10TH W. G. DEMAS MEMORIAL LECTURE

WHAT NOW FOR CARIBBEAN PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS? REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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What Now for Caribbean People and their Leaders? Reflections on the Current Economic and Social Crisis: A Gender Perspective

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Good evening everyone, I would like to begin by thanking my former campus principal Prof. Dr. Compton Bourne, governor of the Caribbean Development Bank for the invitation to address this distinguished gathering this evening in Turks and Caicos. It is a distinct honour to join a line of eminent predecessors in delivering this 10th lecture in honour of an outstanding Caribbean son William G. Demas– someone who Lloyd Best referred to as a polycrat - "the low-key but multi-talented, all-purpose, policy-leader, the pragmatic academic in public life who wears the technocrat's face. " (Lloyd Best, 1998:13)

Like me Demas began his academic career at the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the UWI: that important site of intellect and praxis in the post-war Anglophone Caribbean. Joining in 1985 as a young scholar I drew inspiration from the heritage of early ISER researchers and scholars such as - Dudley Huggins, Lloyd Braithwaite, Roy Augier, Elsa Goveia, M.G. Smith, Lloyd Best and W.G. Demas, scholars and practitioners committed to the region and its social and intellectual development. Scholars who laid the groundwork for Caribbean social sciences, history and socio-economic policy; a legacy that I am not sure current UWI graduates are sufficiently aware.

As we grapple with youth disengagement with society and its problems I was touched by a story recently relayed me by Ms. Lylla Rose Bada, neé Ottley our outgoing campus bursar of her entrée into the field of accounting. She recounted to me her pivotal encounter with W.G. Demas when in 1962, the year of Trinidad and Tobago's independence; he came to address her sixth form class at Bishop Anstey High school, my alma mater as well. She said – "he told us that we could be great; he stressed the need for nationalism" and made us feel that we could make a difference." The young Lylla Rose Ottley, then a Spanish, French and Latin student decided to switch her focus to read economics at The University in London so that she could be useful to the new nation. While reading economics she discovered her facility with numbers and did a double major with accounting and the rest is history. Oh that W.G. Demas were around today to once more reach out to young people, pulled in so many directions by the unfettered and unregulated technological revolution of this period – to provide them with a raison d'être beyond their own personal achievement.

In my presentation this evening I reflect on the historic conjuncture at which we are currently located and ponder at the possibilities and opportunities now open to us. In doing so I look backwards in order to look forward and draw on my own experience of gender analysis in doing so.

Understanding Gender

Gender is now a word that is bandied about and liberally used by many in various contexts. It is one of these things that everyone feels that they instinctively understand because after all - "we all have a gender". As a result few seek to properly examine, read and reflect upon what it actually means. For example it is now popular on survey questionnaires and government forms to replace the word 'sex' with the word 'gender.' Maybe it is assumed that gender is the modern word for sex (which it is not!). As someone who has been privileged to work in this field for close to thirty years, I am continuously humbled by its complexity and by its rich possibilities for enabling a deeper comprehension of so much of the human condition.

The more we study this phenomenon the more we are fascinated and realize how much more there is still to know. But many in our region, possibly including some of you here this evening, have resisted the urge to learn more. This is partly out of fear; because gender will certainly change your way of thinking and of understanding yourself; the society and the world; your relationships; body and sexuality. But also partly because gendered knowledge is transformational and necessitates that we re-think much of what we have accepted in the past and much of what we are currently doing.

The interesting thing about gender though is that although we may not be conscious of it, virtually all of our actions, our thoughts and our beliefs are gendered. This is because human beings are gendered beings.

Sex/Gender identity is possibly the most fundamental identity that we possess. Human beings find it difficult to relate to persons outside of a gendered context, hence the very first question we ask of new parents is – is it a boy or a girl? This is because we have no knowledge of how to relate to persons outside of gender. This in some ways also accounts for our discomfort with sex and gender ambiguity and diversity, but this is the subject possibly

for another lecture in another place. For now I will simply define gender as I understand it as – the social, cultural and historical constructions of masculinity and femininity and the related power relations *or* the social determinants of what it is to be a man or woman which may vary with social, cultural and historical contexts and the unequal power related to this.

The term gender assumed this new meaning with the emergence of the new feminist theory and scholarship of the 1970s – 1980s. It was used to facilitate an analytical and conceptual distinction between the biological differences of being 'male' and 'female' and the socially constructed or socially determined differences and meanings attached to 'masculinity' and femininity'. These scholars therefore established a conceptual distinction between **sex** which was seen as biological or anatomical and **gender** which was seen as social.

What was also important is that the social value attached to masculinity and femininity was and is not equal. Masculinity and maleness has always been valued more highly and seen as superior to femininity and femaleness, even today with the improvements in women's situation. The specifics of various 'gender systems' however vary from society to society, shaped by factors such as ethnicity, class and economics, religion and belief systems, ability and disability and so on, with all of these factors interacting with each other with diverse outcomes.

In 2004, the Centre for Gender and Development Studies of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, collaborated with the Division of Gender Affairs of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in creating a draft National Gender Policy for Trinidad and Tobago. In the introduction to that document we noted that:

> What has proved to be a deterrent to the smoother passage of ideas pertaining to gender equality in international and regional initiatives is that many men (often) feel threatened by the idea of equity between the sexes. There is a view that women's advancement often means deterioration in the status of men. [but] The lives of women and men are intimately and intricately connected. It is impossible to separate the fortunes of one sex from the other, as together they constitute the basis on which the society reproduces its peoples and itself. It is true however that as women's lives change, men's lives will also change. The new studies on masculinity provide new understandings of men, their aspirations and lives. These new insights open up new possibilities for men and boys, widens the options for personal fulfilment and for new patterns of interaction with women and children (NGPTT, 2004: 2).

I argue therefore that Caribbean development approaches have all been undergirded by certain assumptions about masculinity and femininity – whether they were conscious or unconscious. Hopefully with the new awareness of the last thirty years of research, theorising and practical application in this region and globally; future development approaches will be more conscious – recognizing a comprehensive understanding of gender as a key factor which should shape our inputs and be reflected in our outputs, but more on this later.

The Current Context

Our Region along with the rest of the world is coming to terms with the collapse of the neo-liberal paradigm of economic, political and social governance. It has come after a close to 20-year period where the forces of free trade and the free market described by some as - "The Washington Consensus," were paramount. Who could have predicted the rapid collapse of this paradigm that held almost total sway for the last two decades, two decades when it was almost considered heresy to question or challenge the primacy of the "market' resulting in what economist Kari Levitt (2005) called " Market Fundamentalism." Policies emanating from this worldview facilitated the dismantling and removal of the many of the social and economic safeguards which had been established in the Anglophone Caribbean in the aftermath of the labour disturbances of the 1930s and World War II (although not to the same extent in all countries). They also opened up local and regional markets by insisting on the removal of subsidies on local agriculture and manufacturing while commensurate removals have still not taken place to the same extent in North America and Europe.

We are all familiar with the characteristics of this paradigm which was adhered to with almost religious orthodoxy by many – unregulated free market, privatisation of almost all sectors, reduction in public spending on health and education, the 'ngoisation' of the social sector and the privatisation of services - even essential services like water and sanitation. This period was also characterised by a sharp culture change characterised by increased individualism, greed, consumerism and selfishness with money and wealth becoming the most important indicators of value and worth. In Trinidad and Tobago we have come up with a humorous summary of this characteristic – A for Apple, B for Bat and See for yourself. Brown's study of the impact of structural adjustment in Jamaica already in 1994 discovered a value shift where parents and children of middle-class families in Jamaica no

longer considered education to have intrinsic value, worth having in its own right, as had been the case before the IMF loan. Instead they now saw education as an instrumental value, a means to achieving a higher income and nothing more (Brown,1994:61 cited in Cain,2008:.23).

Over this period, we have also witnessed the deterioration of social life in many quarters even as the availability of material goods for consumption – cell phones, ipods, dvds etc. increased exponentially. In the Caribbean, HIV related illness continues to be the largest cause of death for the age group 25-44 (UNAIDS, 2008): the increasing frequency and veracity of hurricanes compel us to address issues of environmental sustainability and climate change something which as people and governments we neglect at our own collective peril. The region is also experiencing an unprecedented increase in criminal violence, especially male youth criminality connected to a drug industry and the related proliferation of small arms; and also reflected in their distancing from formal education. Clearly, the current financial crisis is simply the icing on the cake of a social crisis that was already facing the region.

The current financial crisis and economic recession has already heralded new challenges to Caribbean governments weakened after the last 20 years. As noted recently by economist Norman Girvan:

> 200 million people in the world will be pushed into poverty through no fault of their own, no lack of effort on their part or mismanagement by their governments, and up to 50 million may be added to the ranks of the unemployed (ILO). In our own region, Jamaica has seen one of its main export earners, the alumina industry, practically wiped out overnight; and is struggling to fill the gap in its fiscal budget of J$55 billion, about 6% of its GDP. In Trinidad and Tobago, where the energy sector accounts directly and indirectly for 70% of GDP and 90% of export earnings, energy prices have fallen by approximately 40% below the budgeted levels since the beginning of the fiscal year; compounded by falls in energy output, in manufactured exports, and in non-energy taxes.... Barbados's tourism earnings have similarly taken a beating this season." (Girvan, 2009)

Lessons from History

This period has already been compared by others to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Descriptions of that event which lasted from around 1929 to 1939 read in an uncanny way like reports of this depression as in this citation below:

> Besides ruining many thousands of individual investors, this precipitous decline in the value of assets greatly strained banks and other financial institutions, particularly those holding stocks in their portfolios… Many banks were consequently forced into insolvency; by 1933, 11,000 of the United States' 25,000 banks had failed. The failure of so many banks, combined with a general and nationwide loss of confidence in the economy, led to much-reduced levels of spending and demand and hence of production, thus aggravating the downward spiral. The result was drastically falling output and drastically rising unemployment; [1]

That depression was also preceded by a period of free-market liberalism, with little state spending on social services, etc. According to one source:

> In the 1920s governments and business people largely believed, as they had since the 19th century, that prosperity resulted from the least possible government intervention in the domestic economy, from open international relations with little trade discrimination, and from currencies that were fixed in value and readily convertible. Few people would continue to believe this in the 1930s.[2]"

The Caribbean was of course deeply affected at this period, just under 100 years after emancipation and just around 13-15 years after the end of indentureship. The post-plantation conditions of poverty, malnutrition and extreme labour exploitation, were exacerbated by these economic declines as documented by W. Arthur Lewis in his booklet – *Labour in the West Indies* first published in 1939 (Lewis,1977). Sugar prices fell and the independent countries of Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic were especially affected.[3]

Between 1934 and 1938 a spate of labour disturbances spread throughout the region marking a historic turning point in colonial policy and social development in the Anglophone region. Starting with Indo-Trinidadian plantation workers in Central Trinidad in 1934; strikes and disturbances continued in 1935 in St. Kitts, St. Lucia and British Guiana; Barbados. St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago in 1937; culminating in Jamaica in 1938 (Reddock, 2005). Changes in colonial development policy towards the region in the post-World War II period therefore were the result of both the disturbances and strikes in the region - that is action from below - as well as from the actions of the British colonial state Labour Party policies then strongly influenced by Keynesianism and social welfarism.

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[1] http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/about.htm retrieved 7/4/09)

[2] http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/about.htm retrieved 7/4/09

[3] http://caribbean-guide.info/past.and.present/history/great.depression/retrieved 7/4/09)

This combination of factors contributed to the replacement of the 1929 Colonial Development and Welfare Act. This Act had been based on the principle that colonies should have only such services as they could afford from their own local revenue (Wicker,1958:172; Johnson,1977:268). It had made available the sum of one million pounds sterling per year for the entire colonial empire. This sum, dispersed in either loans or grants, could be spent only on capital projects of an 'economic' – that is profit-making nature – thus excluding any spending on 'social 'services including health and education (CO,1955:4). Interestingly, in presenting this Act to parliament, the British Labour government had justified it as a means of relieving the economic depression by stimulating export trade and thus employment *in Britain* (Wicker,1958:74 emphasis added)." What is clear is that these new approaches may not have been extended to the colonies unless the colonials themselves through their collection actions had demanded them.[4]

By the early 1930s therefore, new approaches were also becoming evident in the US controlled Caribbean colonies of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, the mini-New Deal programmes of the US government led by Theodore Roosevelt, also focused on health, education and the social sector, making British colonial social interventions in the region even more imperative. The West Indian Royal Commission (WIRC) Report made public after World War II provided the rationale for the new Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945.

It was as a result of this Act that many of the social welfare provisions to which we had become accustomed were introduced into the region. These included – institutionalized state-funded social welfare programmes and pensions, subsidized government housing, improved public health services, expanded education, scholarships for higher education in Britain especially in medicine and the social sciences, the expansion of agricultural extension and most importantly the establishment of the University College of the West Indies the forerunner of the University of the West Indies.

Many of the assumptions underlying these initiatives are open to critique. In many instances ethnocentric colonial views on women and family were embedded in the structure and organization of these new labour, social and education structures and systems. Importantly

[4] It is left to be seen what significance the recent strikes and labour disturbances in Guadeloupe and Martinique will have for the current era.

for this presentation and central to these policies were clear gender ideologies and assumptions about women and men's place which deeply influenced our society in the years to follow. There was a strong rejection of indigenous family systems and no attempt to understand these on their own historical or cultural terms. Rather they were determined as dysfunctional and every effort was made to destroy them. What resulted however was not a destruction of these family forms – they have survived until today sometimes in quite misunderstood ways, but what also survived was a social policy which did not support them and which continued to perceive them negatively resulting in many of the distortions and social problems which confront us today.

For example, social welfare provisions in this region were based on notions of family based on the 19th Century European nuclear family model of the male breadwinner/provider and the dependent female housewife. These continue to be the basis for much of our legal system, and social welfare systems and underlay many everyday social practices. In the Caribbean households are diverse, multi-generational or may be female, male or *jointly* headed - a concept that I think is hardly even considered. It is only today with the introduction of gender studies that some of us are beginning to try to understand Caribbean family forms in their own right and not simply as deviations from a Western European norm. Forms that have been shaped by West Africa, Asia, experiences of slavery and indentureship as well as the influence of Western norms and responses to hegemonic Christian ideals. In so doing we are beginning to unravel some of the complex gendered underpinnings which are constantly being re-worked and re-engineered as the social and economic context changes.

In many places in this region today women cannot access social welfare for their children unless the fathers are deceased, hidden, denied or if they take the fathers to court. This often results in further distancing of fathers from their children and increasing tensions and animosities between parents, something which no doubt affects many Caribbean children today. UNIFEM Caribbean has researched and documented this phenomenon and it awaits regional implementation but in the current financially challenged situation, it may once again not receive the attention it deserves.

That period, therefore was a critical one for the region, on the one hand it was a period when new social programmes were introduced aimed at supporting the vulnerable in society while

on the other, it was important in re-shaping gendered structures and systems in this region from the standpoint of colonial domestic ideologies.

There are a number of issues that emerge from this discussion so far. The first is that unfettered, unregulated liberal economic policies, lend themselves not only to eventual financial collapse but also to immense social crisis. Second, our region has tended in both the colonial and post-colonial period not to be a determinant of its own social and economic fortunes. Although the world is today even more interrelated than ever before and no country can exist on its own; especially 'small' economies such as ours, maybe it is time that we develop more confidence in our indigenous intelligence and creativity and in our own possibilities; learning from global experiences but also believing and trusting in ourselves; thinking before we jump on every passing economic bandwagon. The question now on the table has to be: 1) What lessons can we learn from these two historical experiences; and 2) How do we as a region use this knowledge to move forward into this new era; and 3) What part can gender analysis, policy and planning play in shaping this new paradigm for the rest of this century.

Gender in the Construction of the New Paradigm for the Caribbean

In the rest of this presentation I seek to provide concrete examples of the ways in which gender can help us chart new directions for the future. I do this by focussing primarily on one issue that certainly faces my own society Trinidad and Tobago but which is also important for other parts of the region that of male youth and the culture of guns, gangs and criminal violence.

Guns, Gangs and Youth Violence

In the introduction to its executive summary A UNODC/World Bank Report on Crime Violence and Development, observed that:

> In his 2006 New Year's address as then prime minister of Jamaica, P.J. Patterson said, "Without a doubt, the high level of violent crime remains our most troubling and pressing problem." In opening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in September 2005, President George Maxwell Richards said the country was in crisis due to the escalating crime rate. Through multiple channels, crime and violence threaten the welfare of Caribbean citizens. Beyond the direct effect on victims, crime and violence inflict widespread costs, generating a climate of fear for all citizens and diminishing

> economic growth. Crime and violence present one of the paramount challenges to development in the Caribbean (UNODC/World Bank, 2007: i).[5]

This report identified Crime and Violence as development issues that have social and economic effects for entire societies. It also posits that a reduction in crime and violence levels in Jamaica and Haiti to that of Costa Rica could result in an increase in annual growth by as much as 5.4 % (UNODC/WORLD Bank, 2007: i).

This however is not only a Caribbean problem. Buvunic and Morrison argue that between the 1980s and 1990s, a period characterised by the shift to economic neo-liberalism, the world average of homicides rose from 5.82 for every 100,000 persons in 1980-1984 to 8.86 per 100,000 during 1990 -1994 (Buvunic and Morrison, 2000:58-59). The Economic South or Third World exceeded that of the Economic North where, the homicide rates were - 40 per 100.000 in sub-Saharan Africa; 23 per 100,000 for Latin America with the Drug capital Cali Colombia having rate of 91 per 100,000 ((Buvunic and Morrison, 2000:59).

What is significant is that throughout the world youth are the majority of the perpetrators as well as the majority of the victims of criminal violence. In this regard the UNODC/World Bank Report observed:

> **"**Just as they account for a disproportionate share of the victims of violence, young people are also disproportionately its perpetrators, especially young men. In most countries, this is a growing trend. Indeed, statistical data indicate that in virtually all parts of the world, with the exception of the United States, rates of youth crime rose in the 1990s, with many of the criminal offenses related to drug abuse and excessive alcohol use (UNDP, 2003). What little data exist indicate that this phenomenon may be particularly worrisome in the Caribbean (UNODC/World Bank,2007: 64).

While the report focussed quite correctly on the factors fuelling this crisis as: the drug industry which is linked to the flow of small arms and the Caribbean's geographic location, weaknesses in the criminal justice system and a focus on criminal justice solutions, the link with the dominant economic paradigm was not made, and the fact that it was mainly male youth involved not problematised. By extension the gendered character of this phenomenon

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[5] http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/about.htm retrieved 7/4/09

was not highlighted. The fact that alcohol and additive drug use has increased exponentially, especially although not only among male youth, is an important development with many gendered causes and implications. Maybe the authors like many of us would be subconsciously thinking that – Boys would be Boys!

The problem of Guns, Gangs and Youth Violence is one that brings together all of the social, economic and gender questions currently facing our region. It raises questions about:

- The Caribbean's location within the regional and global economy;
- The differential gendered impact of socio-economic policy;
- The collapse of the social sector in many although thankfully not all of our countries over the years of economic neo-liberalism;
- The increased burden of care placed on families, and on mothers in particular with little state or partner support;
- The normalisation of the gun as the weapon of choice through the globalisation of the US entertainment industry and its easy availability;
- The emergence of the drug economy as a replacement of the now disappearing productive industries in some countries;
- The gendered constructions of masculinities and the significance of violence within it;
- The sexual division of labour and the responsibilities of women and men within it;
- The need for attention to the quality of our education systems and not only the quantity;
- The need to support parents in the normal yet challenging role of parenting in the contemporary world.

A gender analysis of this illustrates comprehensively some of the directions we would need to consider in shaping this new paradigm not just for these male youth but for our societies as a whole.

Increased Income Disparities: Decline of Social Services and Parenting Challenges

While there has been some economic growth within the region, its effects have not been evenly distributed among the population. Buvunic and Morrison note that after a short period in the 1970s when income disparities had declined, these rose again in the 1980s and definitely in the 1990s in Latin America and elsewhere. This was exacerbated by the decline in social services beginning with structural adjustment – that early phase of economic neo-liberalism which among other things resulted in the reduction in access to pre-natal care and

early childhood support which could have affected the mental health of a new generation leading to increased deprivation and violence.

This has also come at a time when the demands on parents are increasing. The International Labour Organisation identified the following related trends emerging internationally: the increasing separation of home from workplace despite the increase in information and computer technologies; the increasing labour force participation of women at all levels; the declining availability of family assistance as families become more nucleated and all family members, including grandmothers, seek their own life directions and seek to earn a living; the increasing care needs of the elderly; the increasing pressure of work and longer working hours; the increasing travel and commuting time for workers and their children; and the stresses of health and disease including that of HIV and AIDS.

They also noted the difficulties faced by workers and their families in: organising and coordinating family schedules, coping with emergencies; coping with longer care hours and discrimination in the workplace (Hein, 2005). In a contribution to this global study carried out in Trinidad and Tobago, Yvonne Bobb-Smith and myself observed that: employers in both the private and public sector have not significantly accepted their responsibility to address issues of reconciling work with family responsibilities and the challenges which workers face in this regard. This is also true for the state and trade unions which also have not adequately recognized the relationship between work-family conflict and the problems of social dislocation currently being experienced in Trinidad and Tobago.

Women as part of the labour force (and I need to point out here that Caribbean women have been part of the work force since slavery and indentureship) have used innovative coping strategies to reduce the conflict that work-family responsibilities produce; men to a lesser extent are also visible in this respect, usually in specific areas e.g. providing transportation. While Government[6], and to a more limited extent, the private sector and NGOs have provided some support facilities and services based on family needs, policies are not yet targeted to workers with family responsibilities. The unpredictability of some country's infrastructure especially transportation and utilities e.g. water and electricity - play a large role in heightening work-family tensions and conflict. At the same time the heightening of

[6] For example the Trinidad and Tobago government has introduced a system of early childhood education throughout the country as well as an extensive school feeding programme..

the citizens' fear of criminal violence especially in violence-torn communities, has placed more stress on working parents who seek to ensure their children's safety; while middle and upper-income women/parents are able to use their financial resources to ameliorate their situation e.g. babysitters, special transport arrangements etc. low-income women are unable to access similar support structures and their children remain unsupervised consistently for extended periods (Reddock and Bobb-Smith,2005a:12-13).

While the challenges of work and family have always existed, they have taken on new forms today. The reasons for this are many. They include: the general process of urbanization and decline of intimate community relations; the increasing demands of the workplace; the absence of family members to provide child care and family support; and the insistence on the part of women, including grandmothers, for a life beyond the household; the non-synchronization of work hours with school hours; and the difficulties of public transportation and school transportation (Reddock and Bobb-Smith,2005:106).

What is clear is that parents' especially low-income parents, most significantly mothers, are not being supported in this increasingly challenging job of parenting. The approach of many in the region is that people have a responsibility to take care of *their* children. Indeed in some countries, it has been suggested on more than one occasion that parents be held accountable for their children's crimes and if necessary imprisoned or fined. I want to suggest here this evening that in many ways bearing and rearing children is a contribution made by parents and in particular women to our societies. In parts of the world where this has declined as in parts of Western Europe, pro-natalist and child friendly policies have been established. These include extended maternity leave, paternity leave, child care centres in communities and at workplaces, after work care centres, breast-feeding facilities at work places, school transport facilities etc.

Low-income women in Trinidad and Tobago, some of whom work as janitors, security guards, etc. to support their households, complained of their inability to monitor their children's behaviour or to pay others to do so. This burden of care is exacerbated by the unequal positioning of women in the labour market. This in many ways fuels the continuing quest for more and more qualifications among women in the region. Economist Stephanie Seguino (2003) noted that the higher levels of education among Caribbean women, do not result in equal employment rates with men: She details:

Women in the Caribbean are almost twice as likely as men to be unemployed. This is a troubling finding, given the high rate of female headedness among households, and therefore, extensive reliance of women on paid work to support children. Their difficulty in securing paid work makes women dependent on men, the state and kin to help to make ends meet. Further, the relatively higher female unemployment rates in the Caribbean have contributed to the relatively higher out-migration of women from the region (Seguino, 2003:83).

Low-income Caribbean households therefore, from which the majority of the youth involved in gangs, the drug trade and criminal violence derive, are run by mothers in the main or parents who are severely challenged and who receive little support – financial or otherwise from relatives or the state in meeting this increasingly challenging responsibility. Contradictorily the out-migration of many mothers in the region for long or a series of shorter periods, in order to better meet the material and financial needs of the families, contributes significantly to the national income of many Caribbean states through remittances but they also contribute to many of the social problems facing youth and their societies in the region.

Constructions of Manhood and Masculinities

This issue however is not one only of the availability of time and financial resources for parenting but of equal importance, the character of the gender socialisation that is taking place and its link to sex/gender identity formation. Identity can be simply defined as - How people think of or understand themselves. This can be multiple and based on one or more of the following; race/ethnicity, nationality, religion/belief systems; and sex/gender.

Although so obvious to us today, it is now recognised that sex/gender identity is possibly one of the most if not the most fundamental of all identities that human beings develop. By sex/gender identity I refer to "The relatively consistent, subjective experiencing of oneself as male or female, feminine or masculine or other (Nanda,2000: 108)." This identity is shaped largely although not completely through interactions with others in particular cultural contexts. Parents, siblings, and other significant others are central to its development, its' expression as well as to its policing. Later on and especially today peers and the electronic media also become increasingly important in this process of 'becoming a man" and 'becoming a woman."

As we speak, the strictly dichotomous sex/gender system hegemonic in most parts of the world is being challenged: opening new spaces and possibilities for those individuals who are unable to fit into these dichotomous gendered or sexed boundaries. While this was possible in many non-western or pre-modern societies prior to colonization, the colonial experience suppressed these memories and practices into the underground if not the unconscious. The Caribbean continues to be one of the places most resistant to a more open recognition and accommodation of sex/gender diversity. The HIV pandemic however, has in many ways forced us to bring these citizens out of the closet so to speak and I dare say they will not go away. A better understanding of gender could go a long way in helping us to understand these complex issues, to confront our own fears and address these issues frontally. But more importantly it would begin to challenge the homophobia i.e. the fear of homosexuality, which entraps young men and forces them into destructive forms of 'hypermasculinity' such as violence and the rejection of activities defined as 'feminine' such as education and schooling, as ways of proving their manhood.

One of the characteristics of gendered societies is the differentiation of masculine activities, normally more valued, from feminine activities. Women therefore seek equality and improved status by entering fields and areas previously inhabited by men. These include the jobs which have higher prestige and more remuneration. The opposite is not the case as women's activities by definition, have lower value. So as women enter predominantly masculine areas men tend to retreat resulting in fewer and fewer spaces where men can claim as their own. The retreat into the physical, one of the last remaining areas of male dominance through for example, sport and violence and other forms of hypermasculinity therefore become one means of reclaiming masculine power and identity. As observed by David Plummer former UWI Professor of HIV-AIDS Education:

> "Physicality is particularly important in contemporary life because it is an important way that men can differentiate themselves from the 'opposite' sex and is therefore central to modern gender identity formation. The emphasis on physicality also has consequences for relationships, for example men are more likely to use physical means to resolve disputes. The converse is also true: that a man that backs away from a physical confrontation risks his reputation as a man (Plummer and Simpson, 2007?:4).

Gender socialisation, therefore is another factor which must be brought into the equation. The processes at home, at school, on the block, among peers, in religious institutions where

young women and men learn about acceptable masculine and feminine behaviours and the sanctions which could result for not staying within these boundaries. Caribbean parents especially mothers' fear of homophobia often affects their parenting styles with negative consequences in the contemporary world. Adherence to a strict sexual division of labour for example, means that girls may receive skills of multi-tasking, discipline, time-management through their involvement in housework (Figueroa,2004); although this is changing this is largely still the case. Their capacity for nurturing is also developed though participation in child care something from which young men would no doubt benefit. As noted by Barry Chavannes, the place of young men in many Caribbean communities is in the street, not the 'house' or 'the yard' (Chevannes, 2001). Hence a drive through many parts of the region would see young and older men congregated on street corners. The block therefore becomes a critical area for gender socialisation of young males – for good or for ill.

A key construct in Caribbean gender ideologies is that of the male breadwinner/provider concept which determines that men have the responsibility to financially support partners and spouses and their children. This concept was central to British social welfare systems which were introduced into the region in the post-war period, hence the social welfare provisions mentioned earlier. This idea justified women not working outside the home and earning less than men if they did so because it was assumed that they had a breadwinner somewhere – a father or husband who was supposed to support them. In this way, 'providing' became the single most important characteristic of fathering in this region; and 'minding' your child for many meant mainly financial provision. Recent studies in this region suggest that even where children share households with both parents, there was still much emotional distance from fathers. As reported in one Jamaica study:

> "...the fact that a father shared a home on a consistent basis with his children did not mean that there was effective communication or that he played an important role in his children's personal development or socialisation. There seemed to be an acceptance, mainly among some members of the female groups, that fathers were not interested in their activities. There was also an expectation that they would play a distant role, functioning mainly as breadwinners." (Bailey, Branche and Henry-Lee: 2002:5).

These researchers also noted that:

> "Some fathers totally abandoned their children, and several of the male participants expressed keen disappointment over this abandonment and the fact that they had not experienced the nuturant and supportive relationship that they felt ought to exist between a father and son. Still there were fathers who were loving and supportive although even in such cases the children felt a stronger emotional bond with their mothers. (Bailey, Branche and Henry-Lee: 2002:5)."

But the male breadwinner/female housewife concept is undergirded, consciously or unconsciously by assumptions of what we call sexual-economic exchange. In other words the assumption exists that women access financial support for themselves and their children through an exchange of sexual and domestic services. Where this is no longer the case – where a relationship has ended for example, many men – of all economic classes feel hard-pressed to continue with financial support. The other side of this equation is that for most women economic provision becomes the sine qua non of fatherhood. Men who do not or are unable to provide economically are prevented from seeing their children and fathering cannot be expressed in any other ways.

In an effort to change this, the draft national gender policy for Trinidad and Tobago, completed in 2004 as an extensive collaborative exercise involving the UWI Centre for Gender and Development Studies and the Division of Gender Affairs[7] of Trinidad and Tobago identified as one of its policy areas - the promotion of men as parents and proposed the following policy changes:

1. Review of the practice of paternity leave in local and foreign jurisdictions to prepare draft legislation for discussion and consideration. This should include the minimum ILO recommended leave with benefits. Paternity leave should also be provided with safeguards to prevent misuse and abuse.

2. Creation of measures to increase men's participation in the pre-natal and birthing processes.

3. Provision of support mechanisms for men who wish to be full-time home makers.

[7] A division of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs.

4. Increased awareness of these new understandings of fatherhood among relevant sectors of workers e.g. family court, social service delivery, school social workers, teachers, etc.

5. Strengthening the male support programme of the Gender Affairs Division to include programmes on new approaches to fatherhood in communities and workplaces.

In relation to child maintenance payment the report noted that in Trinidad and Tobago between 300-400 men are incarcerated each year for failure to pay maintenance (NGPTT,2004:73). It also noted that:

> "The maintenance of children is an important gender equality issue. Neither the legislation nor the way it is implemented or administered addresses the issue in a meaningful way."

and among others the draft policy recommended the implementation of:

> "...new and creative remedies (such as sharing in childcare or picking up children after school to give to (sic) women employment options) and a review of the process of determining the quantum of maintenance payments (NGPTT,2004:74)."

While young male's demise, and I say demise because in my country they are dying daily, is often pitted against the improvement in the status of women; the truth is that – the status of young men is closely related to the status of their mothers. Something recognised by the young men themselves as they stoutly defend their mothers against all who question them. Because of the improvements in the levels of education and quality of life for women in general in Caribbean societies, the situation among lower-income or poor women seldom receives the attention it deserves.

Women are the mothers, baby-mothers, sisters, daughters, partners, wives and lovers of these young men. They contribute through their gendered assumptions and practices towards these young men's development. They also have the responsibility to take care of their children after they are shot down, or go into prison and to continue to support them in other ways. As noted by the Trinidadian group WINAD:

> "We recognised that, although the violence is happening among our young males, when you look closer at the problem women are seriously affected," Women are the

mothers or partners of both perpetrators and victims. They have to pay for legal representations or burials.

The women of Laventille don't accept this burden stoically or complacently. There is strong desire to get involved in their community and bring about change. ..

"Women also recognise that they have a central role to play in alleviating the problem, but that there needs to be some sort of mobilisation." (Interview with Folade Mutota, *Daily Express*, 11.9 2004)[8]

Masculinities and Violence

In many contexts masculinities are associated with violence, violence as protection, defence or as a mechanism for gaining and preserving power. As noted by WINAD (2006), although violence is not strictly a practice of men, it is linked to masculine identity. In a 2004 document – *The Costs of Male Violence*, A group of seven international masculinities studies scholars observed that:

> "Violence may thus comprise the single largest outlay of public and private funds in any society – for legal adjudication, punishment, health related costs – as well as indirect costs through reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and the many and long-term effects on children exposed to violence. The overwhelming majority of violent acts are committed by men, at every level – between individuals, within and among
> groups, and within social institutions. These acts of violence are committed not only against women and children, but also against other men (Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Jalmert , Kimmel, Lang and Morrell, 2004:7)

They note that men's violence is a problem for men as from childhood; boys and men are exposed to violence, are its main victims, its witnesses, and expected to be its perpetrators. They conclude therefore that it is men who have the responsibility to end men's violence, and it is men who have much to gain by doing this (Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Jalmert , Kimmel, Lang and Morrell, 2004:9).

But violence be it domestic violence in the household; peer violence and teacher violence in schools, (and I understand that schools can be extremely violent spaces for children and this is something that we need to consider seriously in this region as school violence is one reason boys drop out of school), or gang, criminal or police violence on the streets; violence is an

[8] http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=29314869 , retrieved 15/4/09)

ever present characteristic of our lives. Indeed research suggests that while women and girls are more at risk of violence within the home, men and boys are more at risk outside the home. In other words the very spaces designated as women's and men's spaces are the sites where they are most at risk for violence (Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Jalmert , Kimmel, Lang and Morrell, 2004:22). This normalised pattern of violence was heightened during the period of economic neo-liberalism as mentioned earlier.

Violence, Consumerism and the Globalised US Media

But violence is an ever present component of contemporary life. Indeed today's entertainment industry – television, video games, cinema and the internet appears to me to be modern globalised high-tech versions of earlier forms of violent entertainment such as the Christians and the Lions and public hangings. While on the one hand this suggests that the human psyche may have a natural appetite for blood and gore. The influence of globalised images and musical representations of male violence in particular black male violence have served to normalise and valorise male violence and the gun as the weapon of choice and phallic identification.

But the globalised media beamed into all of our territories is guilty of other crimes. These include the focus on young female hypersexuality and the increased commodification of their bodies and sexualities; the generalisation of conspicuous consumption and the emergence of "brands" and "bling' as markers of social status and bases of 'respect'. It has also been the major purveyor of the 'get rich quick or die trying' mentality, which is directly linked to the consumerist imperatives mentioned before.

The 'global' media plays a critical part in highlighting economic disparities. Consumers in the Economic South become closely aware of the consumer items which they do not own and this increases demand as well as feelings of deprivation. Perceptions of unfulfilled entitlement are generated among youthful populations, bred on a diet of commodity consumption demand fed by US commercial cable television and the US commercial internet. Perceptions that they are worse off than others is a powerful instigator of violence and engagement in criminal activity for financial gain.

For countries of the African diaspora and people of colour everywhere, this influence has been particularly strong as transmissions of commercialized US Black culture through

television, music videos, the internet and the recording industry generally has a significant influence on diasporic populations the world over including Africa, a responsibility not often recognised by the artistes themselves in their quest for economic success in a market-driven world and certainly not the concern of the corporations. In his book *Manufacturing Powerlessness in the Black Diaspora,* Charles Green (2001) links the urbanizing effects of global capitalism to the environment of failure and despair characterising Black youth, in particular male youth in the African Diaspora who cannot be reached by local education and other programmes.

Conclusions: What now for Caribbean People and their Governments?

In conclusion, this period of Crisis, should also be seen as a period of opportunity. It provides the opportunity for critical reflection, review and renewal. As Caribbean leaders let us not wait for the signals from the North to tell us what we need to do; let us take the bold steps to chart a new way forward. In the short run we may ask ourselves – What would a Caribbean stimulus package look like? In speaking about the role of new Caribbean societies, Demas suggested that the first priority

"… must be to meet the basic needs of all the people in the society for work, food, shelter, clothing, education and recreation, and to ensure that these goods and services are equitable distributed(Demas, 1965)."

I want to endorse this suggestion that we focus on our people but probably in more sophisticated and certainly more gender conscious ways than we have in the past. We also need to re-orient the focus of the people on the region as for the last two decades it has been directed elsewhere. They need to once again see themselves as Caribbean people, citizens of a region with a clear vision of where it needs to go and that they want to be part of.

We need to support parents, families and households in a gender-sensitive way – whatever their shape or composition to meet the increasingly difficult challenges of parenting in a globalised world. The Nordic Countries, for example have incorporated gender equality and family-friendliness into their socio-economic paradigm and guarded this jealously during the period of economic liberalism, with little loss to economic growth or competitiveness as observed by *The Economist* in 2006:

> "The Nordic region [...] has the world's highest taxes and most generous welfare benefits. And yet Sweden, Finland and Denmark (Norway's oil sets it apart) have

> delivered strong growth and low unemployment, and rank among the world's most competitive economies. Nordic companies are strong in technology and research and development. Their health-care and educational systems are much admired. And, unlike other European countries, most Nordic states run healthy budget and current-account surpluses. Sweden, whose 9m people make it by some way the biggest Nordic country, is a particular favourite. A year ago the *Guardian*, a British newspaper, said it was the most successful society the world had ever known." *The Economist* (2006).

In these countries the burden of care is shared with the state, all of which have instituted non-judgemental national parenthood policies, which are monitored and updated as changes in the parenting situation emerge. Ellingsæter and Arnlaug note that:

> "From the 1970s, the Nordic countries have set new standards for 'good' motherhood and fatherhood, facilitating caring fatherhood , working motherhood and a more equal sharing of breadwinning and caring...Welfare policies have advanced and facilitated the sharing of earning and caring, forwarding a model of the "citizen-parent" – mothers and fathers who combine employment and childcare (Ellingsæter and Arnlaug, 2006:47).

Childhood is recognized as a pivotal period for children's development therefore education is gradual, playful, child-centred and based on evidenced-based research on child development. At the UWI we are also carrying out research in this area and hope to share with the rest of the region. These states also recognize lone parenting as a reality and provide support systems to address this. Although these systems are not perfect they suggest that there is no contradiction between supporting people's needs in a gender-sensitive and progressive manner and economic growth. Of course these supports are the result of high taxation but citizens benefit from the reduced stress and relative safety and security of their lives.

This suggests that our education system which in some instances has focused primarily on qualification and certification and not on real learning needs to be totally re-conceptualised. We need a system that empowers, transmits knowledge, skills and awareness and facilitates social, civil and regional engagement. We at the University of the West Indies hope to take leadership in this direction in the future and ask for your support in this area. To achieve this, an understanding of gender must be central. Teachers, social workers and guidance officers all need to be trained in gender analysis to a high level in order to address some of the issues raised in this presentation.

This region also needs to take a much more considered approach to its media policy. In these days of unregulated free trade, with still surviving WTO rules this is discouraged but in this new context, how do we build on the creativity of our artists, film makers, writers, crafts people and media practitioners to develop a regional media and cultural industries that bring to the fore all that is best in us. How can our media link us with the rest of the region and the global south? Connecting us more closely with Latin America, the African sub-continent and Asia, how can we diversify our media products to facilitate a truly globally aware Caribbean citizen? How can our most creative sons and daughters be able to live, work and share their knowledge in the region and not have to migrate in order to survive? Here I would like to echo the call made by one of my predecessors Prof. Rex Nettleford when in his W.G. Demas Memorial Lecture he called for initiatives to unlock the creative potential of the inhabitants of the region. Noting that:

> "... for future Caribbean society to be worth its salt
> it must shape itself into a society that can facilitate to its
> optimum the exercise of its people's creative intellect and
> creative imagination, the fruits of which will be the only reason
> for our existence and our endurance in the recorded history of
> human civilisation (Nettleford, 2004:23).

We owe it to those who went before and struggled for a Caribbean sensibility, for our sons and daughters struggling for a sense of identity and for meaning in their lives, at the UWI we will be striving to play our part in this regard and ask for your support in this endeavour but I end by asking - What now for the CDB at this historic conjuncture? What Now for Caribbean Leaders and their governments? I thank you.

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