



Gender Perspectives in Education: Caribbean Impact, Global Reach: Selected papers from the 2008 Elsa Leo-Rhynie Symposium

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Introduction

SECTION ONE

Gender Perspectives in Education: Caribbean Impact, Global Reach

Selected Papers from the 2008 Elsa Leo-Rhynie Symposium

The Elsa Leo-Rhynie (ELR) Symposium entitled *Gender perspectives in education: Caribbean impact, global reach* was held on November 10 and 11, 2008. It celebrated the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) and the institutionalization of Gender Studies across the three campuses of The University of the West Indies (The UWI) as an autonomous, interdisciplinary programme of teaching, research, outreach and advocacy within and beyond the academy.

The ELR Symposium honoured Professor Elsa Leo-Rhynie for her pioneering contribution to the advancement of Gender Studies at The UWI and her advancement to a number of leadership positions in the institution. Having served in the School of Education for a number of years, in 1992 Professor Leo-Rhynie was appointed as the first Professor of Gender and Development Studies and as Regional Coordinator of the *Project of Cooperation in Teaching, Research and Outreach in Women and Development Studies* between the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of The Hague and The University of the West Indies. She remained in this position until 1996 and was then appointed as Deputy Principal of The UWI's Mona Campus and Pro-Vice Chancellor, Undergraduate Studies. In 2006 she was appointed as the first female principal of the Mona Campus and served in that capacity until her retirement in July 2008. The Symposium included plenary presentations and panel discussions. A documentary film, celebrating her life and work was also launched. This volume

concludes with Elsa Leo-Rhynie's lecture at the 10th anniversary celebrations of the CGDS at The UWI St Augustine Campus.

The ELR Symposium coincided with two significant milestones. In October 2008, The UWI approved a request to enhance the status of the Centre to become the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, able to grant its own degrees. It also coincided with the expansion of academic offerings through the Mona Unit of the CGDS with the approval of a Major terminating in a BSc in Gender and Development, offered in collaboration with the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work. The Symposium was also incorporated into the 60th anniversary celebrations of the University and provided a special opportunity for reflection on the impact of the work of the Centre.

Like the mythical Sankofa bird, this collection of selected papers from the ELR Symposium reflects on the past and looks to the future of gender studies in the academy. The collection contributes to the burgeoning analysis of gender issues that reflect the Caribbean reality. It builds on the analyses presented in its precursor, *Gender in the 21st Century - Caribbean perspectives, visions and possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie (2004) which includes a collection of papers from the 2003 UWI Academic Conference held to mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the CGDS.

The thematic focus for the 2008 ELR Symposium was deliberate. Education is an area in which Professor Leo-Rhynie has had a passion and in which she had done pioneering research on the impact of gender on the education of girls and women in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean region. Analyzing the causes and impact of gender differences in educational participation and achievement, of males and females, as well as the possible solutions, remain a central research theme of the Institute. This focus continued even after Professor Leo-Rhynie's retirement from The UWI. Speakers at the Symposium were therefore asked to address sub-themes related to this broad concern. The

papers included therefore provide various perspectives on a range of education issues which focus on the Caribbean impact and global reach of the Institute's work on gender and education perspectives.

Keynote Addresses

Papers from two keynote speeches are presented. The first is the keynote address, by Professor Marlene Hamilton, Professor Emerita, The UWI, Mona Campus which was delivered on Day 1 of the Symposium. Professor Hamilton is a former Pro-Vice Chancellor and her responsibilities at one point, included oversight of The UWI's Women and Development Studies programmes. Her paper, entitled: *Moving from the periphery - Elsa Leo-Rhynie's contribution to gender studies and beyond*, highlights the multi-faceted work of Professor Emerita Elsa Leo-Rhynie as outstanding scholar, administrator *par excellence*, creative researcher and dedicated member of The University of the West Indies family for many years. The main focus of this paper is on that aspect of her work between 1992 and 1996 on her appointment as the first Professor and Regional Coordinator of Women and Development Studies (WDS), in time to be renamed Gender and Development Studies. It takes as its starting point, Leo-Rhynie's inaugural professorial address entitled *Moving from the periphery* and reviews the well-reasoned directionality proposed for WDS as well as dreams held for the fledgling Centre. The paper examines the steps taken along the way to establish a dynamic and well regarded unit within the University. Issues such as disciplinary/interdisciplinary scholarship, building a research agenda and the activism/scholarship divide are critically examined. Also included is the effectiveness of the Centre at its 15th anniversary in delivering its mandate. The paper also looks at the other sides to Elsa Leo-Rhynie beyond the CGDS: as teacher and researcher in the Faculty of Education; as competent and effective administrator in her role as Deputy Principal of the Mona Campus and

Pro-Vice Chancellor and Chair of the Board of Undergraduate Studies; and as first woman to hold the post of Principal of the Mona Campus.

The second keynote speech was presented on Day 2 of the Symposium by Professor Amina Mama of the University of Cape Town and is entitled *Beyond the frontiers: Feminist activism in the 'global' academy*. In the paper Professor Mama contends that localized feminist movements that emerged out of nationalist and anti-imperialist struggles have been greatly enhanced in the post-colonial era by transnational networks and modes of activism that transcend national boundaries. She argues that in the context of globalization, the imperatives for transnational mobilization are more powerful than ever but at the same time the parochial interests and systemic inequalities continue to present challenges to the realization of transnational solidarities. The particular manifestation of these challenges is discussed in relation to the university as a space that is both nationally and globally constituted and which has a critical role in development/under-development processes. Within this space feminist interventions have given rise to gender and women's studies and the author posits that in southern contexts this scholarly field has maintained a strong link with the development industry and with women's movements. In the paper, the potential and challenge of thinking and working beyond the frontiers of the academy and its disciplines in order to sustain a critical engagement with global processes is discussed, in relation to gender studies.

Selected Conference Paper

The paper by Dr Aldrie Henry-Lee of The UWI Mona Campus, *Child rights: A gender perspective* examines challenges in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlighting the negative impact on children's rights when there is a gap between policy and practice. Evidence to support this position includes demographic and statistical data on socio-

economic status, child welfare and poverty to argue the importance of gender mainstreaming to ensure that the specific needs and concerns of both boys and girls are addressed in policies and programmes. The paper questions whether duty bearers (governments) always act in the best interest of boys and girls. Henry-Lee focuses especially on the needs and rights of invisible and excluded children in public and private institutions, street and working children and children exposed to various forms of violence, neglect in the home, schools and community, despite commitments to child protection. She also argues in favour of increasing avenues for child participation and recommends that children should participate in the implementation and evaluation of programmes which impact their lives. The paper makes a strong case for closing the gap between policy and practice and mainstreaming gender in child rights.

Gender across the disciplines: The graduate experience

A paper by Warren Thompson, an IGDS graduate student at the Mona campus, examines male participation in social work, a traditionally feminized, female-dominated profession, and in gender studies which putatively continues to maintain the legacy of the feminist project. The paper is entitled *You sure aren't a real man: Space, power and possibilities for men in social care and gender studies*. Thompson's paper examines the social and structural place of men in two female-dominated fields and reflects on the challenges that come from both within and without a hegemonic patriarchy. An analysis of the power dynamics that play out even as theory is created and new modalities of practice are fashioned is presented. The possibilities for a new terrain of gender studies both in the academy and the field are also examined. The author's own experience in both arenas is used as the lens through which the examination and analysis is carried out and the arguments developed.

Personal Reflection

Mr. Anthony Perry provides a personal reflection on *The ELR Legacy* from the perspective of a former graduate student. He traces his personal journey and experience, as a male student relating to Professor Leo-Rhynie led him to unknowingly, recognize the importance of gender in education. He contends that long before gender was a sociological construct to be studied, researched and written about, he had figured that there were differences between and among men and women. He points to the fact that the paper is not about exploring the epistemology or the contending and contentious debates about femininity and masculinity but about how a man was guided, mentored and nurtured by an exemplary leader and academic as he navigated his way through university to successfully complete a master's degree.

SECTION TWO

Documentary Film: Becoming Elsa

Becoming Elsa is a 19 minute documentary film commissioned for presentation at the 2008 ELR Symposium, and presented at the Symposium. The Director/Scriptwriter was Patricia Mohammed and Production Assistant and Co-Director was Hilary Nicholson. The film traces Elsa's early life, her journey in education from the St Andrew High School to The UWI, her later experience as a teacher in the UK and her sterling career as an educator and later Principal at The University of the West Indies. Against the background of inspiring music, interviews with Elsa and key stakeholders, it traces the origins and history of the Women's Studies Group which became the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. The film is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R54KPgjZu44>

SECTION THREE

IGDS Anniversary Keynote Speeches

Gender studies: crossing boundaries, charting new directions Elsa Leo-Rhynie

In this 10th Anniversary Lecture delivered at The UWI St Augustine Campus on December 3 2003, Professor Leo-Rhynie provides an insightful, theoretical and practical analysis of the rationale for and challenges of introducing gender as an academic discipline and the journey from activism to scholarship. She highlights the crossings of boundaries and borders and the establishment of the Centre to develop and deliver an interdisciplinary academic programme reflecting this history.

Crossing Boundaries: Against the background of the UN Decade for Women 1975-1985, the social and political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s and the political activism of feminists, Leo-Rhynie argues that the trigger and stimulus for crossing this boundary was feminists' attention to issues of power and influence in women's lives, and their relationships with men, the family, the community, their workplace and the State. She highlights the pivotal role of the Women in Caribbean Project directed by Professor Joycelin Massiah in the 1970s and early 1980s in crossing this boundary.

Crossing borders: The second major boundary crossing she notes, challenged the structure and organisation of knowledge in the academy. Gender studies she argued represented a major shift from disciplinary to interdisciplinary scholarship.

Creating Interdisciplinarity: Her comprehensive analysis of what is required to achieve interdisciplinarity remains relevant today and she outlines the

pedagogical challenge of charting new directions as well as the institutional challenges of creating an interdisciplinary Centre. Leo-Rhynie concludes by acknowledging the boundaries crossed, new directions, special pedagogy, research methodologies and critical analysis that are part of Gender Studies and her hope that the discipline will continue to influence scholarship and stimulate societal change.

This selection of papers and the documentary film, attest to the range and multi-disciplinary scholarship of Professor Elsa Leo-Rhynie's work, and her legacy which has expanded knowledge and use of gender as a tool of analysis to enhance policies and practices which impact the lives of Caribbean people.