



Editorial

Signs of the Future of Feminist Praxis and Practise: IGDS Graduate Students and the Evolution of Caribbean Gender Theorising

Editors

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Keywords: Caribbean Feminism, Academia, Feminist Praxis, IGDS, Feminist Scholarship

How to cite

Bean, Dalea and Raquel Sukhu. 2016. "Signs of the Future of Feminist Praxis and Practise: IGDS Graduate Students and the Evolution of Caribbean Gender Theorising." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* issue 10: 1–10.

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) is an autonomous interdisciplinary entity of The University of the West Indies, which aims, through its programme of teaching, research, outreach and activism, to question historically accepted theories and explanations about society, sexuality and human behaviour, as well as to critically examine the origins of power differences between and among men, women and transgender persons and the range of factors which account for these differences. In its 23 years of existence, the IGDS has developed an integrated, interdisciplinary programme of feminist studies within the University, at both undergraduate and graduate levels. This includes facilitating the incorporation of gender analysis in all disciplines. The Institute has also produced and disseminated knowledge, based on the generation and analysis of research data on gender-related issues in the Caribbean and has established and maintained linkages with national, regional and international institutions concerned with gender and development. It has also provided advisory services, influenced policy directions and assisted with capacity-building in these institutions.

Located on all three campuses of the University, and with established links with the Open Campus, the impact of the work of the Institute is wide-ranging and far-reaching as it enjoys long established relationships and collaborations with local, regional and international development agencies. While the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) was officially institutionalised at The UWI in 1993, consciousness-raising, teaching and research guided by feminist and gender and development theories, principles and methodologies were being undertaken from as early as the 1970s with the establishment of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) in Barbados, through the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) and the formation of Women and Development Studies Groups (WDS). Since 1993, the Regional Coordinating Office, Mona Campus Unit (both in Jamaica), St Augustine Unit (Trinidad and Tobago) and Nita Barrow Unit (Barbados) have offered academic courses and programmes that respond to emerging gender and development issues in the Caribbean. In addition to traditional degrees, the units have also been involved with offering

short courses, summer institutes and various training fora. In 2008 the CGDS achieved another milestone by being upgraded to an Institute, with the ability to grant its own undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Since then, the IGDS has graduated scores of candidates from the BSc Gender and Development (Mona Unit) MSc and MPhil programmes, and no less than eight PhDs, many with High Commendation.

Professors of the IGDS and faculty, visiting scholars and research fellows are world-renowned and widely respected practitioners of Gender and Development Studies. The Institute has benefitted from the genius of Lucille Mathurin Mair, Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Rhoda Reddock, Verene Shepherd, Patricia Mohammed, Sir Hilary Beckles, Barbara Bailey, Eudine Barriteau, Joycelyn Massiah and countless other scholar-activists. Perhaps the most impressive legacy of these stalwarts is their collective mission to ensure that the future of the IGDS and Caribbean gender studies remains a beacon in the region. To this end, much effort has been spent on honing the skills of a new generation of intellectuals. Indeed, the IGDS has excelled in producing graduates who have revolutionised the landscape of gender policy and praxis regionally and internationally, and it is to this great achievement that this issue is dedicated.

This tenth issue of the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies aptly highlights student research, some of which may not have otherwise been read outside of the university, and also provides a niche for current students and recent graduates to begin publishing their work in scholarly publications. The majority of pieces in this issue represent the research of current students and graduates of the IGDS units across the three campus units that offer a graduate programme. The issue exemplifies the rich tapestry of scholarly work and diverse research interests investigated through traditional and non-traditional modalities by students of the IGDS. It also includes work by postgraduate students who have been influenced by the work and tradition of Caribbean feminist theorising. The issue includes four peer reviewed papers, three gender dialogues, a photo essay, poetry, research in action and book review. The variety of entries not only

speaks to the diversity in the output of the IGDS, but also to the range of issues still relevant to Caribbean gender and development studies. While grounded in the solid foundation of Caribbean feminist tradition, the entries challenge existing epistemologies, tease out critical ideas relating to gender identity, construct innovative dimensions for investigating 21st century challenges and force us to reckon with the future of gender studies as an ever-evolving space of discursive criticism.

Sue-Ann Barratt utilises multi-level Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis (FPDA) to demonstrate the ways in which a sample of young Trinidadian female university students trouble their feminine identifications, and how they experience their gender identity as a place of ambivalence. The young women's rejection of hyperfemininity is analysed in relation to the beauty-versus-brains binary, and their understanding of the girlie girl feminine identity. Through meticulous interrogation of the women's discourse she reveals the ways in which these women are able to "temper the disempowering effect of hyperfemininity" by claiming a "measure of masculinity as part of their atypical feminine identity" to achieve a greater sense of agency and resist the sense of powerlessness produced by gender polarisation and patriarchal power relations.

In juxtaposition to Barratt's focus on the re-imagining of the young Caribbean woman's construction of the feminine identity, Ellie McDonald's research on Caribbean feminist movements and the experiences of four Anglophone Caribbean activists draws on oral history interviews of stalwarts in the movement. One of the particularly enriching aspects of the research is the diverse positionalities of her interviewees – Peggy Antrobus, activist and scholar, who served as Director, Women's Bureau in Jamaica and a member of the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) network; Andaiye, grassroots activist who is co-founder and organizer of Red Thread in Guyana; Alissa Trotz, also from Guyana and a member of Red Thread, Assistant Professor in Women and Gender Studies, and Director of the undergraduate Caribbean Studies Program at New College, University of Toronto; and Patricia Mohammed,

scholar and activist who disseminated the work of Caribbean activists and academics through her role as the Regional Course Director of Women and Development Studies, and is currently Professor of Gender and Cultural Studies and Campus Co-ordinator, School for Graduate Studies and Research at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad. Acknowledging that the women selected for the research do not represent the entirety of the feminist movement and face of activism for the region, McDonald skilfully weaves their insights and experiences with their larger bodies of work to create a lens through which the reader sees and situates their perspectives on and involvement in Caribbean feminism as it has developed through the last half century.

Drawing on her doctoral dissertation, Debra Providence reads Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* through a rhizo-nomadic lens and demonstrates the way in which this transforms the deity Erzulie into a source of knowledge that "gives the reader privileged access to the consciousness of a historically marginalized [Caribbean] woman" connecting Jeanne Duval, mistress of French poet Charles Baudelaire, with women from other historical eras – St Mary of Egypt the Dusky Saint and Mer, a slave on St Domingue just prior to the Makandal uprising. She appraises Hopkinson's use of science fictional elements, combining them with Haitian spirituality, as an effective means through which these women are radically re-visioned. She highlights thus the way in which Hopkinson as a Caribbean female author counters the way in which Eurocentric scholarship, and official historical records have marginalised and obscured Caribbean subjects, and in particular, Caribbean women.

In the final piece in this section, Aleah Ranjitsingh gives us a glimpse into her doctoral research which she conducted in Venezuela, looking at the ways in which then President Hugo Chávez employed feminism as a tool and integral element in his model of socialist government; and in so doing, broadens the scope of this issue outside the Anglophone Caribbean region. Her qualitative study launches from Chávez's own words: "True socialism is feminist" while occupying "an androcentric and heteronormative world." She demonstrates

the ways in which the state facilitated gains for women, particularly for poorer women, through mechanisms such as constitutional reform coming out of his recognition of the importance, and elevation of the distinction and complementarity of women and gender equality.

The Gender Dialogues are situated in a space to explore conversations on critical issues of import to the authors. While generally at the conceptualisation stage, the Dialogues offer a glimpse into the musings of a new generation of budding scholars grappling with conventional and unorthodox forms of expression while still maintaining the rigour associated with the CRGS. Lisa Allen-Agostini proffers a re-examination of young black women's sexual agency and conceptions of black female criminality in the music video for the soca song "Party Done" by Angela Hunte and Machel Montano. Allen-Agostini situates her work in black feminist tradition, which contends with the intersectionality of modern expressions of culture with ideals of femininity. Using film analysis techniques, she deconstructs the video's underlying narrative: black working class women as capable of being "carefree".

Tameka Hill, who has twinned her academic interests with activism against human trafficking in Jamaica, offers a piece on the state of human trafficking with particular focus on the evolution of the Jamaican Government's response to this critical issue. With the realisation that deafening silence can stymie efforts against this criminal activity, Hill aims to not only bring clarity to the issue, but also encourages continued conversation to facilitate a deeper understanding of the power and gender dynamics at play in this modern day slavery that disproportionately affects women worldwide.

The issue also includes an insightful and thought provoking photo essay by Angélica Rodríguez Bencosme. She carefully crafts a narrative punctuated by images, which invites the reader to consider the influence domestic furniture and common household items on those who reside in the space and those who

visit. Focussing on the Dominican Republic, Rodríguez Bencosme shares her sentiments relating to cultural norms and gender power relations in the home as expressed through furniture use (and even misuse) as well as placement. The nuanced approach facilitates a consideration of the notions of the author, while creating the space for one to draw personal conclusions about the images and the ways in which inanimate objects can reflect our own gendered understandings.

Amilcar Sanatan's unique perspective as socialist feminist man, IGDS graduate student and activist involved in the depatriarchal struggle for gender justice is evident in his piece which juxtaposes Caribbean feminism with younger Caribbean women and men. Using his experience in the classroom, particularly with the course Introduction to Women's Studies offered in the St Augustine Unit of the IGDS, Sanatan captures the essence of this issue by interrogating the limits and potential of the student experience with modern day feminism in all its evolving forms. Sanatan's fascinating submission argues for a greater emphasis on a critique of neoliberal discourse by Caribbean feminist theorising in order to productively engage the trajectories of Caribbean youth.

The potential of gendered cultural activist research is aptly explored in Ellen O'Malley-Camps' interpretation on her Research in Action at Trinidad's Maximum Security Men's Prison. The paper explores the usefulness of Carnival Theatre as an empowerment and transformative process for long-term male inmates in Trinidad's Maximum Security Prison. The ground-breaking research includes techniques of carnival and theatre as well as the insights of restorative justice, mediation and transpersonal psychology and may unlock key understandings related to the empowerment of vulnerable Caribbean masculinities. The applicability of these techniques is not only presented as a method to evaluate notions of justice, power and identity, but offers a critique of, and alternative to, the Restorative Justice Policy which the author presents as inadequate for the particular needs of long-term and lifer inmates.

The issue closes with poetry by Lisa Allen-Agostini and Nicholas Gilbert and a book review by IGDS Professor Patricia Mohammed. The pieces of poetry reveal the potential of a literary exploration of the intersection of race, gender identity, sexuality, empowerment and the limitations of traditional understandings of masculinities and femininities.

It is hoped that you, the reader, will not only enjoy the pieces included in this issue, but also be challenged to reimagine the loci of feminist theorising and gender activism in the region. While building on the solid foundation of numerous foremothers and fathers of the IGDS and wider network of feminist scholar/activists, these and other students and graduates of the IGDS are charting their own course and meanings of a feminism and gender de/construction. The message of this issue is clear and encouraging: Caribbean feminist theorising is alive and well and the future of gender activism is in good hands.

