as late as 1971 with no legislated quota system yet women outnumbered men four to three (4:3) in the Executive³. Men however, outnumbered women by three to one (3:1) in Parliament and men still occupied the majority of top corporate positions in the country⁴. The Swiss Portal (ch.ch) on which the federal government shares information on political issues highlighted that the complex nature of the systems of governance⁵ coupled with traditional gender ideologies have all contributed to the delay in the granting of suffrage in Switzerland in 1971. Gaining suffrage in 1971 is indicative of a rigid patriarchal culture especially since men voted “No” twenty three (23) times in 1919 against petitions for women’s political emancipation (Denton Record-Chronicle 1965). Further research has shown that Swiss women in Zurich made fruitless petitions for the vote as early as 1886, which continued throughout World War II and into the decade of the 1960s. In the article entitled “Swiss Suffragettes Make Slow Progress” in the Montreal Gazette 1965, it was reported:

The Swiss male has fortified himself against a dangerous foreign idea – women’s votes...his fortress is not impregnable. Hardworking suffragettes predict that perhaps by 1970, Swiss women may win the right... (Montreal Gazette 1965)

The article, in reiterating men’s unbending position on the vote, underscored the substantial gains made by women especially since in 2010, women held the three highest political offices all at the same time---President of the Confederation, President of the Upper and Lower chamber and President of the National Council, just thirty nine (39) years after suffrage was won.

Several pioneers were involved in Swiss women’s laborious journey into the political arena. One such pioneer was Elisabeth Kopp who was active in the advocacy for women’s suffrage. Kopp’s familial background may have influenced her involvement into party politics. Her father worked for the federal government as Director of Federal Finance Administration and her mother worked in the education sector as a teacher. Her political career began in the mid-1950s when she became a member of the FDP-Frauen

Schweiz, a women's arm of the Free Democratic Party. She was an active member of the women's group in Zumikon (in the canton of Zürich) in 1970 and was part of the advocacy for the vote. Her involvement 'on the ground' increased her popularity and she became the first female Council Leader in German-speaking Switzerland. This position assisted her to move into the National Council in 1979 and she was later selected as Vice President of the Free Democratic Party and in 1984, she was elected to the Federal Council (Interview conducted by Regula Brechbuhl 2014)⁶.

Women's swift progress might have been influenced by the fierce activism for the vote and the visibility that would have emerged from participation in public discourse. Progress during the seventies and beyond would inevitably be linked to the global feminism that culminated in the first World Conference on women convened in Mexico City, June 19th to July 2nd, 1975, in which the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-85 was declared. The records show that Swiss women still continued to make significant strides evidenced in the 1983 major furore in which Ruth Driefuss was selected over a popular male candidate to sit on the Federal Council. There has been continued progress to include women in representational politics. Driefuss eventually rose to become Switzerland's first female President⁷.

The 2011 Global Gender Gap Report: Rankings and Scores showed that Switzerland had moved from 40th position in 2007 to rank 10th in 2011, attributed to the country's focus on parity across the following pillars: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, health and survival of women. In an article entitled "Michelle Bachmann's New Swiss Political World" in the Washington Post dated May 9, 2012, it was stated that since November 2010, women held the three highest political offices all at the same time---President of the Confederation, President of the Upper and Lower Chamber and President of the National Council. The Washington Post also noted the downside. Women still occupied less than a third of the seats on the National Council and quarter in the Council of States. This means that men's statistical majority on the National Council and in the Council of States still had influence over the leadership and the political direction of the country especially in light of the historical culture of a rigid patriarchal state.

In a speech⁸ entitled "The Changing Role of Women" delivered in 2012 by Rebecca Blank, Acting Deputy Secretary of Commerce, US Government, at the Women's Leaders Conference in Bern, she stated that women's fight for the vote is in the historical past and that the women's political involvement at the lower levels ought to

be expanded in order that more women may get to the top political positions. The data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union⁹ highlighted that Swiss women occupied 62 seats out of 200 seats in the lower House as at December 2013 which is high compared to several other countries. The 'proliferation' of women at the lower level may have helped them in filtering through state political structures to the top positions. Although the Gender Gap Report provided useful data, it seemed deficient in determining the extent to which policy was being used to influence the gender of leadership. The Report did not outline whether there were distinct differences in the policy focus of female leadership, and if there were, to what extent did the shift in policy focus affected established gender systems; or whether there were noticeable shifts in the relations of power, or whether the substantive representation of women by women was strengthened.

Patricia Funk et al (2008) believed that women have policy preferences and if this were not so then increasing the numbers in representational politics would be useless. But to explore the politics and the machinations of female leadership outside of a descriptive framework would fall outside of the scope of this research. Both Funk (2010) and Blank (2012) believed that women's policy preferences tend to focus on women's issues and although they did not delve into the extent to which men gave support to these policy preferences, they both shared in the thought that countries can benefit from women's involvement in politics based on those interests.

Finnish Women's Political Emancipation

Finland is ranked second (2nd) on 2012 Global Gender Gap Report which means that the country has made strides in bridging the gaps in the participation of, and in the creation of opportunities for, women within the economic and sociopolitical spheres. Finland was the first country of the world to adopt full voting rights for women through the passing of the suffrage law in 1906. In 1907, the country adopted universal adult suffrage and nineteen (19) women were elected into parliament. Nine (9) women came out of the Social Democratic Party and ten (10) emerged from right-wing parties. A point of note is that four of these women hailed from the lower social strata of the society; the leader of the Maid Association, a former female servant Miina Siianpaa later emerged as the first female Minister in 1926. The other women were a teacher, a seamstress and a mother with several children (Sulkunen (2009).

This caliber of women was not well accepted by all groups of women as the agrarian Finnish society had social issues related to class divides that placed different groups within hierarchical social categories in which the allocation of resources, opportunities and power were based on social class. Women such as Alexandra Gripenberg who was active in the international women's movement and who later rose to become one of the first female Member of Parliament, supported the concept of *hierarchical* sisterhood, opposed by the female grassroots. Sulkunen noted that the divide created a chasm between the different groups of women and as a result, fragmented and negatively affected the activism for suffrage. However, the Social Democratic Party (whose membership included the landless), the temperance movement (that had the largest popular worker support) and an alliance with other social groups, played a pivotal role in the achievement of the vote. Lähteenmäki (2000) noted that leading up to the granting of suffrage, women were involved in several different activist organizations. These ranged from underground anti-tsarist activities to strike committees, meetings and demonstrations. Both Lähteenmäki (2000) and Sulkunen (2009) believed that the war in Russia in addition to the major strike in 1905 led to the need for stability and consequently, the adoption of universal adult suffrage. It would appear that women's involvement in activism at different levels gave them visibility and the opportunity to expand their networks in collective strategizing. Women's collective work *on the ground* would have strengthened solidarity between themselves in spite of the divides, and allowed them to redefine their contribution to the political process.

Women's early success in winning the vote within a conservatist agrarian society as well as the ways in which female political leadership was accommodated, seemed to suggest that there was an ideological revaluing of women's political worth within patriarchal Finland. Saarinen (2007) noted that Finland's progress with its gender equality agenda has caused Finnish women to be mythicized as strong and resilient. But Finnish women still have difficulties in much the same way other women do, in coping within a society where "women earn less than men in the business world; in the private sector women earn 80 percent of the their male counterparts' salaries despite higher levels of education". In 2010, the *This is Finland* newsletter published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹⁰, reported that Mari Kivniemi was voted in as the first female Prime Minister in June 2010. Mrs Tarja Halonen was already the President from 2000, which meant that Finland then had a female Prime Minister and a female President ruling in the

same period. Moreover, there were an equal number of women and men in government leadership in the coalition, although women outnumbered men in the Centre Party.

Tarja Halonen was a Member of Parliament from 1979 to 2000 (21 years) until her election to Presidency in 2000-2012. According to Emilia Erkinheimo (2009), 12 out of 20 government ministers were women. 42% of the Members of Parliament were also women. She stated further that government has continued to place priority on the equality agenda by implementing the Ombudsman for Equality, a Gender Equality Unit and the Council for Equality. Finnish women have made headways in spite of the gender disparities in particular sectors of the society. The inference here is that the progress of Finnish women in accessing top political leadership positions despite the challenges of the patriarchal order, seemed to have encouraged other women and therefore increased female leadership sustainability. The presence of women in leadership positions over time would have had the capacity to close the disparities in the gender of leadership by impacting the social psyche of women in general, in increasing the desire to participate in the political process at the highest level.

Moving Forward: Rwanda

Like Finland, Rwanda is recognized for establishing one of the most gender equal parliaments in the world. Late in achieving suffrage, though not as late as Switzerland that won suffrage rights in 1971, Rwanda achieved suffrage in 1961. Despite the overwhelming female presence in parliament, this country is not ranked on the Global Gender Gap Report. The absence of Rwanda from the Report is linked to the several social inequalities that existed within the society such as those related to gender discrimination in the family code, gender-based violence, freedom of speech, women's right to maternity leave, unemployment among women, *inter alia*. Several laws still discriminated against women depriving them of rights and opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts. Traditional gender ideologies relegated women to the household while men played leadership roles in the public sphere (Social Institutions and Gender Index 2009).

Pre-colonial history has shown that Rwanda had always been essentially patriarchal although during that era, the queen mother (umugabekaz) played key roles in state matters as chief advisor but this did not significantly affect the discriminatory gender relations that existed in the country (Mutamba 2005). Rwandese women played different roles during different eras dependent upon the changing socio-political climate

as the social politics has always been problematic. Historically, ethnic divides and social polarization are complexly intertwined, resulting in nation wide conflicts from time to time. This was particularly evident in 1994 when the destructive genocide took the lives of many women and men. Research has shown that women's role in society took another significant turn after the genocide as women had to work across different ethnic groups to find solutions to the issues that emanated from the then broken society (Izabiliza, 2009). The article entitled "Hutu Justifies the Slaughter of Tutsis" in the Daily Gazette dated August 21, 1994, reported that historically Rwanda was a feudal monarchy ruled by the Tutsis for several decades until 1959 when the Hutus took over ruler-ship by force. Because a democratic process was not observed, the United Nations chose not to recognize the Hutu government until 1961 when internationally supervised elections were held. It was not clear as to extent to which women participated in the political activism prior to the elections, since there seems not to be a lot literature that provides information on this subject.

Despite the socio-political challenges, Rwanda has managed to retain a large female presence in parliament, which continues to be the subject of discourse in societies in the West. In explaining the large female presence in parliament, Izabiliza (2009) pointed to the aftermath of the 1994 genocide and the quota system that essentialized women access to the structures based on the needs of the country. The consequential socio-economic hardships and the need for policies to focus on rebuilding lives prompted the government to support the presence of women in parliament. Christopher Kayumba, a lecturer at the National University of Rwanda, in his PhD dissertation¹¹ from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, also noted that genocide in 1994 between the Hutus and Tutsis in which over a million were killed, resulted in a shortage of men and consequently a higher proportion of women than men (56 per cent) in the Rwandan parliament. The BBC news release on December 18, 2008, stated that over 800, 000 people died in the genocide and Jeanne Izabiliza (2009) noted that in addition to those who died; 250,000 women were raped and 'most of those who died, who never returned to Rwanda after fleeing, or who were imprisoned on charges of genocide were men'. She stated that in response to the needs of the large number of women dying of HIV/AIDS, 250,000 rape victims, physically injured women, war widows, the large number of women caring for 400, 000 to 500,000 orphans and other neglected children, impoverished female single-headed households, women had very little option but to assume responsibilities traditionally undertaken by men in patriarchal Rwanda. It

therefore seems reasonable to assume that government's focus on women's descriptive representation was intentioned for greater priority to be placed on the issues affecting the lives of women and children, as it would be more likely that women in parliament would seek to promote policy concerns in their own interests.

There is the school of thought that political agendas should include the perspectives, views and experiences of those who would be affected by the formulation and implementation of policy. Since in the case of Rwanda, women would have been the most affected, then it would be reasonable to assume that women's participation in the political process would improve the relevance and usefulness of policy formulation in their own interest, hence the focus on descriptive representation. The work of Izabiliza (2009) and Matumba (2005) did not sufficiently indicate the extent to which, or whether, the viewpoints of community women were included in policy; the extent to which increased female presence in parliament, improved substantive representation so that the concerns of community women were addressed; the extent to which women in parliament were able to embrace ethnic group heterogeneity and idiosyncratic gender systems; whether there were limitations to substantive representation since the onus rested on only one set of players within the single space of representation; whether there was a narrowness in the focus on the various issues. More importantly, the question also arises as to how women's descriptive representation may be sustained on its own without intervention after the economy rebounds and within the context of patriarchal rigidity.

What Have We Learnt From The Outliers

A cursory look at the outliers has shown that there is no linearity to the progress of women within the structures of governance. The site of representation, cultural, socio-political and socio-economic climate, and international pressures seem interlinked into the point at which governments will accede to the suffrage call. But there is no real linearity to particular occurrences or to the era in which suffrage was achieved. The heterogeneities between the outliers lie in the geographical positioning of the countries and the related historic- socio-political context that would have impacted the extent to which women were able to access the structures in their own locations. Although Switzerland and Finland ranked high on the Gender Gap Reports and made significant strides in women leadership, they are still largely patriarchal societies. This points out that female leadership by itself is not sufficient for societies to unlearn traditional gender

ideologies that foster the differentials between women and men. Although descriptive representation is important, it is not quite sufficient to ensure that the issues are central to government's agenda. This shifts the focus to substantive representation where the issues are brought to the fore and women are not positioned within the structures just because they are women. It is hoped that women's increased access to the structures of governance will move beyond its symbolic value to inculcate values that would make women's participation at this level, sustainable.

Women's Political Activism and Leadership in the Caribbean

Caribbean states share similar historical past, as they have all emerged out of colonialism and slavery. As a result, Caribbean women have understood the significance of activism as they themselves have historically been engaged in actions for change. The activism for suffrage is a case in point as Caribbean women adopted different strategies dependent upon where they were, who they were and how they were located within the struggle. This was an important entry point for women to access the structures of governance. The work of Vassell (1993) is instructive as it outlined women's progress from welfarism to advocacy, and from suffrage to governance. Although located in Jamaica, the study tracked women's activism and charted the journey through to universal adult suffrage. She examined the activism of Nellie Latrielle who convened several mass meetings at the Ward Theatre in Kingston 1918 as she advocated for the vote. Letters were sent to the local newspaper, *Daily Gleaner*, engendering public discourse on women's exclusion from the political process (Vassell 1993). An excerpt from one of the letters, stated:

We must teach our people as the English women are taught, what the votes mean, what its advantages will be for them and for their children, how it will help them to help their sister woman, and to place her where she has never been placed before in this island of Jamaica. It is not far to say unless they manifest interest it will be withheld. Agitate for the interest to be awakened..." (Nellie Latrielle: 1918)

After unabated agitation, the colonial government eventually acceded to suffrage rights in Jamaica. The activism for suffrage did not only occur in Jamaica but in several other Caribbean states during the period of the mid-eighteenth century. Consequently, women won the vote Trinidad in 1925; Guyana, 1928; Jamaica, 1919; Dominica, 1925,

and so on. Although Vassell's work did not focus on the political activism of the individual women who ran for seats in the first general election under universal adult suffrage, it however highlighted the extent to which suffrage rights was defined by exclusions, underpinned by the principles of discrimination.

The granting of suffrage rights in the Caribbean followed closely on the heels of the United Kingdom (UK) that won suffrage in 1918 under the UK Representation of the People Act. The granting of suffrage to the women of the Caribbean would have then been linked to the colonial ties between the UK and the Caribbean. But like the UK suffrage laws, the legislation adopted in the Caribbean ingrained discriminatory principles that precluded the majority of women from accessing the vote. The law enfranchised only propertied, educated, mature women the right to vote. In the UK, women over the age of thirty years who met the minimum property and literacy between twenty-five and thirty dependent upon the country, but in all cases, the age limit was higher for women than men. The property qualification was doubly higher for women in all instances and the literacy criterion was applicable only to women. This phenomenon was not a *Caribbean thing*, since women in several countries external to the region were faced with similar inequalities. But given the historical processes of slavery in the Caribbean, it is not unusual for laws to disenfranchise the majority of black women and men, and poor whites, as in the case of the suffrage laws.

Although characterized by exclusions, suffrage was an important milestone for accessing political rights. It embodied a point of departure from enclosure within the private sphere to public visibility, as women's citizenship must then be acknowledged. It heralded a new beginning in providing women with access to the political structures but also helped *enroute* to universal adult suffrage and electoral equality. Despite the difficulties, suffrage opened up political opportunities for women, revaluing women's citizenship and political worth by the counting of their 'hand' in the selection and election of political leaders. The symbolic value has transcended beyond a mere participation in the voting process, to the redefinition and revolutionizing of antediluvian perspectives on the value of femininity. But based on the nominal presence of women in parliament even today, suffrage by itself seemed not to have been able to alter the relations of power between women and men, nor between women and the patriarchal state. Women's progress must therefore be understood in terms of how power and male privileging have guided the actions of the state and the thinking of women and men within democratic processes. History has shown that Caribbean women have understood the importance

of a *level playing field* even after the enfranchisement, since they were active in the campaign alongside men in the demand for universal adult suffrage.

In an article entitled *A Bit of History About Women and the Vote*, which appeared in the *Weekend Mirror*, January 27-28, 2007, Janet Jagan, commented on the activism in Guyana for universal adult suffrage. She stated that she had co-founded the Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO) that was purposed to fight for women's rights primarily. This was against the background that the majority of women were not eligible to vote, and those who could vote were not allowed to serve as jurors. WPEO led protest marches to bring awareness to the inequalities and to the other issues women faced. These issues included the call for universal adult suffrage aimed to provide all women with 'the unconditional right to vote irrespective of literacy or any other previous restrictions' (Jagan 2007). WPEO's activism challenged the social order and the *welfarist* uni-direction of the other charity-based women's groups/organizations in Guyana. History has shown that Jagan ran for a seat in the general elections of 1947, and although she was unsuccessful then, it is noteworthy that she was one of three women who gained a seat in the 1953 general elections, the first election called under universal adult suffrage in Guyana.

In Trinidad, women such as Beatrice Gregg, *Mrs. George Mason*, Gertie Wood, Audrey Jeffers among others contributed to the advocacy for women's causes during the early twentieth century. Although Audrey Jeffers was not involved in the struggle for universal adult suffrage, she was the first woman to be elected to the Port of Spain City Council in 1936. She was known for her work in the interest of women and girls, through the *Coterie of Social Workers* which she had founded in 1921. The *Coterie* comprised only middleclass women and was aimed at 'helping the underprivileged, but in the long term at raising the status of black, middle-strata women and men in the Trinidad and Tobago society' (Reddock 1994). Reddock in her extensive research on the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago, noted that the *Coterie* was concerned with educational opportunities for girls and the inclusion of middleclass women in salaried employment. Its call for reform was focused on the issue of illegitimacy and maintenance and these concerns were included in the petitioning of the West India Royal Commission to address the pressing issues that affected women and girls. The advocacy for the removal of legal barriers that precluded women from sitting on the Legislative Council or to sit as jurors or on government Boards, increased her visibility even though she was not involved in the advocacy for adult suffrage. Her visibility and popularity helped her in

the winning of a seat on the City Council that was historically male dominated. The Coterie's support of Jeffers as well as her political work on the ground assisted her to permeate state political monolith into early representational politics. She was the first woman to be elected to the Port of Spain City Council in 1936; and appointed to the Legislative Council in 1946.

The work of Reddock was useful as it highlighted that there was no prescribed approach for entry into representational politics. It also underscored that women were not a homogenous group and therefore different groups undertook different issues that they deemed important. Universal adult suffrage might have been perceived by the middleclass as a challenge to their own power base and it may well have been those same issues that made Beatrice Gregg, a political activist, seemed radical since she openly called for universal adult suffrage, equality between the sexes and campaigned for women's right to seats on the City Council. Gregg offered herself as a candidate in the 1936 elections but was forced to withdraw her candidature on the basis of an erroneous disqualification. Audrey Jeffers on the other hand, secured a seat on the City Council. The work of Reddock however did not highlight whether women with different backgrounds and viewpoints on empowerment found commonality in purpose from a single site of representation; how the gaps were bridged in light of women's heterogeneity and the extent to which this affected the substantive representation of women by women.

During the same period in Jamaica, Mary Morris Knibb, born in 1881, became the first woman to hold a political post when she won a seat in the 1939 local government by-elections. She was a social worker by profession, which occasioned her to interface with poor communities and see firsthand, the plight of poor women and children. The increasing number of *illegitimate* children and the extent to which their fathers neglected them, influenced her mass wedding initiative in which she marshaled over 150 weddings¹². Real or imagined, the expectation was that marriage would ameliorate the living conditions of women and children by providing them with familial stability and accessibility to legal redress. This determinist approach to liberation, underscored that she believed in the inevitability of women's life experiences in that outcomes were dependent upon, or determined by, particular occurrences in women lives. Cooper (1995, 53) in her exploration of Jamaica's cultural form of social commentary from a historical perspective, excerpted a poem that used Jamaican creole lexicon to describe Morris Knibb's assertiveness in marriage initiative:

*Dat lady Mrs. Married Knibbs
She is a real Godsen'
For every man now mus tun husband
Dem kean be noh mo' bwoy fren'*

*Ah she mek nine-toe Berty
Wed kass eye Sue you know?
A she force awn Mary Fowl-head
Pon Miss Biddy cousin Joe*

Like Jeffers, Morris Knibb petitioned the Moyne Commission for policies to stem the endemic *problem* of promiscuity, maintenance and illegitimacy (Shirley 2008). And like Jeffers she gained favour among the populace and won a seat in local government in 1939. She was the first woman to hold a seat within the structures of governance in the history of Jamaican politics. The win seemed an important steppingstone for middleclass women's inclusion within representational politics since in the 1944 general elections, the first under universal adult suffrage, women ran for seats in the House of Representatives.

Morris Knibb contested the election as an independent candidate, running against Norman Manley (who rose to be Prime Minister in a subsequent election) and Edward Fagan in the same constituency. She amassed only 269 votes while her contenders, Edward Fagan and Norman Manley, gained 5253 and 4858 votes respectively. The other female candidates competed in different constituencies, and Iris Collins of the Jamaica Labour Party who remained relatively unknown and in the shadows up to the time of the elections, won her seat with 5519 votes and her closest contender, Allan George St. Claver Coombs, trailed behind with a measly 1683 support.¹³ Collins became the first woman in the history of Jamaica to win a seat in the House of Representatives and even today, still very little is known concerning her life prior to her entry into politics¹⁴. Edith Dalton James and Frances Isabelle Brissett who also ran for seats were unsuccessful. Edith Dalton James continued to have a presence within the structures up to her death in 1976.

Dominica also has a rich history of women's involvement in political activism, and is the first Caribbean state to elect a female Prime Minister, Dame Eugenia Charles. She led the country for fifteen (15) years from 1980 to 1995. A cursory look at the historical and socio-political environment revealed that Dominican women had always

engaged the patriarchal state in activism for political rights. The work of Parvisini-Gebert (1996) revealed that Phyllis Byam Shand Allfrey was one such woman who dedicated her life to political activism. Born in Dominica in 1908, Allfrey was a novelist and political activist who emigrated to the United States and England for several years until her return to Dominica in 1954. Her political alliance with the Labour Party in England and her association with the radicals of the Party influenced her thinking and acceptance of socialist political ideologies that shaped the direction of her activism in Dominica. Her concern for the working conditions of the poor coupled with the lack of empathy on the part of the merchant class for the black working class, the Paleolithic political system devoid of political parties and electoral democracy, the exclusion of the masses from the political process, all irked her socialist sensibilities. This led her to forge an alliance with Christopher Loblack, a trade unionist, who shared similar political ideologies (Paravisini-Gebert 1996). Loblack was already a well-known radical having petitioned the Moyne Commission in 1939 for acquiescence to universal adult suffrage. But although universal adult suffrage followed in 1951, there were still several class and social disparities that created pressing hardships for the poor.

As a novelist and political activist, Shand Allfrey's writings illuminated her political perspectives, challenging the small but powerful elite class who controlled the politico-economic systems and the resources. With no support from the wealthy class or the Church, Allfrey continued with the activism. She led the labour movement and co-founded the Dominica Labour Party with Loblack in 1955, coining the Party's motto: *No one is truly free who does not work for the freedom of others* (The Guardian, January 22, 2005). The DLP contested the general elections under universal adult suffrage in 1961, and she was expelled from the Party in 1962, in a 'palace coup'. Paravisini-Gebert wrote:

They crucified her in the eyes of the people. They ridiculed her looks, her age, her mannerisms. They accused her of a mania of power, of wanting to control the party to suit her needs...The more serious challenge came in connection to her ability to lead and govern. Despite the fact that she had proven her leadership abilities in organizing and bringing the party to power, barely six years after its creation...they presented her to the executive and the people as not being capable of sustaining a government (Gebert 1996, 213)

Her expulsion was based on an editorial she wrote in the Herald entitled "Green Blood" that criticized the banana industry stating that "Government might finish with the old

foolishness, practiced nowhere else in the world, taxing exports". The statement was found to be offensive by party members, hence the expulsion (Paravisini-Gebert 1996). The DLP won four consecutive elections since the general elections of 1961. Her disaffection with the DLP led her to forge alliance with the Eugenia Charles in the early formation of the Dominica Freedom Party where she won a seat in the 1970 elections, even though both women had divergent political views. The work of Paravisini-Gebert (1996) recounted the highs and lows of the lived experiences of a Caribbean woman who had invested her life in politics. Her exclusion from the DLP she had founded underscores patriarchy's resentment of female leadership, as well as the importance of male support, networks and bonding in male hegemonic party politics. The scope of Paravisini-Gebert's work did not include the political activism of women's organizations or of individual women across class lines in order to assess whether there was solidarity between women and if so, whether the solidarity could have been mobilized to thwart the ousting of Shand Allfrey,

In examining the contribution of women such as Janet Jagan, Mary Morris Knibb, Audrey Jeffers, Beatrice Gregg and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, to the development of the region, it is evident that their activism helped to shape the socio-political culture of the region. Although they may be defined as middleclass subjects who would fall on different points of the class continuum, their heterogeneities with respect to education, cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds, lived experiences and realities, did not allow them to fit neatly within one generic middleclass 'box'. Their middleclass backgrounds provided them with an access point to the structures and the leverage they need to challenge the masculinity of politics. But based on the challenges women faced, it is clear that political access to gain equality by itself, is not sufficient to make significant change in the attitudes of men or the populace in general, towards female leadership.

Mary Morris Knibb for example, received overwhelming mass support in the by-elections of 1939 but failed miserably in the larger general elections of 1944 when she tallied 269 votes as against 5253 amassed by the male frontrunner. Although the masses threw their support behind her for the lower elections, they did not support her in her bid for greater political power in the larger elections. In the case of Phyllis Shand Allfrey, she co-founded the DLP and led it through the election loss of the 1957 elections and built its resilience to a win in the 1961 elections but ironically was not allowed to participate in its success. These two cases underscored that leadership is still the reserve of men as sexist patriarchal values has legitimized it by excluding women. The

difficulty is that women and men accept patriarchal values over time and as a result, the patriarchal codes have become imperceptible, reproducing processes that are repressive to women. The women who managed to move into political leadership positions, have all been engaged in activism at different points in their lives, at different levels and in different locations. This was evident during the decade of the seventies when there a paradigm shift in Caribbean feminisms that focused primarily on legal reform.

Women's Activism, Politics and Leadership during the period of the Seventies

The period of the 1970s in the Caribbean represented a revolution of the social and politico-cultural conceptual understanding of gender justice. The disparities in the distribution of wealth, power and the ownership of resources cross-purposed with black identity and community power, contributed to the foment of radicalism during the era. The foment was also linked to the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s in the US and the transfer of socio-political thought into the Caribbean (Shirley 2009). This was mixed with the radicalism of the leftist Black Power Movement, global socialist ideologies, and the introduction of the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, all of which created a social environment that was pliable for social change.

As part of the developing world, Caribbean states are dependent upon developed countries for trade, tourism, financial resources and other forms of support. However, during the period of the 1970, in addition to the issues of external economic support, the Caribbean was also concerned with other internal issues related to party politics, social class disparities, identity issues, gender and other concerns. These problematic issues caused the emergence of social movements during the era, which manifested themselves in different ways, with different focus and intensity, within the different cultures of the Caribbean, and with different kinds of social repercussions. The various permutations of socialist ideologies for example, where different Caribbean countries introduced their own brand of socialism---Guyana coined the term, Cooperative Socialism, Jamaica with Democratic Socialism, are testament to the heterogeneous nature of the region where intrusions imported from other societies in the West, were likely to be bastardized to fit into Caribbean socio-political milieu (Shirley 2009).

Research has shown that women were drawn to these movements and especially in the case of the Black Power movement in Trinidad, they had even

participated in combative gun encounters, fighting alongside men against the police in defense of a shared cause (Pasley 2001). But women's otherness within the Black Power movement in general, and the ways in which black male hegemony constructed power around itself, placed women in a liberation struggle that was not liberating to them. Women's departure from group androcentrism to form women's groups in order to take a common liberated approach to empowerment provided them with the agency to advocate for the issues that affected them as a constituency. Their leadership in the various feminist oriented groups, in taking charge of the struggle, helped to shape the Caribbean feminist movement of the 1970s. This is important as the 1970s signifies a paradigm shift in Caribbean feminisms to one of discourse and advocacy. But also, it highlights the work women did on the ground to improve women's access to the structures.

The emergence of the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HATT) in that particular time and space in the early 1970s was indicative of the different ways in which women had begun to collectively organize for reform. HATT emerged in 1972, focusing on the issues related to consumerism, product standards, inflation, violence against women in particular rape, domestic workers rights, employment rights, nutrition and other health related issues (Brown 2003¹⁵). Hazel Brown reiterated that HATT's advocacy resounded across Trinidad and Tobago and the unabated activism influenced legislative and policy changes such as those concerning standards for consumer items, minimum wage and the treatment of domestic workers, among others. Their vociferousness and engagement in several protest actions challenged the state to turn its attention to women's issues. Hazel Brown, a leading member of HATT stated in an interview in 2003:

...for example, we got a Bureau of Standards established in Trinidad and Tobago. There were people here who were making things without proper labels and without sanitary standards. We had actually taken ice cream and milk off the shelves and have them tested in the laboratory. We would understand the relationship between standards and prices because if you don't know what you are getting how can you determine the prices. We were able to get minimum wages for domestic workers on the basis of a study that we did on the number of hours they were working and the wages we were getting, and sensitizing people to the issue of the value of domestic work... (Brown 2003)

Brown further commented that five women from the membership contested the 1976 general elections with four representing four different political parties and the fifth, ran as an independent candidate. The importance of HATT to this body of work is that it highlights that once a platform for advocacy is created, the probability of women's eventual inclusion within the structures is likely to be increased, The activism and visibility of HATT helped women's entry into representational politics via the democratic electoral process. Other activist groups such as the Concerned Women for Progress (CWP), a corollary of the decade of the seventies and the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, was inspired by the ideologies of socialist feminism. They were engaged in discursive forums around the issues of sexism, sexuality and legal reforms (Mohammed 2003¹⁶). Although the women in this group did not try to access the structures of governance, the platform they created provided them with a space for activism.

Women's migration from specialized interest groups as in the case of HATT, to representational politics underscored the need to strategically position themselves to influence policy changes for seismic shifts. This was the same in the case of Jamaica, where women led the reform movement during the period of the 1970s. The ruling People's National Party guided by a democratic socialist approach supported the inclusion of women within government's agenda. The move from postcolonial capitalist values to a 'democratic socialist' approach to governance, was new to Jamaican politics. In fact, the term 'democratic socialism' seemed oxymoronic as it conflicted with liberal values and the classic Marxist ideologies, but the ambiguity forged a compromise between the capitalist notions of the powerful elite class and working class community power. It is arguable as to whether the blurring of the lines between two distinct political ideologies, democracy and socialism, had the capacity to produce precise outcomes. It might have been this revolutionizing of political thought coupled with the need to centralize women's concerns that led women who were already within the structures of governance to take an interest in the plight of poor Jamaican women.

According to Reddock (1998) and Irena Cousins, a member of the PNP Women's Movement who was interviewed in 2003¹⁷, both Mavis Gilmour and Lucille Mathurin Mair presented a joint paper entitled "Women and Social Change" to the Prime Minister that called for a special machinery to be established that would focus on transforming poor women's lives. Out of this advocacy, the Women's Desk, later renamed the Bureau of Women's Affairs, the first of its kind in the world, was implemented in Jamaica, in the

Office of the Prime Minister. The action of these women in the substantive representation of women from the within the structures, highlighted that despite the minority presence of women within the structures, gains can still be made. It also pointed out that women tend to have policy preferences and therefore, there is a link between the substantive representation of women by women and the kinds of policies women are likely to push Reingold (2008).

In an attempt to access the representational politics, research has shown that female political leaders may seek for strategic ways to gain entry into the structures of governance. They may choose to go through women's political organizations or women's arms as these structures provide the opening to garner community support while involved in party politics. Ideally, politicians who are feminists and are included within the structures in this way, may use their strategic positioning to advance the feminist agenda as well as develop women's interest in politics and political leadership. The importance of understanding women's roles and the challenges they face in women's political arms are fundamental to understanding the ways in which party hegemony may constrain feminist work within the structures since women's arms are firmly aligned to political parties in much the same way that women in parliament are aligned.

Research has shown that in Guyana, during the period of the 1970s, the women's political arms of the two oppositional political parties, the Women's Progressive Organization (WPO) and the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM, were firmly aligned to party hegemonic control and consequently, were not able to retrieve sufficient autonomy to undertake feminist work outside of the larger party dictates. The complexities of gender systems, ethnic and political divide and the ways in which party politics and party support were constructed within plural Guyana, challenged feminist initiatives undertaken by the women's political arms. In commenting on the socio-political divides in Guyana, Trotz (2004) stated:

...The split, originally along ideological lines, soon solidified into racialized polarities. Today, the divide between Afro-Guyanese, PNC supporters is deeply embedded in Guyana's coastal fabric. In a country where 'stubborn racial arithmetic' undermines electoral outcome...neo-liberal policies accompanied by increasingly polarized camps among these two dominant groups..."

Kemp Hope (1985) also assessed that 'politics in plural societies is restricted to the single dimension of ethnicity and that ethnic preferences in such societies are

intense and are usually non-negotiable'. An interview with Indra Chanderpaul¹⁸, a young member of the WPO during the seventies, indicated that both women's organizations were at loggerheads as the focus of both groups was different. WPO turned its attention to fundamental social reform while the WRSM seemed more focused on political mobilization. This was affirmed by Lutchman (1972) when he commented that the Women's Auxilliary (renamed Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement) openly called for a One Party state that raised questions and sparked hostilities towards themselves and the government--which would have had implications for any feminist initiative undertaken by the WRSM. Neither Trotz (2004) nor Hope (1985) did not sufficiently provide explanations as to how racial and political divides complicated the challenge of re-building and sustaining solidarity between the different groups of women. But more importantly, how the governance of a plural society should intervene for a broader civic inclusiveness.

The socio-political terrain of Guyana made it difficult for feminism prior to the Decade for Women 1975-1985 and prior to the emergence of WPA Women¹⁹, an autonomous multi-racial feminist group co-founded by Andaiye in the late 1970s. WPA Women emerged out of a larger political party and intentionally broke its structural party ties, a visionary move that enabled WPA Women to be engaged in feminist initiatives unobstructed. WPA Women worked across all groups of women regardless of ethnicity or political party affiliation (Andaiye 2003²⁰). Their measure of success in transforming the lives of poor women was significant especially in their implementation of the Red Thread Organization²¹, which might not have been possible if WPA Women had genuflected to male hegemony. Male hegemonic control of feminist work, the co-option of feminism and the coercion of female genuflection to party dictates are all challenges that females in women's political organizations will face. These challenges are very likely to be similar to those experienced by women in representational politics. They are not independent of party ties and the substantive representation of women by women is usually aligned to political mandates usually set by men. This means that increase in the descriptive representation of women might not necessarily engender significant improvement in the substantive representation of women by women exponentially.

Conclusion

Where are we now? Is the Past, Past? :A Cursory Look at the Contemporary

Despite the rich history of women's activism and how women have struggled to be included in the political process and within the structures of governance, they still remain a statistical minority in parliaments and very few have been successful in being elected as Presidents and Prime Ministers. They have made substantial gains but do not seem to have been able to consolidate on those gains to improve their numbers in representational politics. It appears then that there are imperceptible challenges that block women's access to political leadership despite 'transparent' democratic electoral processes. As a result, contemporary discourse on quota systems to ensure critical mass seems important in light of the seeming empirical link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women. Further research is required to determine the extent to which women in representational politics, whether feminist oriented or not, will involuntarily engage themselves in women's rights issues. The 'add women and stir' concept might not be sufficient to engender significant shifts in the ideological relations of gender without paying attention to the relations of power although there might be strong links between increased female numbers in parliament and policy outcomes. Women have come too far to give up now, so the activism for full political inclusion must be continued.

The research has shown that females Prime Ministers and Presidents seemed to be assessed differently from their male counterparts as leadership and governance historically have always been masculinized and are sources of social power for men. Charges levied by opponents and critics against female political leaders tend to denigrate their intellectual dexterity, their competencies, ethnic and social background. Traditional gender ideologies that ascribe support roles to women tend not to accept contraventions to established gender norms. The gender of leadership therefore is an important element in conventional masculine assumptions concerning gender roles and femininity. *The invisible* being made visible, women entering *male domain* as dominant players, are problematic issues in the conventions of patriarchy. The positioning of women in hegemonic noticeable roles suggests to men that they are losing control of women as well as the privileges that had historically been preserved for them. As a result, the same age-old 'issues' are still being raised in the contemporary concerning

women's intellectual capacity and by extension, their political worth in relation to men's. Women's social class and status and whether they fit into the *required* social categories for political inclusion on the same footing as men— are questions that are still being raised even today. These inquiries are embedded within in the harsh criticisms meted to women political leaders, that denunciate, devalue and undervalue women's contribution to political development processes.

The nominal presence of women in parliament in the Caribbean is indicative of a patriarchal culture that endorsed the disparities and men's right to governance and leadership. This is evidenced by the ways in which female political leaders are treated by the media, populace and their opponents. Portia Simpson Miller for example, who is at present the Prime Minister of Jamaica, was the first woman to occupy the highest executive post in government in the history of Jamaica, and the first not to be selected from the middle or elite classes but from humble beginnings to join in the echelons of political leadership. In Jamaica, the working class is comprised within the social bracket from which the proletariat by virtue of their level of skills creates the goods and services imperative to economic development. Simpson Miller emerged from the working class not historically aligned to the social class of the traditional Jamaican intelligentsia. Her contribution to the political and economic development of Jamaica spanned 40 years as at 2014. Despite her achievements in the local women's movement in influencing several pieces of legislation in the interest of women and children; her work with the workers' unions as Minister of Labour and Social Security; her overwhelming support to the development of Jamaican athletics and other social development initiatives and programs, she is possibly, the most ridiculed premier in the history of Jamaica. Verbal attacks concerning her social class, background, shade of skin and her non-elitist academic background are packaged to commoditize masculine assertions of incompetence, inefficiency and other incapacities. These assaults are congruent to the discriminatory ideologies embedded within the historical suffrage laws that endorsed citizenship rights differentials and the disparities between the political participation of women and men.

In reference to Simpson Miller's standing within Jamaica's political leadership, a contributor to a Jamaican newspaper stated that, "personally, Ms. Simpson is a bit too much of an unknown quantity for my tastes..." (Daily Gleaner, October 2, 2005). Although elementary in thought, the statement should not be trivialized as it sought to diminish and make invisible her standing within the political sphere. Since leadership is

understood by men to be the reserve of men, then the broader social problem rests in the double standards that are even more apparent when viewed through a sexist kaleidoscope. Other contributors to the newspaper however, have countered the comments of the critics. For example, an article published by the Daily Gleaner, noted that 'many of those who oppose Portia Simpson Miller do so in language coached and packaged in supposed classism, affected snobbery, and even buffoonery,' (Daily Gleaner, 2014). Public discourse concerning whether Simpson-Miller was the right social fit in Jamaica's leadership traditions underscores the extent to which institutionalized social practices in respect to the selection of political leaders, were imbedded within the ways in which leadership is understood and assessed.

Portia Simpson Miller alluded that she was not oblivious to the criticisms but in spite of the negatives, but believed that her role transcended baseless disapprovals to be focused on the issues of national importance. In a speech delivered to the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations (NAJASO), she stated:

When I talk about the need to deal with poverty, when I emphasize the issue of poverty as one that must be dealt with decisively, there are people who have sought to ridicule me. ... But I say poverty reduction and its eventual elimination has to be a central plank of our policy, (if) growth and development is what we seek (Daily Gleaner, July 24, 2013)

The treatment of the first female Prime Minister of Jamaica highlighted that despite laws and policies to bridge the gaps in the participation of women and men, legal reform by itself, cannot make seismic shifts in gender relations or shift the conventions of the patriarchy. Men still feel the need to retain the gender of leadership and the leadership of gender for themselves in view of the considered ideological and historical relational ties between men, governance and leadership. Consequently, they view female political leadership as anomalous. Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 2006, noted that women are seen as unusual if they do not undertake the stereotypical characteristics of being passive and likely to be labeled if they do not fall within the stereotypical understandings associated with femininity (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 2006).

Although a few women have managed to slip through the tiny fissures in the glass ceiling, they do so at a very high cost. Female political leaders must grapple with fulfilling the larger political mandates while simultaneously strategizing to galvanize male majority support. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who became the first female Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010, also experienced similar challenges. The Trinidadian

media alleged that she is an alcoholic whose addiction had impaired her leadership judgments. An article in the Guardian quoted a past campaign manager as saying ‘...she should just keep on walking’ mimicking her to the Johnnie Walker campaign tagline.²² The media propagandized the allegation to propel public discourse concerning her lack of control, leadership and governance. Whether there was any truth of flaws in her leadership style, the fact that the critics had chosen to make allegations as a means to justify the ends, suggests that men still do not think that they need to do a lot in order to oust a female political leader. In this case, the critics considered female leadership as a ‘personal brand’ of politics, calling for a change in her *personal political brand* if she wanted to keep her party in power (Trinidad Express Newspapers, October 13, 2014). Bissessar’s attire has also been judged heavily by the media, which has sparked pointed public discourse²³. The wearing of an ethnic dress that did not align with her own ethnicity was considered problematic and engendered public debates and criticisms when she appeared in Johannesburg for the funeral of Nelson Mandela²⁴. Wearing the cultural attire of a country not her own, might have been aimed to publicly embrace the peoples of other cultures and perhaps to reiterate the need for building relations between countries. But the action seemed misguided as it could be interpreted as clowning around without boundaries although the wearing of cultural attire has no bearing on political competencies and intellectual perspicacity. The female political leadership project is held to extraordinary standards when judged in the public domain. This is not specific to the Caribbean as in the United States, Sarah Palin, a Republican who contested for the US Vice Presidency in 2008 was criticized for wearing expensive clothes and Hillary Clinton, the Democrat, looked better and better as the campaign wore on²⁵.

Other Caribbean female political leaders such as Janet Jagan and Eugenia Charles underwent specific kinds of attacks from the media, the public and political opponents alike. Like Simpson-Miller, Janet Jagan ethnic background came under attack but from a different standpoint. Janet Jagan was an American born of Jewish parents who married Cheddi Jagan, a Guyanese politician and trade unionist. He became the first elected Prime Minister of Guyana and governed from 1992 to 1997. Janet Jagan’s involvement in representational politics in Guyana led her to become the first female general secretary, the first female Speaker of the House, a member of the legislative assembly in 1953, then later, Minister of Home Affairs. She was a major figure in the struggle for independence in 1966 and was instrumental to the development of the local

women's movement. She became Prime Minister of Guyana from May to December 1997, then was elected President in the general elections held at the end of that same year (The Guardian, March 30, 2009).

During the campaign leading up to the elections of 1997, the issue of her ethnicity and shade of skin, became a source of concern. Although born American, she had legally acquired Guyanese citizenship after relinquishing her American citizenship as far back as 1947. Jagan was declared *persona non grata* by the US government based upon her radical leftist political alignment in Guyana. Despite the fact that she had sacrificed the citizenship of her mother country, and was already a prominent figure positioned within the Guyanese political structures, her ethnicity precipitously became problematic when she attempted to access the top political leadership position. An article entitled *Janet Jagan: The Woman who Stuck to her Marxist Views* published in The Guardian, reported:

The campaign featured some of the nastiest attacks on her origins and her colour in a political system by then inured to nastiness. Her victory was contested on the streets and the courts and she resigned from office in 1999 on health grounds (The Guardian, March 30, 2009)

After winning the presidency, her right to the position was contested in court and although she came out victorious, it led to civil unrest perpetrated by her opponents. She voluntarily resigned the Presidency and handed it over to a young male in her political party. According to the critics, the resentment to her leadership also concerned her inflexible and perhaps, 'aggressive' approach to governance (Grant and Kirton 2007). Durerst and Kelly (2003) noted that assertiveness lies on a continuum from fully passive to fully aggressive, and 'women are confined to a more limited range of appropriate assertive-aggressive behavior than men, and women's range falls closer to the passive end...' This statement highlighted the socialized gender stereotypical standards that underpin the expectations of femininity and holds implications for women's leadership and governance within the context of the patriarchal order. Jagan was challenged to fit within the cultural expectation of political leadership in a complexly plural society. The treatment of Eugenia Charles was another case in point. She was known as the Iron Lady of the Caribbean and was Prime Minister of Dominica from 1980 to 1995. The fact that she never married, had a deep voice and was childless raised questions concerning her sexuality that placed her in the forefront of vitriolic attacks, although 'she never

really identified with feminist issues or gave Caribbean women, who carry many burdens, particular consideration' (The Guardian 2005).

Though the Caribbean is lagging behind on the Gender Gap Reports, other countries external to Caribbean that are considered more progressive, also grapple with the issues related to the equal treatment. Elisabeth Kopp of Switzerland who was the first female member of the Swiss Cabinet only thirteen years after women won the vote, was charged for breaching official secrecy in September 1989, though later acquitted. This led to her resignation from political office. In an interview with Regula Brechbuhl²⁶, Kopp responded to the question:

Various allegations ended your political career abruptly in early 1989. You were in the public spotlight for months, although in February 1990 the Swiss Federal Supreme Court cleared you of all charges of violating professional confidentiality. What were you feeling during that time?

It was by far the worst period of my life. It's devastating to have your reputation destroyed. The worst part for me was the feeling of helplessness. To give you an example: Shortly after I resigned, I gave an interview in which I was not misquoted, but the headline said in huge letters, "Still euphemistic and sugarcoating things." That hurt me a lot. (Brechbuhl 2014)

Traditional gender ideologies supported by societies, presuppose that men make better leaders and consequently, women in top political leadership positions are treated differently from their male counterparts. Women therefore face the barriers of sexism which not only support the notion that men make better leaders but also place limitations on women's freedoms and access within the structures of governance. Although leadership is behavioral and skills oriented, sexist notions also presuppose that leadership is gender derived. Associating gender with leadership underpins the masculinizing of leadership and the denying of access to women based upon the roles aligned with femininity. Gender therefore continues to be a challenge for women in political leadership positions as well as for those seeking to be included within the structures of governance.

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“The PM's alleged drinking problem—the perception” Guardian, December 9, 2012
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“A Bit of History About Women and the Vote,” Weekend Mirror, January 27-28, 2007.
“Dame Eugenia Charles: The Caribbean's first woman PM, she led Dominica for 15
years” The Guardian, September 8, 2005.

Endnotes

¹ Address by Rhoda Reddock to the Graduation Ceremony of the Women in Politics Programme (Cohort II) of the National Women's Commission, Belize, March 31, 2011.

² See (<http://www.weforum.org/our-mission>)

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⁴ See (www.ch.ch/private/00987/01052/01054/02321/index.html?lang=en).

⁵ The legal procedures required that there must be majority votes at the cantonal level.

At the federal level, the majority of electorates and the cantons must agree.

⁶ Interview conducted by Regula Brechbuhl in 2014 under the caption "Elisabeth Kopp: Women Often have Different Priorities" published by Credit Suisse, Switzerland

⁷ See Swiss Review. No.5, November 2011. See also article entitled "In Sexist Switzerland, Rumbblings of a Political Avalanche. Orlando Sentinel, March 28, 1983.

⁸ Speech delivered by Rebecca Blank of the US Government. See Bib.

⁹ The Inter-Parliamentary Union is an international organization established in 1889 under Article 1 of the Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹⁰ Kyösti Karvonen. "Woman to take Charge of Government, Again" This is Finland Newsletter. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 15, 2010.

¹¹ See Reference Notes.

¹² See Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture by Carolyn Cooper in Reference Notes

¹³ 1944 Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Government Printers. Jamaica. 1944.

¹⁴ Data collected from the Electoral Commission of Jamaica.

¹⁵ Hazel Brown was interviewed by Beverly Shirley in 2003.

Hazel Brown was a leading member of the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago founded in 1971. She was an outspoken advocate for the issues that affected women and their families with specific focus on consumerism. HATT was successful in the advocacy for minimum wage laws and for improving the working conditions of domestic helpers.

¹⁶ Professor Patricia Mohammed interviewed by Beverly Shirley in 2003. Patricia Mohammed was a founding member of CWP during the period of the 1970s. She was involved in the early establishing of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) in the 1980s and was the Head of the CGDS on the Mona Campus, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

¹⁷ Beverly Shirley interviewed Irena Cousins, the Honorary Consul of Poland, in 2003. She associated herself with the PNP Women's Movement and was also a close associate of the Prime Minister, Michael Manley during the period of the 1970s.

¹⁸ Indra Chandarpaul interviewed by Beverly Shirley in 2003. Indra Chandarpaul was a strong advocate for the rights of the Guyanese people. She was member of the women's arm of the People's Progressive Party during the 1970s. She later rose to occupy several ministerial positions within the government of Guyana.

¹⁹ WPA Women (explain what they were about and how they were founded)

²⁰ Beverly Shirley interviewed Andaiye in Guyana in 2003. Andaiye is the founding member of the Red Thread Organization and WPA Women.

²¹ Red Thread Organization used community based organizing to strengthen multiracial collective participation through involvement in several projects and initiatives in the interest of women's economic independence and to build solidarity between the different groups of women.

²² See "The PM's alleged drinking problem—the perception" Guardian, December 9, 2012, authored by Maxie Cuffie.

²³ Coudray defends Kamla's wear at Mandela service, Guardian Media, Thursday, December 12, 2013 and PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar- Political Survivor of The Year the Guardian, Sunday, December 22, 2013

²⁴ See (11) above.

²⁵ Palin's Appearance Makes Headlines Because of Our Hypocrisy, Not Hers. The Huffington Post, October 24, 2008

²⁶ See (6) above

List of Interviews

Hazel Brown: interviewed by Beverly Shirley, Trinidad, 2003

Hazel Brown was a leading member of the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago founded in 1971. She was an outspoken advocate for the issues that affected women and their families with specific focus on consumerism. HATT was successful in the advocacy for minimum wage laws and for improving the working conditions of domestic helpers.

Professor Patricia Mohammed: interviewed by Beverly Shirley in Jamaica, 2003

Patricia Mohammed was a founding member of CWP during the period of the 1970s. She was involved in the early establishing of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) in the 1980s and was the Head of the CGDS on the Mona Campus, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

Ambassador Irena Cousins: interviewed by Beverly Shirley, Jamaica, 2003

Irena Cousins was the Honorary Consul of Poland, in 2003. She associated herself with the PNP Women's Movement and was also a close associate of the Prime Minister, Michael Manley during the period of the 1970s. As a result of her association with the government and women's movement, she was able to provide key information on women's activism during the period of the seventies.

Indra Chandarpaul interviewed by Beverly Shirley in Guyana, 2003

Indra Chandarpaul was a strong advocate for the rights of the Guyanese people. She was member of the women's arm of the People's Progressive Party during the 1970s. She later rose to occupy several ministerial positions within the government of Guyana.

^{Mark} Beverly Shirley interviewed Andaiye in Guyana in 2003. Andaiye is the founding member of the Red Thread Organization and WPA Women.

Janet Jagan interviewed by Beverly Shirley in Guyana, 2003

She was the wife of Cheddi Jagan who became involved in socialist politics in Guyana. She was Prime Minister for a short period in 1997 then served as President of Guyana from 1997 to 1999. She introduced several feminist initiatives and was one of the pioneers of the Guyanese feminist movement.

Rhoda Reddock: interviewed by Beverly Shirley in Jamaica, 2003

Rhoda Reddock was a founding member of CWP and was involved in feminism initiatives. She was part of the early pioneering initiative for the introduction of a women's studies department/unit at the University of the West Indies. She later became

the Head of the Centre (now Institute) for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine.

Joycelin Dow interviewed in Guyana, 2003

She is a founding member of the Red Thread Organization and was involved in the activism during the period of the seventies as a member of the WPA Women.

Peggy Antrobus, interviewed in Barbados in 2003

She was Director of the Women's Desk (now Bureau of Women's Affairs) during the period of the eighties. She advocated for social legislation in the interest of women of children.

Joycelin Massiah - Barbados 2003

She was instrumental in the establishing of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies and was the initiator of the Women In Caribbean Project

Linnette Vassell - Jamaica 2003

She was involved in the collective activism for the Maternity Leave Bill. She was member of the Committee of Women for Progress (CWP) and a member of the communist party Workers Party of Jamaica.