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No Money No Love: Representations of the Social Impact of Poverty in Media, Popular and Literary Discourse

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Abstract

Within a global scenario that increasingly measures the worth and accomplishment of human persons, communities and nations in material terms, Caribbean societies continue to grapple with legacies of entrenched poverty and its intergenerational transmission. The challenge remains of transcending a brutal history of enforced and unjust labour systems, racialized inequities, multiple diasporas, structural adjustment and globalizing impulses. Moreover, traditional avenues of poverty alleviation and upward mobility, including education leading to professional careers, which undergirded the birthing of the new nations of the archipelago, are today proving increasingly distant or even unattainable for a widening cross-section of youths.

This paper explores extracts of literary, popular and media discourses for insights into the far-reaching social consequences of poverty, its intergenerational impact and prospects for alleviation. It examines poverty's differential impact as dependent on the age, gender and social locations of its victim. The paper zeroes in on the entrenchment and institutionalization of poverty and its impact on intimate and familial relations. It also identifies the points at which Caribbean discourses, in the process of defining a place and a way to be human, are working towards more affirmative measures of the worth of persons and societies.

Key words: social impact of poverty, Mighty Sparrow; Hurricane Stories, University of Hunger, media discourses on poverty, poverty and gender violence.

Introduction

Within a global scenario that increasingly measures the worth and accomplishment of human persons, communities and nations in material terms, Caribbean societies continue to grapple with legacies of entrenched poverty and its intergenerational transmission. The challenge remains of how to transcend a brutal history of enforced and unjust labour systems, racialized inequities, secondary migrations, natural disasters, structural adjustment and globalizing impulses. Moreover, traditional avenues of poverty alleviation and upward mobility, including education leading to professional careers, which undergirded the birthing of the new nations of the archipelago, are today proving increasingly distant or even unattainable for a widening cross section of youths.

The issue of defining poverty is as complex as designing and implementing measures for its alleviation. The statistical evidence provides a useful though severely limited way of knowing. The imperative to know poverty in greater measure in order to design appropriate interventions has been heightened given global interconnectedness in trade, finance, health, migration, drugs, crime, and war. The 2008 riots triggered around the globe by increases in food and fuel prices are a case in point that demonstrates the connection between poverty and peace. President of the World Bank Group, James Wolfensohn, addressing the 2000 Conference on World Poverty and Development: A Challenge for the Private Sector, argues as follows:

... the issue of poverty is no longer an issue that you can consider either within the developing world where there is poverty or the developed world looking out to the developing world. You have to consider it as an integral issue. And it is an issue not just of equity and social justice and morality. It really is an issue of peace, because it is unlikely that you will have stability in a world of inequity. People who have nothing, or have little, or no place to go or no opportunity, react like you or I would react. You want to protect your kids. You want to create a life...The issue is not just money. The issue is self-esteem. The issue is wanting a better life for your kids; a household free of domestic violence; protection against crime; security and opportunity. (www.washingtonspeakers.com)

The Caribbean is no stranger to this complex of issues. The island societies spawned by the forces of early capitalism and globalization demonstrate the unhappy outcome of the commoditization of the human. The Caribbean's formative labour migrations have been entrenched in racism and structural inequities. Indeed, to ensure the plantation societies' operation with the minimum of disruption, it proved necessary not only to draw the blood, sweat and tears of the labouring populations, but also to erode their histories, cultural moorings and self-esteem. Despite the success of Caribbean societies in creating viable social orders in the aftermath of this originary trauma, the legacies of these inauspicious beginnings underlie attempts at poverty alleviation even until today.

In Part One, “No Money, No Love” explores extracts of popular and media discourses to garner insights into the far-reaching social consequences of poverty and their correlation to gender-based abuse. In Part Two, it examines literary selections which represent the social impact of poverty in broad structural terms. The paper examines poverty’s differential impact as dependent on the age, gender and social locations of its victim, its intergenerational impact and prospects for alleviation. The analyses zero in on the entrenchment and institutionalization of poverty and its impact on intimate and familial relations. It also identifies the points at which Caribbean writing and popular expressions, in the process of defining a place and a way to be human, are working towards more affirmative measures of the worth of persons and societies. It is to literary expressions that the paper turns to examine the subjective experience—the sights, sounds, mood and tincture of poverty; it explores evocations of the intersection of gender and poverty. In other words, do men and women experience and interface with poverty differently? What is the correlation between poverty and impoverished social relations and poverty’s close henchmen—hunger, drug abuse, crime, underdevelopment and despair?

Poverty and Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary Media Discourse

The initial focus will be on the manner in which poverty cycles overlap with gender norms and assumptions to produce the all too common domestic disasters that are featured in newspaper reports almost daily. This is significant given the extent to which attitudes and orientations to these issues are in turn constructed in discourse. Media discourse is both mimetic and paradigmatic as it simultaneously shapes and reflects world knowledge. Societal and institutional perspectives exist in dynamic interplay with the reporter’s individual perspective. Readers in turn filter the reports through their own world views and social and psychological perspectives which are shaped by the body of knowledge, attitude and feeling they bring to the table. Analysis of media discourse yields significant insights into representational and ideological politics, because, as indicated in *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse*: “the complex representation of events and circumstance by different media and government agencies can often shroud events and motivations in the perspective of their agents, complicating and distorting an already complex picture.” (Morgan and Youssef 2006, 22)

The *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper, the nation’s oldest newspaper with the finest reputation for quality press, in its September 16, 2008 edition, carried a report about what has now become a typical case of gender-based violence. The case was given front page billing. In recent years there has been a growing trend in the *Guardian* towards tabloid format both in terms of the size of what had previously been a broadsheet and style of reporting. The September 16 report follows what has now become a generic style of lurid photos of female victims of abuse, direct quotations from victims, family and neighbour eyewitnesses giving details concerning crimes committed, with a strong focus on the basis of frustration of the assailant.

The report pictures two battered women in hospital garb. The headline reads:

Hungry man runs Amok

*Stabs lover, family
Torches house
Kills self. (Guardian 1)*

The front page headline is reflective of the highlight of the most significant news item of the day. It focalizes the event and creates a filter through which it will be read. Headlines and large photographs are displayed prominently to catch the eye of early commuters trapped daily in extensive traffic jams. In this instance, despite the pain and anguish inscribed on the faces of the women overlaid on their severe injuries, the headline which plays on the adage a hungry man is an angry man implies a measure of justification for this extreme act of violence. There is no censure or blame attributed to the “justifiably” angry man who throws a concrete sink on his common-law wife and a brick on her mother (*Guardian*, 3) and subsequently sets the home on fire. The grouping of the elements in the front page headline implies his ownership of the property; however, given the fact that there is no mention of the lover and her mother and sisters leaving the premises in order to effect the “clean break”, the strong possibility is that the house belongs to one of the women of the family.

The page 3 stories within written by two female journalists strengthen this range of assumptions. The page 3 story, headlined *Man Found Dead after Burning Valencia House*, continues to imply a measure of justification for the assailant:

*Determined to hold on, 24-year-old Jamel Sebastian refused to end his relationship with his common law wife Alisha Wellington.
But when the 21-year-old woman tried to make a clean break, Sebastian became enraged and went on a stabbing spree...(3)*

The stabbing spree included the lover, her sister (aged 25) and her mother (aged 43). The account casts the assailant as a man full of determination, steadfastness, even fidelity and commitment to a long-term love relationship. His admirable determination to hold on is placed in opposition to his common-law wife’s desire for a clean break. Diction and sentence structure work to impute blame and alleviate responsibility. The assailant is nowhere reported as one who attempts mass murder and succeeds in inflicting grievous bodily harm on three women and two children, all of whom were hospitalized for their injuries.

Even more bizarre elements appear in the reported interview with the mother. Rendered immobile in her hospital bed by the severe injuries, she offers apparent justification for the assailant based on commonly held assumptions in relation to a man’s rights in his home, even while stating of her severely burnt daughter: “*She is in the ICU right now. She is real bloated. She is unable to speak.*” The mother nevertheless reportedly directs all of her implied and stated criticism at her own daughter in extremely simplistic terms which are supportive of the hungry man–angry man connection:

*I heard him complain that he wasn’t getting any food cooked...
how could a man feel when he comes home from work and nothing is there to eat?*

When I had a man, I used to come home and cook and clean and do things for him.”

(Guardian, September 16, 2008, 2)

The report implies the mother’s distant, superficial knowledge of a disastrous scenario that was unfolding in a home in which she was co-resident with the daughter and her lover. Moreover, the mother who proffers her own appropriate behaviour (when she had a man) as exemplary, appears well schooled in the expectations and mores of common law unions. She has imbibed, and uses to imply judgment of her own daughter, a range of tacit though widely held assumptions about the privileges that a man should enjoy in his home and his right to do violence, should he not receive his due.

On what basis can we tie this all too common case to the social impacts of poverty. If the causative impact of poverty on the acts of violence in this scenario is difficult to discern from the flattened account which is inherent to newspaper reporting, the post-disaster outcome of poverty is clearly displayed on the same page, so to speak. The indicators are all present: the squalor of the incomplete, windowless, unpainted home pictured in the newspaper; the dependency of the victims on state services which do not work and which compound the suffering and neglect. In a small, oil-rich nation, in which state authorities are currently indulging an obsessive focus on large-scale ostentatious projects in the pursuit of developed country status, the poor are not only abused and disadvantaged within their domestic circumstances, but in seeking to cope with familial crises, they are oppressed and abused by the system. The newspaper reports a layering and multiplication of traumas. The Sangre Grande police did not respond because of lack of vehicles. A neighbour who walked to the police station to report the crime is quoted as saying: “But the police tell me to go home and sleep because they said they have no vehicles.” (3) Who can tell whether this is pure callousness or the frustration of officers who lack the resources to do a high-risk job? The Sangre Grande Fire Station was without a vehicle to send to the blaze. The Sangre Grande Hospital kept the injured women long hours awaiting medical attention. Thankfully, at the end of the extended period, this hospital had beds to receive them.

Too many cases of gender-based violence only become significant after the most heinous acts of brutality against the self and the other are perpetrated. When they do come to public attention based invariably on media reporting, these reports—written by two female journalists in this instance—speak reams based on what is not said. There was no mention of the violent tendencies of the young male, only of his faithful persistence. The former was not perceived as a salient issue. There was no attempt at an explanation for the woman’s desire to separate from the potentially violent mate. There was no attempt to delve beyond the most superficial of explanations for the crisis. No connection was made between the plight of the abused women and their ongoing abuse suffered at the hand of all the state representatives from which they had a right, as citizens, to expect support and service—the police, the fire services, the hospital. Neither was there any mention of the undervaluing of community, the impotence of the neighbour who sought to assist by walking to the police station to seek help (the implication being that telephone services were not available). The impoverished national becomes in effect a second-class citizen

who is constrained to live with, or in extreme cases to die because of, the outworking of inequitable distribution of the resources of the national coffers.

When you try to caress her, she will tell you' "Stop"
I can't carry love in the Chinee shop"
 —Growling Tiger "Money is King" (1935).

This contemporary crisis can be measured against countless similar tragedies that have played themselves out on the national stage since the beginning of the last century. Indeed, male–female violent conflict of every imaginable shape and form has occupied a prominent place in the Trinidadian imaginary. Since the 1930s, such conflict has been a constant theme of calypsos whose bards are seen as the people’s philosophers offering profound insights into social conditions, while speaking the language and reflecting the world view of the common man. The values presented in calypsos represent the views of the songwriters and performers, yet they present to the broader population an opportunity to negotiate a stance and formulate a value system in relation to what validly constitutes a positive quality of life and society. And these notions are constantly being constructed and reinvented. Gender critic Patricia Mohammed argues for the power of calypso critique to unwrap a complex process by which identities—national, cultural, ethnic, class and particularly gender—are cumulatively being fashioned. (Mohammed 2003, 130) V.S. Naipaul, who has indicated that it is only in calypso that the “Trinidadian touches reality” (Naipaul 1962, 58), structures his urban vignettes on the mock epic search for significance on Miguel Street, Port of Spain around a series of popular calypsos of the 1940s, the majority of which focused on chaotic gender relations (Naipaul 1959). And Gordon Rohlehr writing on “Images of Men and Women in the 1930s Calypsos” argues that “We are never far away from the context of hunger, unemployment, economic depression, worker militancy, desperation, struggle and sheer survivalism, out of which the fictions of the thirties were shaped.” According to Rohlehr the notion that “one’s domestic and marital relationship depends on money” emerges as “a cardinal truth” for calypsonians and the theme of “no money no love” has been recurrent in “Calypsos from the thirties to fairly recent times.” (Rohlehr 1988, 238)

The social context is that the Eurocentric Victorian ideology of family with its male breadwinner–female homemaker model, though patently unsuited for Caribbean gender relations, nevertheless sets up the expectation that men should provide for their women whether or not they were capable of so doing. This ideology was based on the ideal of conjugal union defined according to Christine Barrow as “marriages—legally and religiously sanctioned, co-resident, permanent and based on love and togetherness” with “distinct but complementary” male and female roles. The man inhabited the public domain as wage earner and discipliner and trainer of the children, while the woman’s place was in the home. (Barrow 1999, 459) Violence was one outcome of the spectacular failure of this model for Caribbean gender relations. Burdened by unrealistic expectations and bereft of skills, education, jobs and money, men were forced to face the humiliation of desertion by their women who opted for prosperous partners:

Relationships were based on the necessity for food, and hunger was a reality graphically portrayed in several songs. Hunger was evidence that the male provider could not adequately provide; that the bourgeoisie ideal of the household or family wage earned exclusively had not been attained. Hunger brought deep shame and was wherever possible concealed and denied.” (Rohlehr, 242)

The 1930 calypsos identified by Rohlehr focused on the male dilemma—his pain, anguish, sense of being used, despair and hopelessness at his incapacity to provide. Rohlehr’s exhaustive study of the output of the 1930s considers some 200-odd calypsos and supports the conclusion but not the cause posited by J. D. Elder in relation to over fifty years of calypsos: “Many calypsos were male rationalizations of felt inadequacies, or served as therapy via wish-fulfilment.” Conversely, Rohlehr points to male-female conflict as being rooted not in the Oedipus complex but in the “logical product of the context of survivalism in which both men and women were placed.” (306)

The most famous calypso on the theme was composed and sung by the Mighty Sparrow.ⁱ The conflicting vantage points expressed in this and the others of its genre clearly articulate the differential gender perspectives in the far from subtle negotiations in relation to food, money, sex and romantic and marital unions. Given the context of a long history of male self-aggrandizement and ego retrieval in the calypsos on this topic, Sparrow offers a relatively straightforward composition in *No Money, No Love* with an implied focus on the perspective, action and agency of the female and the impotence of the male that leads him to resort to violence.ⁱⁱ Significantly, the calypso holds love to be a constant. Down and out Johnny loves Ivy and Ivy loves Johnny greatly, but since he is without resources to supply her with the basic life’s necessities of food and housing, she has made arrangements to leaves him for a better provider, arguing:

We cyar love without money
 We cyar make love on hungry belly
 Johnny you'll be the only one I'm dreaming of
 You're my turtle dove
 But no money no love

The issue here is currency. Love and sex are the currency that Ivy brings to the relationship. In exchange, Johnny is expected to provide her with shelter, food and other material provisions. In the ruthlessly pragmatic scenario, there is no room for him to renege on his part of the exchange, so much so that she threatens police intervention if he seeks to detain her. Through the male-oriented calypsonian’s perspective, the woman is portrayed as possessing agency to fight back against debilitating constraints, decision-making capacity, and a voice to speak. Fourteen lines of the calypso are in the voice of the narrator, while 25 lines including the catchy chorus are dedicated to Ivy’s direct speech. The chorus is her definite and memorable statement on the matter while we are told indirectly and mockingly in relation to Johnny: “If you hear how he plead with she to get she to understand.” Outside of personal power, Ivy is portrayed as having power to access the intervention of state authorities. It is as if the poverty of the male has also

robbed him of all of the emblems of agency and power. Robbed of voice and capacity to reason persuasively, his avenue of first resort is to beg and his second and final resort is to beat.

Johnny nearly killed she with blows
 Poor Ivy bawl like a cow
 Rip up she wig and he tear down she clothes
 The South man ain't want she now
 Oh, Lord, what a fight
 They roll until broad daylight
 Charlotte Street was hot that night
 She get some good lick but she let go kick and some bite

The violence that ensues is constructed as rooted in his extreme need and desperation. Surveying the scene and imparting filters for its interpretation is the calypsonian acting as the voyeur and interpreter of the interaction and as the commentator who voices the collectivity's judgment on the values of this social interaction. What are these values? Love is commoditized. There is no assumption in the calypso of the woman's capacity to go out and earn a living except in this risky form of commodity exchange. The long history of women working, "making do" and often single-handedly successfully supporting the family is not honoured in calypsos of this thematic focus; neither does the imperative to feed clothe and educate their offspring. A stark focus is maintained on the couple. The male response to female agency and self worth is to damage the woman's value in the commodity exchange. Johnny unmasks the basis of Ivy's beauty as false accretions of wigs and clothing. Ivy is stripped naked. Blows and bruises further rob her desirability and render her as impotent as he is to effect change in her circumstances.

A lengthy tradition of calypsos of this nature and the widespread popularization of these and similar sentiments are the constitutive, ubiquitous, circling discourses which surface in the 2008 media reports and continue with all the power of discourse to shape lengthy, meandering trajectories of violence. Little wonder that when the female calypsonians enter into voice, they sound a very different note. The innocuous call is to flight. In 1979, Singing Francine counsels women to respond to violence with flight: The refrain goes: "Dog does run away/Cat does run away/Child does runaway when you treating them bad/Woman put two wheels on your heels/You should run away too." This evolves a decade and a half later into a strident call to vigilante justice and castration in response to violence, rape and incest. As Rohlehr explains in his critical commentary on the socio-cultural conditions within which Singing Sandra offered the composition "The Equaliser" in 1993, gender-based and other forms of violence had by then become so gross and gratuitous that the female calypsonian offers a far more terrifying alternative—for women to come out to equalise.ⁱⁱⁱ

Poverty and Hunger

While media reportage and popular cultural expressions yield insight into the outworkings of poverty within diverse social contexts, it is to literary expressions that this

enquiry will turn to understand the mood, taste, feel and tincture of poverty. Significantly media and popular cultural expressions focus on the practicalities of unemployment, food acquisition and gender-based violence, while the literary expressions produced by the male and female writers explored below address questions of the universality of poverty as ubiquitous and as the consequence of the sudden intervention of natural disaster.

Martin Carter's *University of Hunger* (1954) subsumes the specificity of the Caribbean social and political conditions and particularly his deep-rooted ongoing concern with the injustices perpetrated by the Burnham regime in Guyana into an elegiac exploration of poverty and hunger as endemic to the human condition.^{iv} Carter in descriptions of the traumatizing impact of poverty on individuals and communities is testing the boundaries of language by layering an array of rhetorical devices to give voice to the indescribable. In this sense, the narrative strategy mirrors the grim reality of poverty itself which layers impact upon impact until its victims teeter on the brink of loss of meaning. In this exploration, Carter does not lay emphasis on social and historical contexts. Note the elliptical nature of his allusion to the journey of enslaved Africans near the end of the poem, which reads "is they who heard the shell blow and the iron clang" (Carter 2006, 223) and connects the impoverished travellers to the enforced migration in chains from the villages where they were forcibly conscripted to the coastal slave holding bays; and from thence to the new world and beyond.

Carter's poem is rich in conveying the subjective experiences of poverty which propel a quest—the long long march of man in search of a better life. The University of Hunger—the dominant metaphor—speaks of a stringent institute of higher learning which schools men in gnawing adversities of the human condition—starvation, lack, vulnerability and frailty. The densely packed proliferation of meanings is illustrated in the phrase "twin bars of hunger mark their metal brows." (222) The metal brows represent the countenance of persons whose adversities have etched themselves on their permanently toughened and lined visages. The bars on the faces also convey the agony of souls imprisoned within bodies that are hungry for food, but more fundamentally for rest, order, beauty, creativity, purpose and self-esteem. All of these aspirations are held captive to that most basic, but not the most significant, of human needs.

The poor are characterized by a series of images of diminishment and debasement. Their stature on the landscape is compromised:

is the dark one
 the half sunken in the land
 is they who had no voice in the emptiness
 in the unbelievable
 in the shadowless (222).

The poor have no voice in the land, no stature and no social presence. Their ultimate lack of presence and substantiality is reflected in their shadowlessness. The misery and impotence becomes the impetus for migrations. But the multiple migrations do not necessarily bring relief. Migration in time positions them between the mocking twin

seasons of parching drought and flood, which represent threat to food supply, shelter and livelihood. Migration in space lifts them from the rural desolation of “broken chimneys, brown trash huts and jagged mounds of iron” to the urban landscape with its promise represented by the “moon like the big coin in the sky.” Yet the urban ghetto brings its own brand of woe—impoverished living conditions, overcrowding and lack of privacy such that “men’s huts are fused in misery.” (222) Here again, Carter deploys the metonymic transfer between the physical state of the living quarters and the socio-psychological and psychic state of persons huddled within such abject living conditions. Pushing the boundaries of meaning, he deploys metalepsis, that is, the combination of multiple figures of speech:

The long street of night move up and down
 baring the thighs of a woman
 and the cavern of generation (222).

Gender relations in this male-authored evocation are not explicitly adversarial because universalized victims of poverty are not gendered. Males and females are equally victimized by poverty, yet not equally susceptible. The commodization of sexuality brings enhanced vulnerability to the women and their offspring. Darkness personified as the long street of night is itself moving in search of empty release in loveless intimacies. The thighs of women by virtue of contiguity to the sexual organs is a metonym for sexual intercourse. The cavern which connotes a hollow cradling darkness becomes the birthing chamber of a new generation. The woman herself becomes a terrain which the streets of night penetrate, to produce children of darkness who are condemned in their own generations to the long march of man “the terror and the time”. (222) Arguably the woman, as opposed to the man, carries the anguish of her children’s migrations, poverties and failed quests within the bloodstream of genealogy.

The elegiac sweep of the poem is emphasized by the use of initial rhyme and particularly the persistent repetition of “is” as if in response to the question “what is the university of hunger?”:

is the university of hunger the wide waste
 is the pilgrimage of man the long march
 ...is air dust and the long distance of memory
 is the hour of rain when sleepless toads are silent
 is broken chimneys smokeless in the wind
 is brown trash huts and jagged mounds of rain.

Of the 54 lines of the poem, 17 begin with “is”. The experience of extreme poverty tinges one’s inhabitation of space time and even “the long distance of memory”. The poet implies not only that it is impossible to escape poverty by travelling from one place to the other, it is impossible for the family of man to escape poverty by travelling from one time to another; from one generation to the other. Barbara Lalla in her careful reading of conceptual perspectives on time in this poem argues that the *University of Hunger* rewrites “history as incomplete, progressive and current—unbounded action that

perpetuates the past in the present, and iterative action ... that unlocks closure... This is the big picture—vast landscape and seascape, vast movements of people over geographical space, irrational suffering of cosmic dimensions” (113). Poverty takes on the quality of a haunting trauma because notwithstanding its ubiquitous meandering imprint throughout the land, it remains elusive, horrific and amorphous. Hence, there is a dense layering and intermingling of its causes and effects—poverty and hunger head the list; and then drought; famine; dust; flooding; migrancy; urbanization; ghettoization; overcrowding; unwanted, impoverished children, and so the long march begins again.

Poverty and Natural Disaster

Olive Senior’s socio-historically situated *Hurricane Story* series delves into the poverty generated or exacerbated by natural disaster. Together they form insightful vignettes on coping strategies deployed over time and their interface with gender relations. For the Caribbean nations, hurricanes are constantly impending disasters and are becoming moreso in this season of global climate volatility. The sudden potentially devastating natural disaster can sweep away a nation’s development efforts in a flash and leave behind the threat of yet another onslaught next year. A current case in point is the severely impoverished Haiti which was battered by four hurricanes within an 8-week period early in 2008 creating in the hardest hit areas starvation, disease, anarchy, and mayhem such that international aid workers have termed the scenario hell on earth. This improbable occurrence was followed by yet another unprecedented event in January 2010. A devastating earthquake of 7.0 magnitude struck the Haitian capital and its environs creating an unparalleled humanitarian crisis which will test global good will and aid resources for months to come. According to Government estimates some 230,000 people are assumed to be dead, an estimated 300,000 injured, and an estimated 1,000,000 homeless. The cost of damage exceeds the nation’s gross domestic product. The irony is that poverty also militates against risk management for those who need it most.

“Hurricane Story 1903” and “Hurricane Story 1944” tests a range of coping strategies over the decades and exemplify how the definition and significance of poverty can substantially alter from generation to generation, place to place, and time to time. “Hurricane Story 1903” recalls, through the eyes of a young child, strategies deployed by her grandparent to deal with a hurricane. This is the rural, land-based peasantry who in the post-Emancipation period engage in the practical outworking of breaking free—clinging to the land, depending on subsistence agriculture, building villages, markets, schools and communities. Senior attributes the effective riding out of the storm to simple rooting in supernatural ethos, place and environment. The capacity to effectively deal with natural disaster hinges on faith, closeness to nature and the capacity to tap into intuitive ways of knowing: “...but he was the seventh son /of a seventh son and could read signs /and interpret wonders” (Senior 1994, 20). This is the early warning system which instructs in when to board up against the coming storm. ^v

The dominant metaphor which Senior deploys is that of Noah’s ark—that quintessential symbol of a structure built to withstand unprecedented disaster. The ark though crowded with people and animals rides to safety with its inhabitants calmed and comforted by

mournful Protestant hymns led by the grandmother schooled in the Sankeys^{vi} which themselves call upon the help of God:

... In our frail bark
 in total darkness we passed through the eye
 and out on the other side, till all was still.
 When Grandfather opened the window the sun
 was shining (20).

The simple cadences and sentiments of the poem echo those of the hymn to which it alludes:

And it holds, my anchor holds:
 Blow your wildest, then, O gale,
 On my bark so small and frail;
 By His grace I shall not fail...
 For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.

The biblical Noah's ark was also a gene conservation bank and this element surfaces in the poem, as indicated by the child's fascination as she eagerly awaits the offspring of the sensay fowl and leg horn rooster who survive the hurricane together in the cleft of the silk cotton tree. There is no sense in this poem of poverty; despite the family's survival on subsistence agriculture and the absence of all the trappings of modernity, the family is rich in coping strategies. The careful listing of what the grandmother as opposed to what the grandfather does to ensure the safety of all speaks to intergenerational, intragenerational and gender concord and complementarity, as much as it speaks to harmony with natural and supernatural realms.

By "Hurricane Story 1944", the coping strategies have changed to yield a counterproductive social dynamic. By this period the rigid system of class stratification with education as the passport to upward mobility has begun to take root. The nascent sense of self which emerges from this process is buttressed by stereotypes and assumptions which entrap persons in postures that are potentially deleterious to themselves, their families and communities. The father of this hurricane story has indeed become the literate, upwardly mobile dandy on whose shoulders the social standing of his entire family falls. The capacity to read the signs and wonders has been replaced by literacy and graduation away from land to white collar work, clerking in Solomon's Dry Goods and Haberdashery. The significance of status is reflected in the spatial and kinetic imagery which is the dominant motif of the poem:

and when he left
 freewheeling downhill
 his barefoot country brothers
 ran long distances behind
 falling back from exhaustion
 while their pride

their hope
 kept riding
 on that frail back (24).

The father's aspiration toward upward mobility is reflected in his laborious pedalling uphill to visit his barefoot country brothers. Moreover, he carries the weight of their communal expectations of upward mobility as the one who transcends the hardship and the debasement of land-based poverty. The story demonstrates the extreme self-centredness and visibility of the upwardly mobile family member whose accomplishment becomes the source of pride for the entire family and emblematic somehow of its worth.

For the father, class aspirations prove to be noxious. The impulse toward upward mobility proves to be his downfall for when the hurricane forces the closure of the dry goods store the father is left without work. His incapacity to dirty his hands renders him impotent in crisis and ashamed of the "low class" occupation of his wife. Conversely, his wife invokes the traditional though effective coping strategies of the past: coaxing the land to produce bountifully by hard work, faith and mournful hymns. In the midst of harsh, abusive circumstances, she becomes emblematic of wholeness enjoying oneness with nature, peace and productivity within her body, peace with her God. Her reproductive function and harmony with God both infuse her agricultural production producing high levels of synthesis and integration.

My mother who hardly ever spoke
 crooned hymns in the garden
 to her skellion tomatos pumpkin melon
 which thrived (as everybody knows)
 from her constant labouring
 (nothing like a pregnant woman to encourage
 pumpkin and melon)
 she sang mournful hymns as she reaped

Like the Ivy-Johnny debacle of "No Money, No Love", the woman finds a coping strategy while the man, to cover the shame of his dependence on his wife who becomes a haggler, resorts to violence:

Meantime
 he coasted downhill
 and we settled onto our new routine
 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday our Mother worked in the fields
 Thursday Friday she went to market
 Saturday she left him money on the dresser
 He took it and went to Unity Bar and Grocery got drunk
 Came home and beat her
 Sunday she went to church and sang (27).

The closing stanza zeroes in on the dull routine cyclic nature which informs the correlation between poverty and domestic abuse and the tacit institutional complicities that sustain its cycle. The male, floundering under personal and societal expectations that he cannot meet, is disappointed with his incapacity and imbibes alcohol to soothe his shame and insufficiency and dull his pain. With inhibitions lowered by consumption, he turns his self-hatred, disappointment and aggression on his wife, on whom he is reliant for his daily bread. The wife beaten and intimidated into silence submits to her abusive husband and sublimates her discontent with her lot through worship. Senior alludes indirectly to the complicity of religious organizations and belief systems that keep women subordinated to patriarchal structures and strictures and tolerant of abuse.

These extracts from popular, media and literary discourse selected for analysis of the social impact of poverty are exemplary of a far broader corpus of material on the subject. The examples in this paper turn the spotlight on poverty but are not in any way intended to convey the notion that domestic violence is limited to the poor. The primary material explored demonstrates the significance of gender differentials in terms of coping strategies in dealing with poverty and its wide-ranging consequences. All of the discourses—fictional and real life—demonstrate the pain and shame of the men grappling with poverty, which they seem powerless to alleviate. Similarly, they demonstrate the women deploying more effective coping strategies in terms of dealing with the stranglehold of poverty and simultaneously bearing in their bodies the lacerations that their husbands or partners mete out as they lash out against those who are closest and most vulnerable. Faith figures prominently both as an avenue which empowers the women to function and lends them spiritual sustenance, and as an opiate which dulls their pain and facilitates their ongoing participation in the violent male-female relationships. These evocations imply that this issue is not being alleviated with time. Indeed contemporary real life enactments bear a tired resemblance to the decades old scenarios. The possibility is, as suggested by Morgan and Gopaul (1998), that the gains for women in terms of upward mobility, enhanced education, increasing resources may not have panned out in a reduced vulnerability to violent interpersonal relations. But that is the concern of another enquiry.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ This is the work of the king of the sexist double entendre who delivered this piercing lament on the fall of patriarchy when Britain the colonial motherland was governed by Margaret Thatcher, with Queen Elizabeth as ceremonial head:

In a land that used to be strong
 There's a woman wearing the crown
 And another one running de town
 London bridge is falling down
 "London Bridge is Falling Down"

ⁱⁱ The lyrics of "No Money, No Love":

Ivy pack up she clothes to leave
 Because John was down and out
 All alone he was left to grieve
 She had a next man in South
 She said openly
 I really love you Johnny
 But you ain't have no money
 So what will my future be
 Even though you love me?

We cyar love without money
 We cyar make love on hungry belly
 Juhnny you'll be the only one I'm dreaming of
 You're my turtle dove
 But no money no love

If you hear how he plead with she to get she to understand
 Listen, mister, she tell Johnny
 Leggo me blasted hand
 And make up your mind
 We got to break up this lime
 She said poverty is a crime
 You got no money
 Still you tanglin' me all the blinkin' time

Gentleman let me tell you plain
 She say I don't want to make a scene
 But if you only touch me again
 The police will intervene
 You ain't got a cent
 I couldn't even pay me rent
 I had to give up me apartment

You give me nothing to eat
Now you want me to sleep on the pavement

Johnny nearly killed she with blows
Poor Ivy bawl like a cow
Rip up she wig and he tear down she clothes
The South man ain't want she now
Oh, Lord, what a fight
They roll until broad daylight
Charlotte street was hot that night
She get some good lick but she let go kick and some bite

ⁱⁱⁱ Excerpts from the lyrics of “The Equalizer”:

Man get so callous man get so cold
no remorse no humanity
they moving brassface they moving bold
imagine they light in UWI
this little black gyul listen to Gypsy
she went up dey to study she get rape instead
that dread!
She thought she woulda find de key
but is a Pandora box of misery
some might even say she better off dead
....
but when they hold that son of a Satan
don't tell me bout no Constitution
with me he don't have a prayer
hang him high in Woodford Square
tie he drawers around he neck
leave it for corbeaux to peck
all who find that harsh them too civilize
ah come out to equalize
me ent had no time to philosophize
ah come out to equalize
send he brain to doctor to analyze – not me!
The equalizer, the equalizer
Equal rights equal pain
that is my franchise
Ah come out to equalize
(Singing Sandra 1998)
.....
All dem faddas who like to rape
dem dog – committin incest
from my wrath there is no escape
you just raise the hornet's nest

when you stoop so low to molest
 your daughter no amount a holy water
 could ever save you now —
 no how is more than just flesh you bust
 you destroy that young girl's trust
 ah go stamp 666 on your brow
 all ah dem abusing they daughter
 put them with a horny gorilla
 they can't control they appetite?
 More than the lion go roar tonight
 they won't stop their bacchanal
 let King Kong roam their root canal
 them who like to threaten and terrorize
 them wolf in sheep clothing in disguise
 whether we castrate or desensitize
 ah come out to equalize

(Singing Sandra 1998)

^{iv} Poem echoes Carter's indictment of the Burnham regime under which he suffered and witnessed severe atrocities. Carter deems this regime as assassins of the voice.

^v This would have appeared spurious as a coping strategy had not the same skills saved the indigenous tribes in the disastrous 2007 Asian Tsunami

^{vi} Ira David Sankey (1840 - 1908), author, evangelist, and songwriter teamed up with Dwight L. Moody, in 1871, to become a world famous evangelistic team. Mr. Sankey is the author of one of the most popular hymn and time books in the English language, entitled *Sacred Songs and Solos*, published in England, which together with the celebrated *Gospel Hymns*, of which he is one of the authors, had had the largest circulation perhaps of any evangelical hymn books ever published.