

POLITICS, POWER + GENDER JUSTICE IN THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN



Women's Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation

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IGDS

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Advancing Gender Justice? The Opportunities, Resistances, and Limitations of Guyana's Quota System

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List of Acronyms

APNU-A Party for National Unity

AFC-Alliance for Change

CARICOM- Caribbean Community

CIWIL- Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership

IDRC - International Centre for Research and Development

IGDS - Institute for Gender and Development Studies

PPP - Peoples Progressive Party

PNC - Peoples National Congress

UWI - University of West Indies

Preface

This chapter is one of several outputs of a research project undertaken between 2011 and 2014 by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at the University of West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus. Titled *Politics, Power and Gender Justice in the Anglophone Caribbean: Women's Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation*, the project was spearheaded by IGDS in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and led by Principal Investigator, Gabrielle Jamela Hosein, with the support of Lead Researcher, Jane Parpart.

Additional technical feedback was provided by Project Advisory Team members including Rawwida Baksh, Eudine Barriteau, Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Patricia Mohammed, and Linnette Vassell. Feedback and support from Francisco Con-Montiel, from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), also contributed to the project outputs. Support from the staff at IGDS, St. Augustine, and especially Tisha Nickenig for project coordination and management, and Kathryn Chan for graphic design and layout, deserve particular recognition.

The project examined four strategies to promote democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality in the Anglophone Caribbean. First, women's political leadership was explored for the extent to which it creates greater governmental will and capacity to more actively and effectively transforms gender relations both within and outside of the state. Second, quota systems were assessed for their impact on effective women's participation and leadership in representative government. Third, the usefulness of national gender policy documents for promoting gender equality was evaluated. Finally, the impact of feminist movement building on women's capacity to be effective transformational leaders within democratic political life was investigated.

Each of these strategies has expanded the spaces for realizing women's rights and gender equality, created greater capacity (among women and men) to achieve transformed gender relations, and shifted the gender ideologies that present resistances to women's effective political participation and leadership. Together, they reflect a core set of historical struggles waged across the Anglophone Caribbean. This project therefore sought to document the history of struggle in five Caribbean nations. It focused on specific countries where these struggles appear to have been won. Trinidad and Tobago provided an appropriate case study for examining the impact of women's contemporary political leadership, Guyana for exploring the impact of quota systems, Dominica and Jamaica for exploring the formulation and impact of national gender policies, and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) for

evaluating the impact of feminist advocacy on women's rights, effectiveness and representation in democratic governance in St. Lucia. These cases thus investigate four global strategies for advancing democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality. They offer insights into transnational, regional and national alliances between states, international organizations, NGOs and feminist movements, and demonstrate the relevance of national case studies for understanding regional and global experiences. Indeed, the project's comparative, historical and case study approach shows that both regional and national case studies are essential if we are to understand how democracy, the state and politics offer opportunities for and resistances to renegotiating gender relations in different twenty-first century contexts. For a more comprehensive summary of the project's conceptual framework, methodologies and findings please refer to the Introduction by Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Jane Parpart, available at IDRC and IGDS, UWI, St. Augustine. The following is a list of related chapters produced by the project:

- "Women's Political Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, Understandings, Experiences and Negotiations" by Aleah N. Ranjitsingh
- "Getting to One-Third? Creating Legislative Access for Women to Political Space in Guyana" by Natalie Persadie
- "Feminist/Womanist Advocacy Toward Transformational Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean: The Interplay of Individual and Collective Agency" by Shirley Campbell;
- "National Gender Policies in the English Speaking Caribbean" by Deborah McFee;
- "The Patriarchal State and the Development of Gender Policy in Jamaica" by Maziki Thame and Dhanaraj Thakur
- "Crossing over the Barriers: A Historical Journey of Women's Political Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean" by Beverly Shirley;
- "Enactments, Contestations, and Possibilities of Women's Transformational Leadership in the Anglophone Caribbean" by Denise Blackstock
- "Masculinities and the Practice of Dominica's National Gender Policy" by Ramona Biholar

Executive Summary

A series of constitutional reforms in 1998 and 1999, kicked into action largely by the mobilization of Guyana's feminist movement and influences from the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, gave birth to the establishment of an electoral quota system, making Guyana, in 2001, the first country in the Anglophone Caribbean to legally and systematically promote higher representation of women within the political sphere. The quota law stipulates that the total number of women on each political party's national top-up list be at least one third of the total number of candidates². While the constitution does not require one third women to actually be extracted from the list and placed in parliament, Guyana parties have consistently ensured that one-third women are represented. Guyana's quota system has indeed acted as a catalyst for unprecedented strides in the representation and inclusion of women in politics at the level of parliament, as well as in all levels of government. But while the quota system has been successful in increasing the visibility and descriptive representation of women, as well as in disrupting the discursive terrain, and certainly creating space for more women, it has not managed to bridge the distance between women and patriarchal norms, patriarchal state processes, and patriarchal state structures. The quota system appears to be grounded in a feminist framework rather than a gendered one. In Guyana's context, this has been counterproductive, because it attempts to place emphasis on women only as the main category of analysis in a predominantly masculine dominated and controlled space. Party patriarchal discipline prevails despite the presence of the quota, and this patriarchy still policies feminism. Women remain loyal to party ideologies and will not form any formal caucuses aimed at pushing forward a woman's agenda out of fear of being labeled as "too feminist" or "out of line," and also out of fear of going against party ideologies. Women's rights activists then view women as gender blind, undedicated to women's empowerment, and as facilitators of various injustices against Guyanese grassroots women. A fascinating finding that emerges from this research reveals that women in parliament are in a tough predicament. On the one hand, women's rights activists and groups hold female ministers of parliament (MPs) to do a better job to advance women's concerns. On the other hand, they are cautiously trying to negotiate the masculinist terrain of their parties. Demands, expectations, tension and to some extent hostility from feminist and masculinist agents inhibit Guyana's female parliamentarians from effectively being able to fight gender inequalities and injustices. Two possibilities for addressing this issue are

² Each party puts up a National Top up List of 40 headed by a presidential candidate. Names are then taken off the list of each party according to percentage of seats or national votes won.

perhaps 1) the promotion of a more gendered approach 2) the development of a unified and active women's movement that not only holds female parliamentarians to account, but one that also supports them, engages them, and protects them from political backlashes.

Unfortunately, the quota system has had little effect on translating the gains related to participation and empowerment of women in politics to other spaces such as arenas where women have traditionally been marginalized. It has, however, managed to challenge social norms by giving higher numbers of women the opportunity and access to negotiate within a masculinist space. Going forward, successful outcomes from these women's negotiations will rely on a gendered approach as well as the mobilization power of women's rights activists and groups within civil society. The latter will not be an easy task considering the decline in feminist organizing, not only in Guyana, but throughout the Caribbean.

The following chapter explores the opportunities, resistances, and limitations of Guyana's electoral quota system. It analyzes the effects of the quota system with regard to the empowerment of female parliamentarians; their ability to push forward agendas related to women's rights' issues; challenge patriarchy, as well as engage and negotiate with state hierarchy for policies, legislations, projects, and reforms aimed at advancing the status and conditions of not only women within the parliament, but women across Guyana. The chapter also analyzes the effects of the quota system on transforming dominant masculinities, building male gender consciousness and feminist allies, and promoting gender mainstreaming. This chapter is situated within major global debates on: 1) quota provisions as empowerment to create critical mass and allow women to transform or in any way shape politics; and 2) quota provisions as merely and artificially symbolic and their significance, therefore, as a feminist strategy for advancing gender justice.

Introduction

Guyana's Gender Electoral Quota System

The implementation of the electoral quota system in Guyana materialized as a result of extensive networking and solidarity among Guyanese women. Such solidarity and mobilization among political women, particularly across party lines, was not common, but had been strongly demonstrated before during the fight for the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill which, passed in 1995, and the Domestic Violence Act, which passed in 1996 (Desouza, interview). While a formal parliamentary caucus never materialized in Guyana, women within the various political parties built informal cross party caucuses to advance their collective interests and needs, as in the case of the gender electoral quota system. While informal caucusing has certainly led to strides and advancements for women in Guyana, the absence of a formal caucus has in many ways limited the ability of women to constructively influence a legislative and policy agenda targeting women (Interviews with various parliamentarians, 2013). This chapter explores some of the reasons why a formal cross party caucus never materialized later. Nonetheless, the informal coming together of political party women, combined with strong support from Red Thread, an energetic grassroots women's organization, assisted the development and implementation of the Representation of the Peoples Act in November 2000. Subsection 11B (5) mandates that the national top-up list contain a minimum of one-third women, while 11B (6) upholds that the regional party lists contain a total of one-third women for the geographical constituencies in which the party contests. Subsections 11B(7) mandates that "there shall be no more than twenty percent of the number of geographical constituencies in which a party is contesting for which the party's geographical constituency list contain no female;" while 11B(8) states that "in the extraction from the lists and declaration of names of the candidates who have been elected account shall be taken—(i) of the total number of females on each party's national top-up lists and the lists for geographical constituencies, taken together, being at least one-third of the number of persons on those lists as mentioned in paragraphs (5), (6) and (7); and (ii) of the proportion that women formed of the electorate." (The Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana Act).

Subsection 11B (8) has been criticized for containing a major loophole with serious implications for the actual extraction and translation of women off the list and into parliament. While it is mandatory for women to comprise one-third of the party list, the language does not make it mandatory for one-third of the total number of parliamentary seats to be allocated to women (Persadie 2014; Guyana Model of Quota System for Female Representation in

Parliament, 2012; Desouza, interview; The Equal Rights Trust 2012). Despite this loophole, however, women's rights advocates actively and persistently ensure that the gender electoral quota system achieves its true purpose and intent. Sections 14 and 17 of the Representation of the Peoples Act legally ensure that all parties nominate at least one-third female candidates to their party lists. These subsections, which address "defective lists" and "approval of lists" state that lists which do not comply with all respects and requirements of section 11(1), (2), (3), (4), (5) or section 11B must be corrected or will otherwise be refused. And while there is nothing that mandatory that stipulates one-third is translated into representation in parliament, women's rights advocates, and the Women and Gender Equality Commission work feverishly during elections; scrutinizing political party manifestos to ensure that they have policies and programs aimed at empowering and advancing the needs and interests of Guyanese women. The Commission also advocates that various political parties go beyond the minimum requirement and increase the number of "competent" women on their party lists (Chandarpal, interview; Stabroek News 2011). Many female parliamentarians that the author spoke with, including the chair of the Women and Gender Equality Commission, Indra Chandarpal and the former PNC presidential candidate, Faith Harding, argue that selection should be based on competency not gender, and on quality not quantity. The author revisits the implications of this thinking later in the chapter.

The Effect and Impact of Guyana's Electoral Quota System

Guyana's quota system was lauded by the regional and international community as an outstanding contribution and development for Guyanese women (Inter-Parliamentary Union Women in National Parliaments 2011; Guyana Chronicle 2011; Global Status of Women in Parliament Report 2010). Regionally, Guyana's quota system was upheld as a model for female representation in parliament at the Regional Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary Meeting 2012 in Jamaica. Internationally, Guyana earned a high ranking in the 2010 global status of women in parliament assessment where it placed twenty-five out of one hundred eighty six countries around the world. The quota system has resulted in a steady increase in the number of women occupying seats in Guyana's parliament, as well as women in the cabinet and other top level parliamentary positions. The new electoral amendments regarding the electoral quota system for women came into effect for the 2006 general elections and saw a jump in the percentage of women in parliament to 30.7% from 20% at the 2001 general elections. After the November 2011 general elections, women now hold 32% of Guyana's parliamentary seats

(Commonwealth Secretariat 2011; Regional Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary Meeting, 2012).

But what does the increase in representation of women in parliament really mean? Does the quota system have any impact on increasing women's empowerment, protection from employment and wage discrimination, or overall socio-economic conditions? To what extent has it benefited women outside of the parliament building? Does the increase in the presence of women in Guyana's parliament translate into a more gender conscious parliament? Has it in any way shaped or transformed the people, space, processes and structures within various parties and within the state? This introduction has highlighted crucial questions concerning women's political representation in Guyana. In the following sections, the author will outline the methodology for investigating these questions, and the theoretical perspectives for analyzing the lived reality of Guyana's quota system, paying close attention to the opportunities, resistances, and limitations. Finally, the author will conclude by arguing that the quota system on its own has not managed to necessarily bring about equal opportunity, voice, and capacity. The experiences, capacities, interests, and consciousness among women in parliament vary greatly and these factors often lead to lack of consensus, resulting in lack of action, and lack of positive outcomes for the welfare of women.

Methodology

The research for this chapter is based on various elements of qualitative analysis methodology. It is grounded particularly in the case study approach which allows researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts using a variety of data sources to ensure that the phenomena is not being explored through one lens (Baxter and Jack 2008). The research also relies on content analysis, which is useful for gathering, sorting, and analyzing secondary literature such as journal articles, textbooks, websites and other relevant reports, such as television interviews relating to the research-question themes. This approach allows the researcher to collect and organize information in a standardized format that allows the researcher to make inferences about the meaning of written or recorded material (Kirppendorff 2004). Atlas.ti is the coding software used in the research design to systematically analyze the collected data. Primary data was collected from semi-structured interviews with forty people, predominantly women, from political parties, government, women's rights groups, retired politicians, and observers within Guyana. The author interviewed four of the seven founding members of Red Thread, a women's development organization that aimed to mobilize

grassroots women, as well as encourage and facilitate their empowerment through skills training and activism. Interviewees also included long standing members of political parties including women like Gail Teixeira, Indra Chandarpal, and Clarissa Riehl. Considered vanguards of political and social struggles in Guyana, the country's parliament honored these women's exemplary performance and long standing service. Interviewees also included former Deputy Speaker Deborah Backer, who resigned from the national assembly shortly after our meeting due to an illness. This research also reflects the perceptions of men like Keith Scott, and Rupert Roopnarine, political activists and founding members of the Working People's Alliance, as well as the voices of young and newly elected parliamentarians that come from diverse backgrounds. Readers hear from young A Party for National Unity (APNU) parliamentarian Vanessa Kissoon, who is a teacher, and single mother of six children, and we also hear from Dr. Vindhya Persaud, young Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) parliamentarian, president of the Guyana Hindu and Dharmic Sabha, and medical doctor. This research draws from the perspectives and stories of men and women across various cultures, ethnicities, generations, and socioeconomic and sociopolitical backgrounds. The author also combed through Guyana's parliamentary hansards, constitutional and legislative documents, as well as newspaper articles. The coding process involved converting the collected content into a suitable format for analysis. "Coding entails the interpreting of the phenomenon under study and stating the observations in the formal terms of an analysis" (Krippendorff 2004, 126). Through the use of Atlas t.i, the content was recorded in an analyzable form. The author also developed a written codebook as a guide to code the variables under investigation, and ensure consistency and stability. Final coding focused on three broad categories: opportunities, resistances to women's effective participation, and limitations. Subcategories included: 1) impact and effectiveness on social processes, and policy and legislative outcomes for women outside of parliament; 2) impact and effectiveness on equality with regards to political processes among men and women in parliament; 3) possibilities for critical mass and caucusing; 4) possibilities for gender transformation; 5) limitations of gender transformation; 6) empowerment; and 7) disempowerment.

Theoretical Framework- Feminist Political Theory

Feminist political theory is the central conceptual framework shaping this chapter. The gender electoral quota system in Guyana touches upon the fundamental principles in feminist political theory, which examines the ways in which political relations, political institutions, and political rule are analyzed by reference to theories of power, gender relations, and gender

balance (Frazer 1998). According to Frazer “politics is the practice of and study of, the power to govern. “Practice of” should be taken to include: exercise of, organization of, the influence of, or pressure on government, and of course the resistance to governance and governmental powers” (Frazer 1998, 50). She further argues that the broadness of her formulation “owes a great deal to feminist thought and activism” (Frazer, 1998, 50). For her, feminist political theory has two principal aims. It first aims to understand, diagnose, and analyze the ways in which politics, understood through power and gender relations, perpetuates gender inequality or disempowerment. Its second aim is to offer principles, policies, and solutions to combat gender inequality, as well as provide a vision for gender equality particularly as it relates to politics. She argues that feminist political theory involves modeling and empirically scrutinizing the connections between events and changes in state government and government policy, changes in laws, social relations in institutions like firms and households, in locations like streets and homes, and in meanings and values constructed and expressed in popular culture and other cultural practices like the conduct of sexual and romantic relations, or past times like going to the pub” (Frazer 1998, 54). This research will therefore apply this framework to examine: 1) the electoral gender quota system in Guyana, 2) parliament as an institution, and 3) parliamentarian’s roles in advancing gender justice and redressing gender inequality, as well as in reproducing and reinforcing gender inequality. Additionally, this research will employ Frazer’s understanding of feminist political theory to focus on women’s voices and agency (or lack of) within parliament and political parties, while paying keen attention to a range of social phenomenon that extend beyond state and political institutions, such as class, age, and to a small extent race.

Findings

Opportunities: Guyana’s Quota System

As mentioned previously, Guyana’s gender electoral quota system has led to a steady improvement in women’s representation in partisan and parliamentary politics. The quota system has undoubtedly challenged barriers to exclusion, discrimination, and under-representation of women in Guyana interested in pursuing political paths. One female parliamentarian expressed in an interview that without the quota system, women’s representation in parliament would be much less substantial.³ The implementation of the quota

³ Chandarpal interview, 2013

system has also to some extent challenged traditional and biased gender notions of women as being unfit and unqualified for political life. Thus the increase in women occupying political positions in Guyana eats away at structural and societal discrimination. The chair of the Women and Gender Equality Commission in Guyana, Indra Chandarpal, expressed in an interview for this chapter that the quota system has been instrumental in challenging cultural and societal notions of women. In the interview, she stated that “the quota has helped for a number of reasons: firstly one cannot ignore the fact that you have often an attitude in which policy holders and policy makers, because of their own historical reality, tend to scoff at women’s empowerment, and they take women for granted especially because of our cultural socialization” (Chandarpal, interview). In this regard, research indeed shows that quota systems bring about changes in attitudes toward women and gender discrimination. A study of temporary gender quotas in municipalities in Italy supports this assertion by demonstrating progress towards the elimination of negative stereotypes of women (De Paola et al 2010).

A number of new policies, legislations, and programs related to women’s interests emerged since the implementation of Guyana’s quota system. Some of these include the Age of Consent Bill (2004) introduced by female parliamentarian Bibi Shadick; the Child Care and Protection Agency Bill (2008), introduced by female parliamentarian and government Minister Priya Manickchand; the Sexual Offences Act (2010), piloted by Minister Priya Manickchand; Amendment to the Sexual Offences Act (2013); the National Task Force on Domestic Violence and the Domestic Violence Policy Unit (2008); the National Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Offences; the establishment of the Women and Gender Equality Commission (2008) and the selection of commissioners (2009). More recently, the Right of Persons in Common Law Union Bill (2012) was tabled. The Bill received considerable attention as it provides legal rights for people, particularly women living in common law partnerships for five years. The Bill was lauded for setting out to correct historical wrongs against women in common law partnerships, which were legalized through loopholes in the Family and Dependents Provisions Act, as well as in the Married Persons Property Act.⁴ Referencing the Bill, Education Minister and former Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Priya Manickchand, stated: “I invite the National Assembly to join us and declare ourselves in this House openly and proudly that we are a House that is friendly to women and who will support Guyana’s women...while the law is gender-neutral, we would be burying our heads in the sand if we don’t recognize that women

⁴ Prior to this law, women in common law marriages had no protection with regards to assets and finances accumulated jointly during the relationship.

will be the biggest beneficiaries. I believe that this piece of legislation will do nothing more than to make women more equal” (Guyana Chronicle 2012).

Minister Manickchand’s pronouncement of the House as “friendly” to women could be attributed to the presence of more women in the House as compared to the number of women that held seats in 2000. According to Helpdesk Research Report from the Governance and Social Development Research Centre on the effects of political quotas for women (2011), the presence of women in politics is believed to have substantive effects for women as a group. “There are common assumptions that quotas will raise attention to women’s issues in policy-making processes, change the gendered nature of the public sphere, and inspire female voters to get more politically involved” (Franceschet and Piscopo 2012, 2). Additionally, quotas are said to increase political attention to women’s interests, particularly by newly elected women. For example, earlier on in her political career, Minister Manickchand was widely viewed as a young, energetic, and dedicated champion of women’s and children’s rights. Manickchand was constantly and openly vocal on gender injustices, despite raising eyes within her own party. She has since been accused of being co-opted and absorbed by party norms, while others sadly believe that she has become frustrated, worn out, and disillusioned (Roopnarine, interview; Desouza, interview, and Hughes, interview).

After the implementation of the quota system other policies directly relating to the needs of women include the Single Parent Assistance Programme (2009), spearheaded by Minister Manickchand; the Women of Worth Micro Credit Initiative (2010); and the Universal Uniform Allowance (2010). This increase in legislations, policies, and initiatives aimed at enhancing the welfare of women can be attributed to the presence of not only more women, but perhaps more empathetic and gender conscious women in parliament. In an interview for this chapter, current Minister of Human Services Jennifer Webster stated,

....I think for us women in the People’s Progressive Party, empowerment is important....and I think the general view of the women in parliament is that we have to do more for women. There are a couple of pending bills that we have, and looking at things that have an adverse effect on our women where they can be discriminated against and where they can be marginalized....take for example in March for International Women’s Day, I had a symposium, we discussed social issues, employment opportunities such as job creation and poverty, we looked at equal work for equal pay because a lot of women are working and doing the same jobs as men but they are earning more than the women, we looked at women’s rights from law to practice, women in leadership . There are a couple of men who participated in the symposium, but not many men are interested at that level (Webster, interview).

Guyana's parliamentary Hansards from debates on the Sexual Offences Act, and the Rights of Persons in Common Law Unions Bill also reveal that women spoke more frequently than men on issues that are of particular interest to women and children. The author observed that all of the legislations and policy initiatives highlighted above were tabled or introduced by female parliamentarians. The speakers to the bills were predominantly female, and the select committees were predominantly women. Christina Xydias, who is a scholar who studies women and politics supports this observation---"the presence of a quota system appears to enhance women legislators' attention to issues of particular interest to women" (Xydias 2008, 64).

While no formal caucus exists, some of the interview respondents for this chapter expressed that they sometimes meet across party lines to discuss issues pertaining to women. These meetings are rare, however, and usually take place out of the chambers. The women often meet in the corridors and during dinner and lunch breaks to converse about issues relating to women, children and family. Interviewees also expressed that while it might appear as though women parliamentarians from different parties are constantly fighting each other in parliament, that their tone is more cordial when they meet in more intimate settings. According to one respondent, it is all about strategy.

...notwithstanding the fact that we are coming from different parties we all converge at one point when we meet on issues that sometimes relate to family, women, children....one is sick we are all concerned....so I think the histrionics, the histrionics of political work is in the chambers. When you start working in the committee, there's a lot of camaraderie....It's not because you don't have to argue in front of the cameras, so nobody can't say you sell out, or you didn't stand up for you party, or you were not assertive enough. You get to do it without the cameras, and say how you feel, and you don't have to worry, and you can agree to disagree, and all of that (Chandarpal, interview).

According to APNU parliamentarian Keith Scott,

...there is a strange thing that happens in parliament especially at the committee level. Those women from all those parties get together, I've seen it many times, they get together in a flash. I'm on the public accounts committee, the most frightening committee, and on that committee we have Volda Lawrence, Gail, and Bibi Shaddick. Those women get together, they have their little conference among themselves.... You would be surprised how they get together (Scott, interview).

In Guyana, female legislators tend to agree more freely and openly on topics of particular interest to women and children. Therefore the increase in more “women friendly” legislations and policies in the country could be directly correlated with critical mass in parliament. Critical mass is a central concept in feminist political theory, and has been widely used as a tool for “understanding the relationship between the percentage of female legislators and the passage of legislation beneficial to women as a group” (Childs and Krook 2008, 1). According to Childs and Krook, gender and politics scholars use the term critical mass to show that fewer women in political spheres result in lesser impacts on legislative outcomes for women. The term is often invoked when explaining why it is that women in politics do not always appear to represent other women. Critical mass theorists typically argue that only as the numbers of women increase will legislative strides relating to women be accomplished (Childs and Krook 2008, 1).

Yet other scholars are increasingly questioning the legitimacy of critical mass theory. In fact, one scholar noted that when women form a smaller minority, they are able to make a greater impact and influence change more effectively (Crowley 2008). Women’s rights activists in Guyana have also argued that the number and presence of women in Guyana’s parliament has not necessarily translated into greater access to state power with the ability to impact and advance gender justice locally (Desouza, interview).

In the context of Guyana, it is important to note that there was still significant passage of legislation beneficial to women prior to the implementation of the quota system, and with lower numbers of women in parliament. For example, some of the legislations particularly relating to women which were enacted prior to the implementation of the quota and through which female parliamentarians met unanimously across party lines, include: the Domestic Violence Act, No 18 (1996); the Prevention of Discrimination Act, No 26 (1997); the Children Born out of Wedlock (Removal of Discrimination Act), No 12 (1983); the Equal Rights Act, No 19 (1990); the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act, No 19 (1997); and the Married Persons (Property) (Amendment) Act, No 20 (1991). This reveals that the small minority of women in Guyana’s parliament prior to the implementation of the quota system, were just as effective in pushing forward legislations concerning women than women in parliament after the quota implementation. It also makes it more difficult to draw a direct correlation between a higher number of women in parliament and the passage of “women friendly” legislations and policy outcomes. However, it is important to note that many of these earlier legislations came about due to regional and international pressures, which gave birth to the CARICOM model legislations and the Beijing Conference (Persadie, 2014). International pressure seems to play

an important role in the implementation of women friendly programs today as well. In an interview for this chapter, Minister of Human Services, Jennifer Webster stated,

....I think we could do more, much more, because we have to have our budgets become more gender responsive, because some of the international bodies like the CEDAW requirements they want to know what percentage of your budget is geared toward the development of women, and our budget isn't structured like that. We giving out loans to housing, and so we gotta get the stats of how many women in the region....so those are some of the things we gotta look at...our statistical collection, and how we do the analytical work. Because the international bodies want to see quality, you have to see how it trickles down (Webster, interview).

This statement places more emphasis on pressure from international bodies to implement effectively than pressure coming from within Guyana's parliament.

Nonetheless, female parliamentarians in Guyana today tend to raise and introduce women and family friendly bills and policies more frequently than men⁵. Women are also more likely to hold male party members accountable to targets for women and family that are outlined in party manifestos⁶. Without a strong presence of women, it is believed that men would be less likely to pay attention to their party's agenda for women. However, even before the enactment of the quota system, women were typically the ones introducing women and family friendly laws and policies associated with issues such as child protection, sexual harassment protection of motherhood, medical termination of pregnancy, divorce laws and minimum wage. Additionally, long established political party women's arms were always active in holding parties accountable to their promises to women⁷.

The presence of more women in parliament in Guyana has increased transparency, accountability, and helped challenge corruption on a wider scale. Female parliamentarians are extremely vocal about issues of corruption, while male politicians tend to remain more mum.

⁵ For example, a number of new policies, legislations, and programs related to women's interests emerged since the implementation of Guyana's quota system. Some of these include the Age of Consent Bill (2004) introduced by female parliamentarian Bibi Shadick; the Child Care and Protection Agency Bill (2008), introduced by female parliamentarian and government Minister Priya Manickchand; the Sexual Offences Act (2010), piloted by Minister Priya Manickchand; Amendment to the Sexual Offences Act (2013); the National Task Force on Domestic Violence and the Domestic Violence Policy Unit (2008); the National Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Offences; the establishment of the Women and Gender Equality Commission (2008) and the selection of commissioners (2009). More recently, the Right of Persons in Common Law Union Bill (2012) was introduced by Attorney General Anil Nandlall.

⁶ This finding is based on face to face interviews with female parliamentarians

⁷ This finding is based on face to face interviews with male and female parliamentarians who spoke about the strong role of women in politics prior to the implementation of the quota law.

The most notable examples of this are as follows: when a Wikileaks cable revealed that former Home Affairs Minister, Gail Teixeira, expressed concern to the United States embassy about corruption and criminalization in the police force, court, and immigration department, as well as criticism of her predecessor Ronald Gajraj (Kaieteur News 2011; Stabroek News 2011). In 2006 when Gail Teixeira called to boycott businesses owned by drug lords during a period where the government was constantly being accused of tying deals with known drug dealers, Teixeira's speaking out was viewed as bold and controversial by political commentators such as Freddi Kissoon and by the general public (Stabroek News 2006). In 2010, Minister of Public Service, Jennifer Westford also spoke out on corruption and announced that the government must stop turning "a blind eye" (Stabroek News 2010). Most notably former Minister of Human Services and Social Security, and current Minister of Education, Priya Manickchand, publicly announced that late police commissioner, Henry Greene, "should go" because his improper behavior had put him on the brink of a rape case. Manickchand told reporters "from his own admission he acted most improperly and in this instance he was discovered so he should leave willingly. I am not sure that he can do very much hereafter to enjoy the confidence of people generally and women in particular, and his actions may have been a bad example for his juniors" (Alleyne 2012). Minister Manickchand's move to publically denounce the late police commissioner was viewed as extremely controversial⁸. On the one hand, people viewed the minister as a sort of maverick and congratulated her for her brave and heroic move. On the other hand, she was highly criticized for making a careless statement, which gave the public the impression that she was speaking on behalf of the government and in her capacity as Minister of Education. Political activist Freddie Kissoon argued that her speaking out on the issue was neither bold nor careless, but a strategic conspiracy. He argued that it was most likely that she was instructed by her party superiors to make the public statement because they were also fed up with Mr. Greene (Kissoon, interview). This analysis sheds light on the cultural perception in Guyana that women, and more specifically women in politics, are merely puppets of male political powers. It reinforced the assumption or even the expectation that political women are voiceless, loyal, and submissive.

Minister Manickchand was also recently banned from speaking during the 2014 budget debates by the Speaker of the House, Raphael Trotman, when she made a heckling remark against member of the opposition Jaipaul Sharma with regards to rape accusations. When apprehended by the Speaker, Manickchand persisted by saying "I am in a bit of a tight situation

⁸ There were several letters by the public to various newspapers on the topic of Manickchand speaking out. One letter to Guyana Chronicle Newspaper argued that it was a careless, vindictive and deliberate attempt to distort and override Justice Chang's ruling.

here, Sir, and I will tell you why. I would never refuse to yield to your advice but this goes against my belief. Five children! Five children!" (Campbell, 2014) Manickchand refused to apologize to Sharma, stating publically on her Facebook page: "I cannot abandon them just to keep the National Assembly happy. Reprimanded I may be, silenced I may not."⁹

It must be noted that opposition members and political critics were outraged by Manickchand's actions, calling her a "rape hypocrite" as well as selective in her position. Popular anti government websites such as Propaganda Press ran headlines that read "Priya Manickchand the Rape Hypocrite" and Priya Manickchand only "Supports Rape Victims who were not Raped by her Comrades"¹⁰. Political activist and writer Ruel Johnson argued that the recent incident between Manickchand and Sharma only reveals how flawed and cynical the PPP party truly is. He argued that her outbursts and defense of injustice appears to be convenient and biased. Referencing the cases of Robeson Benn Jr. and Kwame McCoy (incidents involving rape allegations in the PPP where Manickchand remained silent on) he concludes by stating: "and before she says anything else, she might want to make her position clear on the McCoy and Benn Jr. cases publicly clear"¹¹.

Guyana's Quota System and Men

Guyana's quota system provides more women with the opportunity to increase their leadership capabilities and influence policy across various fields. It has legally challenged the structural and ideological discrimination of women, and helped to transform traditional notions of gender identity. Women in Guyana's parliament also now have the ability to contest notions and sites of "male power," snatching up positions that are traditionally considered masculine. For

⁹ This statement was posted on the Minister's Facebook page.

¹⁰ See Propaganda Press, Author remains anonymous (popular anti-government website): <http://propagandapress.org/2014/04/04/priya-manickchand-only-support-rape-victims-who-werent-raped-by-her-comrades/>

¹¹ Minister Robeson Benn's son was last June accused of raping a woman and was on several instances charged with abuse. Kwame McCoy, Presidential Advisor and Head of the Rights of the Child Commission was alleged with soliciting sex from a minor and was on several instances alleged with assault. See articles: Kaieteur News, Kwame McCoy Recorded Soliciting Sex from School Boy September 20 2009, Accessed from: <http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2009/09/20/kwame-mccoy-recorded-soliciting-sex-from-schoolboy/>

Also see: Kaieteur News, Minister Son Rape Allegations, August 1 2013 Accessed from: <http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2013/08/01/ministers-son-rape-allegations-dpp-perusing-file/>

Johnson's article accessible to public via his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/ruel-johnson/the-manickchandsharma-incident/10152307652156265>

example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Service, and the Deputy Speaker of the House are all women.

Female interview respondents for this chapter expressed that men in parliament are generally supportive and respectful. Notwithstanding one or two rare and isolated cases of sexist heckles, most respondents find men in parliament, particularly those within their parties, to be extremely supportive. In fact, some female parliamentarian respondents expressed they find men offer more support than women, attributing that these men don't see women as threats or competition. On the other hand, female parliamentarian respondents expressed that women in parliament often feel the need to compete with each other (Haynes, interview; Harding, interview). Women respondents also agreed that while men might not spearhead initiatives relating to women's welfare, they are usually forthright with their support. They expressed this is perhaps because no man in parliament wants to be accused of being sexist, regardless of their personal beliefs or opinions. Rita Gruenenfelder in her research on German and Swiss gendered deliberation has observed that when more women are in the House and on committees, men are less likely to make remarks that could be interpreted as sexist (Gruenenfelder, 2007). Additionally, she has noted that the respect level of women increases (Gruenenfelder, 2007). Parliamentarian Annette Ferguson expressed that while men will offer their support concerning legislations relating to women, they do not bring the issues to the table. She stated "since I have been in parliament (10th parliament) not much has been done by men to address these issues. Men more or less make contributions in terms of presentations when there are motions tabled, but it is not a priority for them" (Ferguson, interview).

Male respondents for this chapter identified several benefits of the quota system enactment. Respondents shared a general sentiment that the presence of more women in parliament translated into having more females make decisions about the way the economy should be run, as well as more politician accountability. One respondent expressed that that female parliamentarians are true icons and role models that nurture meaningful goals and aspirations among young women (Bond, 2013). Charles Ramson Jr. who at the time of our discussion was employed as an attorney at the Office of the President and an active young member of the PPP stated that while he believed that the quota system is "inherently unfair because it might not always be based on meritocracy, the benefits exceed the unfairness overwhelmingly" (Ramson, interview). When asked on why so few men introduce bills relating to women and children, Ramson replied that most of the bills and policies relating to women and children come from the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, which is a female dominated ministry. Ramson added that this predominantly female run ministry is a perfect

example of how men suffer from gender based discrimination also (Ramson, interview). APNU parliamentarian Keith Scott holds a similar view on the unfairness of a quota,

If I had to pick a West Indies team of eleven men....and these men come from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, I am one of those people that believe if the best eleven persons are all Trinidadians, then I would pick eleven Trinidadians so that they become the West Indies team. If sixty-five women are the best, I would pick sixty-five women, but if they are not the best, then I would not pick them. I am not a panderer to numbers, and I do not feel that you should pick women for the sake of it (Scott, interview).

Limitations- Guyana's Quota System

Most female parliamentarians and women's rights activists interviewed for this chapter felt that the opportunities brought about by the implementation of the quota system were generally disappointing. While all of the respondents agreed that the quota system succeeded in providing better access and higher numbers of women in parliament, most did not feel that higher representation strengthened political processes as they relate to women in any way. In fact, many of the respondents believed that many female parliamentarians lacked sufficient gender consciousness and were not particularly interested in acting on behalf of women as a group. One interviewee mentioned that during her time in parliament (post quota implementation), she did not feel as though the presence of women made much of a difference with regards to issues that dealt with women and children (Haynes, interview). Most of the interview respondents, with the exception of a few, agreed that support, solidarity, and gender consciousness among women in parliament were generally lacking. Additionally, none of the respondents could identify any real opportunities other than higher numbers and participation of women in the political process. In fact, when referencing solidarity, support, and caucusing, most of the respondents referenced the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1995) and the Domestic Violence Act (1996) as political moments that stood out in their memories as moments where women across party lines really came together as a unit to lobby for women's rights and mobilize on behalf of women as a group. Interesting enough, these incidents occurred prior to the enactment of the quota system and therefore cannot be directly attributable to a rise in number of women in parliament.

Karen Desouza of Red Thread argued that while the quota system managed to ensure that higher numbers of women are able to enter parliament, meaningful representation of women as a group has not been achieved. Disappointed with the outcome, Desouza said that

grassroots women were let down by their female parliamentarians who simply have not acted in the interest of women, and are unwilling to engage with civil society groups. For instance, Red Thread made several attempts to engage female parliamentarians on the issue of the effects that value added tax (VAT) has on poor Guyanese women. In fact the organization organized several picketing exercises to pressure female parliamentarians to address the VAT issue. When asked Desouza about the last time that her organization tried to engage the government on a national issue which required action and representation by female parliamentarians, Desouza stated,

I'm trying to think when last we tried to engage with them. It was probably around VAT, um we had a project a few years ago which was about trying to hold, about grassroots women holding parties accountable for their elections promises, and in fact the parties were totally unresponsive to the questions that we wanted them to answer. They really don't feel that they have to answer to anybody, they parade as though they have whatever information they need and the extent that they can in the Parliament. There is way too much distance between the parliament and the population (Desouza, interview).

Andaiye of Red Thread also argued that political decisions resulted in serious economic abuses on poor grassroots women. She stated that “political decisions, which do not specifically target poor women, have negatively impacted their means of earning a living. She said that the structural adjustment or austerity measures in particular, which developing countries, including Guyana, have implemented because of the necessity of sourcing financing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other such institutions have hit the areas where this group of women are concentrated (e.g. the public sector)” (Stabroek News 2013). Desouza and Andaiye also pointed out that Guyana’s government maintains a very neoliberal outlook that places more emphasis on foreign direct investment than it does on grassroots issues and needs.

....All they concerned with is [what] the IMF dictates about macro-fundamentals, and um what there's a lot of foolish terms that they like to use, but the first consideration is absolutely not the majority of the population which is the poor. Yeah they will listen to the private sector....that's the history because the private sector I suppose lends money and um is able to influence a number of economic things. But they're not going to listen to the trade unions, I mean their operations are about essentially closing out trade unions and the push for foreign direct investment is about, is a push which will mean decimating the trade unions (Desouza, interview).

When asked about her thoughts on lobbying for a 50:50 quota, Desouza's change in facial expression makes her disillusionment ten times more apparent; "the energy to get the parties segregated into the 33% was just wasted energy---they are not serving anybody except the parties" (Desouza, interview). Andaiye shared the sentiment in her interview. Another interview respondent who has served in parliament since 1997, prior to the enactment of the quota system, stated that, "I don't think it has brought much change, I think it depends on how a woman asserts herself in parliament. It is still very much a male dominated field, but change will depend on the strength of the women, because you can go in there to make up the number and just be another number" (Lawrence, interview). Parliamentarian Lawrence also mentioned that there are many female parliamentarians who have been in parliament for years, but have never brought a motion, never been vocal, and never introduced a bill. According to Lawrence,

....you can be there, you can be present but unless you are assertive, you can be used like a pack of cards, they shuffle you around, they tell you what to talk about and all of that {...} it's a sad thing when you have women who are placed there to represent us, but they just allow themselves to be trampled on (Lawrence, interview).

The current opposition's shuffling of female parliamentarians down the hierarchy has recently raised concerns. In fact, Minister of Education, Priya Manickchand, spoke out against the opposition sidelining and demoting their female MP's to the backbench. Minister Manickchand made specific reference to the demotion of APNU parliamentarian, Vanessa Kissoon, who was demoted to the last row of the opposition's twenty-six seats, and who apparently was only made aware of her new seating arrangement when a parliamentary officer informed her on the day of her arrival at the parliament building. Minister Manickchand stood up in parliament during a debate on the Recording of Court Proceedings Bill and said,

....for persons who are myopically saying that I should concern myself with this side of the House, I want to suggest that the cause of women in Guyana, the cause of women across the world, still has to be a united front...every little demotion like that seen here really dents our progress (Chabrol 2014).

Shortly after Ms. Kissoon's demotion, letters appeared in popular newspapers denouncing the move. In a letter titled "Vanesssa Kissoon was Treated with Disrespect by the Decision-Makers in APNU", the writer wrote,

....what I have is a profound difficulty with the way young Member of Parliament Vanessa Kissoon was treated at the last sitting of parliament. Ms Vanessa Kissoon is a sitting

member of the National Executive Committee of the Guyana Youth and Student Movement (GYSM), youth arm of the People's National Congress and a Member of Parliament of seven years of distinguished service. Thus by virtue of her office she should have been granted at the minimum, the common courtesy of a notification of the change in her seating arrangements" (Currie 2014).

Despite the public shock at her sudden demotion and despite the solidarity and empathy expressed by fellow female parliamentarians, Kisson only stated: "where I sit does not matter. I have been elected to serve the Guyanese people...and in particular the people of Region Ten...and that's what matters (Chabrol 2014). The circumstances surrounding her sudden demotion remain unclear, but it is clear that party leaders in the APNU demonstrated an intentional act of disrespect against Kisson by failing to even inform her of her demotion prior to her arrival at the House. Regardless of whether or not her demotion was based on party discipline or on administrative purposes, it highlights the powerlessness that Kisson was forced to confront. During a Guyana Times Interview, Ms. Kisson did admit that she was "not sure about the protocols that would govern reassignments of seats in the APNU coalition and that she was not aware either whether it was a decision that should have been communicated formally" (Guyana Times 2014). Perhaps Volda Lawrence's words can be taken literally: "you can be used like a pack of cards, they shuffle you around" (Lawrence, interview).

Regardless of what seat they hold in parliament, Karen Desouza's description of Guyana's female parliamentarians as distanced from the struggles and cries of grassroots women points to how loosely the term "representation" can be used. It also reveals some of the shortcomings in the critical mass theory. Women in parliament are not a homogenous group and are not all focused on pursuing the same social issues, whether relating to women or not. Women in parliament are differentiated from each other in terms of race, class, socio-economic status, education and expertise, interests, and political party agendas. They also have different relations with men in parliament and different notions of ideal gender relations in politics and society.

Perhaps increased numbers of women in parliament make it discouraging for these female politicians to form caucuses or supportive coalitions because of the fear of reinforcing masculinist perceptions of women's solidarities as "too feminist", "radical", "disloyal", and "out of place". Several respondents for this chapter supported this assertion, stating they did not feel that women in parliament were generally supportive of each other, particularly women across party lines. As mentioned previously, several respondents in fact stated that women come across as more hostile than men towards other women. Bitterness and competition perpetuated

by forces within the various parties due to a long history of racial politics and ethnic division dating back to Guyana's pre-independence period, combined with differences among women, may contribute to this hostility and act as a barrier to women forming alliances among themselves. Another important point is that political parties are essentially the gatekeepers when it comes to selection and nomination of candidates to political posts. Therefore, women occupying seats in parliament tend to demonstrate most of their loyalty and focus on advancing the agendas of their respective parties, rather than pursuing relationships with women outside of their parties. Party discipline is also viewed as a major constraint that may prevent women from pursuing policy reforms relating to women, or from building relationships with other political women outside of their respective parties. In fact, many people have accused women who come into term under the quota system as being selected based on their blind loyalty to their often male party seniors. During an interview for this chapter, APNU parliamentarian Cheryl Sampson stated that party discipline often forces women to keep quiet on issues.

....Take for instance when the president "divorced" his wife. It was not until the separation happened that we realized that the marriage was not legal. Everyone was under the impression that the marriage was legal. She did not benefit. She was denied access to resources. There was no fair division. She was humiliated and treated unfairly. And none of the women on government side could say anything. I talk to Indra. I mean Indra said 'Cheryl there are certain things you just can't say' (Sampson, interview).

Another respondent stated that "the sad thing about parliament is that you are there on a party card....so even if you are inclined to push a particular issue, it is always the party that comes first" (Lawrence, interview). Desouza agreed.

....the politics are very bound up in party domination and women in parliament are essentially subject to the party....as far as I am aware they certainly do not appear to hold any agenda which is at the service of women or grassroots women....the very last organizing of women in parliament I think was 1996 this is to get the Domestic Violence Act passed. I don't know that women in parliament have organized together since then (Desouza, interview).

Cheryl Sampson, politically active since 1978, agreed that women have not really caucused in recent years. "It doesn't happen", she said. "Apart from the domestic violence bill most of the women's bills came before....during the PNC years. That's when most of the caucusing occurred. We talk....I talk to Indra, I talk to Gail....but you have to go along party lines" (Sampson, interview).

Respondents also expressed that legislation presents barriers for women interested in speaking out or voting on issues that may not necessarily be in line with party priorities.

According to Desouza, "...if the party is unhappy with your positions in parliament then you can be recalled. So even if a woman were inclined to go outside of the party directive to take a position, I don't know that they would because the primacy of the party is just extremely strong" (Desouza, interview).

Most, if not all of the respondents agreed that there is a need for greater collaboration among women in parliament. Most also acknowledge that because women in parliament do not function as a unit, they allow other issues to be placed in front of women's issues. This lack of engagement and solidarity among women is detrimental to really pushing forward agendas relating to women. An unfortunate result of this has been citizen disengagement and disillusionment. Women in Guyana, particularly grassroots women, do not feel as though their parliamentarians represent their rights and needs. In March 2012, grassroots women picketed outside of Guyana's parliament buildings calling on female parliamentarians to start represent the interests of grassroots women. Spokeswoman for Red Thread Joy Marcus told a Demerara Waves news reporter that,

....we want to call the women parliamentarians to account....we don't feel that they are speaking on our behalf as grassroots women....While we know that parliamentarians are raising other issues of accountability and transparency, they're supposed to also be consulting with us as grassroots women since we are responsible for them being in parliament (Isles 2012).

In this context, Marcus was referring to old age pension, public assistance, and minimum wage.

Indeed representation is not only a means of ensuring inclusion and participation, but it also requires the responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the constituents, who expect them to reflect and promote their needs and ideas. Citizens repeatedly express this sentiment regarding the distance and unaccountability of parliamentarians to the people, Recently, Guyanese women particularly criticized their female parliamentarians for failing to adequately address the issue of domestic violence in Guyana.¹² Female parliamentarians also came under tremendous criticism when reports surfaced that party officials wanted more time to study the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women before signing. In a Stabroek News feature article, women's

¹² See "Do Government Leaders Have the Will, Capacity, and Expertise to Address Domestic Violence?" *Stabroek News*, Letter to the Editor, August 9, 2013; "P. Ramlall, Parliamentary Performance Disappointing," *Stabroek News*, Letter to the Editor, www.starbroeknews.com; "Red Thread Urges Women MPs to be More Accountable to Press for Livable Income," *Stabroek News*, March 16 2012, www.starbroeknews.com; S. Ramroop Are Guyana's Political Parties Scared of Gender Equality?" *Stabroek News*, June 10 2011.

rights activist Stella Ramsroop wrote “I can guarantee you this. As long we have to wait for the political parties of Guyana to decide they are against gender discrimination and are willing to be held accountable to the standards of true gender equality, the women of this country will continue to live in fear” (Ramroop 2011).

When young grassroots women feel female parliamentarians neglect their needs, it becomes more difficult for these women to view them as role models, and makes political positions and sites of representation unattractive. Guyana’s quota system does not play a significant role in encouraging or empowering women to enter into politics. Many of the interview respondents for this chapter agreed that people are disillusioned. Politics and parliament is simply not an attractive playing field, particularly for women. Karen Desouza expressed that parliament has become a very discouraging space.

...I don't know that you can actually feel as though you're changing something, and I believe that by and large women are very focused on the immediate and concrete, and their survival issues. So I mean the main attraction might be the parliamentary salary but um, you know, you got to do a lot of fighting within the party to get there (Desouza, interview).

Other respondents agreed that the quota system has done little to encourage women to pursue or follow politics. The constant bickering, fighting, and lack of consensus among parliamentarians in general have led many Guyanese to become fed up and disengaged from the political process. Some female parliamentarians interview respondents from the opposition, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, complained of the lack of respect and regard they received by citizens, police and government officials. Ms. Vanessa Kissoon recalled how she was harassed and abused by police during a protest in Linden during her term as a MP. “When I think of how I was treated during the Linden protest, and how I was harassed by the police, I really feel disrespected. In other countries parliamentarians are treated with respect. Now I don’t want people to go around praising me, but if you’re not driving a fancy vehicle, sometimes you even have a problem getting into the parliament compound itself (Kissoon, interview). Parliamentarian Eula Marcello shared the same thoughts on the level of respect that she receives as a female parliamentarian. Ms. Kissoon, Ms. Marcello, and Valerie Lowe and Kathy Hughes of the AFC all spoke openly about the lack of resources allocated to female parliamentarians in the opposition. Ms. Kissoon, who is a teacher and single mother of six children, explained that while many perceive parliamentary work as part time, it really amounts to full time work with very little benefits. Other female parliamentarian respondents explained that they are not given a sufficient stipend to cover research, office space, and most

of the expenses that result from parliamentary work. This creates significant barriers. Jennifer Wade, member of the parliamentary opposition, community leader and former teacher, also highlighted that it is extremely expensive for her to travel from Berbice to Georgetown for parliamentary meetings, and she often has to spend the night in Georgetown because meetings run late. Similarly, Africo Selman who is a young APNU female parliamentarian, a part-time tutor at the University of Guyana, and a community leader, stated that general public believes parliamentarians are well off financially. However, Selman and many of the other female parliamentarian respondents state they are financially burdened, and would like to see an increase in resources required for them to do their job efficiently and effectively. Annette Ferguson, also a young APNU female parliamentarian, stated

...even before becoming a parliamentarian I knew about the challenges, I knew that parliamentarians didn't receive salaries but only stipends. I think that parliamentarians deserve to get a reasonable salary in the Caribbean....in the more developed countries they have a better system where parliamentarians are employed on full time basis. I mean you are representing people....you need to cater to family. You also have to cater to yourself....there are only twenty four hours (Ferguson, interview).

It is also important to note that outside of parliament, female parliamentarians, particularly those within the opposition, earn significantly less than male politicians. With the exception of Deborah Backer, Amna Ally, and Cathy Hughes, all of the female parliamentarians among the opposition work as school teachers. However, teaching salaries in Guyana remain very low, teachers are on a mostly part time basis, and salaries remain uncompetitive with respect to salaries offered in the local private sector (Chapter 18, Guyana National Development Strategy). On the other hand, the majority of male parliamentarians work as economists, doctors and lawyers, with many owning their own practices. It is also interesting to note that Cathy Hughes who is considered middle class, and is also self employed, has admitted that her role in parliament has taken a toll on her financially as it requires her to spend many hours away from her business (Hughes, interview).

Proponents of the quota system often argue that one of the positive externalities that spring from the quota systems is the “role model effect”. According to Pande and Forde, “mandated female leaders may serve as role models for young aspiring women....role models can therefore show the returns or payoffs to a particular type of person achieving a certain position (Pande and Forde 2011). However, in the context of Guyana, the general public does not view the returns or payoffs of political work as attractive, and therefore does not inspire young women to enter the field. Poor or grassroots women are particularly discouraged from

entering into politics. As Karen Desouza pointed out, parliament is not an attractive space for “a woman that has to take care of her children and provide for them as well” (Desouza, 2013). One respondent pointed out that she has to pay for her own gasoline when doing political outreach work and made reference to the high cost of gasoline in comparison to the small stipend that she receives. She explained that the lack of resources provided to parliamentarians adds financial pressure to their lives and makes it more difficult to reach objectives. Middle and upper class female parliamentarians also find it difficult managing their practices, careers and parliamentary duties. Dr. Vindhya Persaud of the PPP said that she had a very difficult time campaigning during elections and working in the department of surgery at the hospital. She said that she was eventually forced to leave the hospital and switch to a private practice due to her hectic parliamentary schedule. Another self-employed female parliamentarian respondent expressed that her business suffered significantly as a result of her demanding role as a parliamentarian. Female parliamentarians respondents with families admitted that parliament is not very accommodating to women who have families. Dr. Persaud also agreed that parliamentary structures and processes are not accommodating to women with families, particularly to women with small children. She stated,

...we feel that the hours that parliamentarians put in, the hours of the sittings, are very long compared to other parliaments around the world. It does not cater to a woman who p had a new child and is breast feeding or have small children at home. It is difficult, there is no nursery facility or play area, and even if you do want to bring your child to parliament, there are no breast-feeding facilities. There are a number of things that I feel should be available to women on the parliamentary compound. In addition to this, time off from parliament! (Persaud interview).

Regardless of other responsibilities, women must sit through the long hours in parliament because of the pressure to be present for the vote. These challenges have not created much of a “role model effect” or “aspirations effect” among political women in Guyana.

Interview respondents did not believe that the quota system did much to change gender stereotypes or discrimination. In fact, some female respondents from the AFC expressed that even within parliament their political capacities and competencies were judged. Some respondents felt that they were at one time or another discriminated against or treated differently because of either their socio-economic background, level of education, age, ethnicity, or even dress. Several female parliamentarians interviewed also admitted to being treated as though they were not “good enough” to be there when they first arrived. This is consistent with

Pande and Ford (2011) who argued that colleagues or constituents of women who are selected through quotas may stereotype them as less qualified, which may nullify the gains of having a female leader. For example, former AFC parliamentarian, Chantalle Haynes recalled an unpleasant experience that she had where a colleague insulted her intelligence.

...this was a guy, a man who did not seem older than me, Khemraj spoke for our side, and he remarked something, something about my learned colleague. He was referring to me and the man said "Ha! You called that learned! That! (Haynes, interview).

Ms. Haynes also explained that other female parliamentarians judged her based on her age, her weight and her choice of attire. Additionally, rumors spread throughout parliament that she was having an affair with the head of the party, Raphael Trotman. Mr. Trotman was also accused of appointing Ms. Haynes out of self interest and sexual pursuit. In March 2013, the *Guyana Times* published an article about the AFC gaze in which the editor argued that there was evident and disgusting male gaze emanating from the AFC. The editor further argued that the party essentially promoted young, thin women. The article stated,

...the feminist movement exposed the pervasive means which kept women in subjugation. First, there was the view that women couldn't do certain jobs, and if there were no men around, then men would decide which women could get the job. We saw this 'male gaze' operating in the AFC from the very beginning. Even though their founding members were from three separate political parties, Sheila Holder, the female of the group, never qualified for the 'rotational leadership'. Did goat bite her? No. It was just the "AFC gaze". The gaze was exposed over the Gomattie Singh issue – when the grassroots-oriented woman was bypassed for the more 'suave' Chantelle Smith. This decision was made by the male Raphael Trotman who 'explained' condescendingly that Smith was his 'friend'. So this latest blow-up over AFC's Charrandass Persaud deriding a female doctor as 'fat' is not a flash in the pan. The sexist gaze is deeply imbedded in the psyche of the AFC leaders. Women are just sex objects to satisfy the fantasies of people like Charrandass as to what they should look like. Women should starve themselves into anorexic twigs (Guyana Times 2013).

The comment on “anorexic twigs” can directly be drawn to Ms. Hayes who is very thin. Young APNU parliamentarian Africo Selman has also had similar experiences. Shortly after she was elected to parliament, rumors spread that she was sleeping with someone in the party. Popular political blogger, Imran Khan wrote: “I know of Selman only because I had seen video footage on NCN of a very poor presentation she made in the National Assembly and had cause to enquire who she was only to be told that she is so and so's lil girlfriend” (Khan 2011). Indeed, much of the comparative literature on quotas makes reference to the potential for quotas to

create a demeaning belief that “quota women” are undeserving or under-qualified. In the literature, this has been identified as a “label effect” (Chowdhury 2002; Dahlerup 2006). There is therefore more pressure for women to prove their capabilities and competencies than men. This could perhaps be one of the reasons why women are less pushy when it comes to women’s agendas. Their lack of action could be seen as a means of escaping gender role entrapment.

Conclusion

While Guyana’s electoral quota system has had a positive effect in terms of increasing the numerical and descriptive representation of women in politics, it has not had a significant impact on the creation of more women-friendly legislation and policy outcomes. Guyana’s quota system has not encouraged women to caucus and meet more among each other on issues relating to women. The two most memorable moments when female politicians coordinated their efforts and energies in parliament occurred prior to the enactment of the quota system, facilitated by CARICOM model legislations and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. Despite the presence of a quota, women’s issues are still not treated with priority or represented sufficiently. Female parliamentarians are more willing to act in the interest of their respective parties than to act in the interest of each other. At the end of the day, party politics triumphs. Women politicians under the quota system in Guyana also have not significantly changed the legislative and policy agendas. While there is the assumption that quotas enhance opportunities and possibilities for female legislators to represent women’s interests, the assumption ignores the fact that not all women are interested in being champions of women’s rights and interests. Most of the respondents in this study expressed that female parliamentarians in Guyana were not gender conscious with regards to crafting political decisions targeted at assisting vulnerable women, or in pursuing and demanding the enforcement of legislations related to the economic and physical protection of women. Additionally, they have not demonstrated gender consciousness with regards to openly promoting a sense of female solidarities. Interview respondents who are activists argued that female parliamentarians did not act on behalf of women’s interests. While it is true that since the quota system, female parliamentarians have introduced and supported bills and policies that address women’s issues, this cannot be seen as a direct correlation to the quota system, as this also occurred before it was implemented and on a greater scale. Additionally, most of the women-friendly bills that were introduced after the enactment of the quota system, are considered to be the “brainchildren” of one or two very

gender conscious parliamentarians, and did not result from any significant coming together or combined efforts of female parliamentarians.

There is also no direct correlation between Guyana's quota system and the presence of women at the top of state hierarchy, as Guyana has had a female president and quite a few female ministers prior to the quota enactment. The quota system also has not changed the climate of gender relations and hierarchies in Guyanese politics. A few respondents expressed concern that women in Guyana's parliament are typically thrown into backbench positions or soft politics related to family- and children-focused positions. This concern epitomizes perhaps one of the major challenges that women in parliament must have: on the one hand, women who embrace what is often considered as masculine or male dominated policy areas are accused of failing to act on behalf of women. On the other hand, women who occupy women and family focused policy areas are accused of perpetuating stereotypes about gender norms. Deputy Speaker of the House Deborah Backer expressed that she approached this sort of challenge by adopting a public profile that is more expansive, and also by attempting to change the language from "woman" to "gender" (Backer, interview). Likewise, head of the Women's Affairs Bureau, Ms Hymwattie Lagan, also stated that "we need to start looking at gender in totality. It is not a new phenomenon, but people see it as a new phenomenon. They think it's a women thing, but people have to understand exactly what gender is all about and how to mainstream it in their work" (Lagan 2013). Head of the Men's Affairs Bureau, Patrick Findlay, also agrees that there needs to be a shift from the focus on just women to that of gender in order to address the broader question of relations shaped by masculinities and femininities values. Perhaps, understandings of the quota system focus too much on increasing the voice of women through numbers, rather than promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming supported by men and women. Understandings of the quota system seem to be deeply embedded in a Women in Development (WID) approach, which could be difficult, particularly in an environment where the WID approach generates hostility and frustration among males who often feel ostracized and intimidated by legislations, programs, and policies that neglect men¹³.

The quota system also has not generated significant strides in women's willingness or abilities to represent women's issues more. Women have not been able to influence more women-friendly processes, structures, and still face challenges accessing government resources for women-friendly programs. Programs benefiting women in Guyana remain significantly underfunded, with the common excuse being that the government "can only do so much".

¹³ In popular discourse Women in Development (WID) relates to a wide range of activities concerning women in development, which focused on enhancing women's productive roles and challenging subordination through economic empowerment.

Recently, citizens criticized the government for spending more than \$170 million USD of tax payer dollars on two projects that are not a priority. These projects included the building of a Marriot Hotel, and the expansion of the international airport. Prior to the budget announcement, Red Thread sent letters to *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News* pleading with Guyana's parliamentarians, and more specifically to the female parliamentarians, to analyze the budget as though they were women on starvation incomes. The women argued that a country's approach to development should start with raising the standard of living for poor people (Stabroek News 2012). During the 2013 budget talks, Guyana's shadow finance minister read Red Thread's letter in hopes of convincing the government to lower the value added tax rate, which Red Thread argued placed a burden on the poor. However, attempts at lowering the VAT rate were unsuccessful, and it continues to remain at 16 percent (Stabroek News, 2013). Female politicians in Guyana post-quota also have not been able to influence or transform political practices, such as meeting times and long sittings that often tend to ignore some women's roles as mothers and caregivers. Additionally, no facilities in parliament exist to accommodate mothers with children.

Overall this research reveals how difficult it is for female parliamentarians to navigate the masculinist space of politics in Guyana. On the one hand, it appears that women remain silent on issues and concerns relating to women, perhaps out of fear of being excluded or ostracized from the party and replaced by more loyal and disciplined women, and perhaps out of fear of being criticized by men as "weak" or "needy". Indeed men and women both believe that women enter politics aware of the disadvantages that come from structural biases, but they put up with these biases to prove that they can cope just the same as the men. According to Keith Scott,

....you cannot expect accommodation. You can't on the one hand claim you want equality, and claim you want one third and 50% representation, and at the same time claim privilege. If you make up your mind that this is your goal....to do something for society, everything else comes second, whether you are a man or a woman. I do not support the fact that you are supposed to be accommodating to women. My mother was 24/7 politics, and I personally suffered, but it was part of the job. (Scott, interview).

On the other hand, failing to address structural biases and failing to actively adopt a women's rights approach, female politicians risk criticism by the women's movement for helping to perpetuate inequality in government structures and in governmental effects. The women's rights movement operates under the assumption

that these women should in fact challenge their parties and put themselves at risk for the wider feminist agenda. Joy Marcus, a representative of Red Thread, told *Stabroek News*,

....While we know that all parliamentarians are raising other issues of accountability and transparency and all of that, they're supposed to also be consulting with us as grassroots women, as poor people, since we are responsible for them being in parliament (Isles 2012).

Guyana's quota system has not encouraged or advanced the willingness and enthusiasm for more women to participate in politics. In general, parliament in Guyana is increasingly being seen as a very discouraging space by both men and women due to the constant fighting, slow pace, and perceived inability to impact change and enhance the lives of people. Despite Guyana's high representation of women in parliament, women are significantly underrepresented in top level private sector positions in the county, and work mostly in very low paying jobs. The commendable statistics of women in parliament in the country, has therefore not translated outside of the legislature. Female politicians have not been able to transform and create more spaces for women in other areas in which they are marginalized. An implication of this is the perception that women have only been able to advance in politics due to special treatment, and not based on competency or any real or tangible ideological shifts about women's political roles.

This research, therefore has not found any direct correlations between numerical representation and Guyanese female parliamentarians' substantive representation. In fact, this research reveals that the emphasis of the quota system deals with numbers rather than challenging or transforming masculinist structures and ideologies of gender power relations. Founding member of Red Thread and women's rights activist, Bonita Harris stated

....with regards to parliament, what we need is not women in parliament, we need women and men who will fight for women's issues. We need women, who are conscious, otherwise it makes no sense if the women are thinking in the same way that men are thinking, and if they do not place women's issues at the top. To me, numbers is not the focus. We need to improve the percentage of women that can champion women's rights (Harris, interview).

At its core, the quota system emerges as a feminist strategy aimed at creating space for women and promoting feminist transformations within the political sphere. However, Guyana's quota system actually falls short of this because it has resulted in an increased war between

masculinities and femininities, as well as between party expectations and expectations from women's rights activists. This research also found that masculinism is so deeply entrenched in party structures, hierarchy and leadership, that women have not effectively been able to negotiate it for various reasons, including lack of personal gender consciousness or for fear of jeopardizing their positions.

Finally, perhaps the most interesting finding that came out of this research is that a women's movement is absent in Guyana. Bonita Harris stated it best,

....We don't have a women's rights movement. A women's rights movement involves women rising up as a body and moving. We don't have that. We have some organizations and persons speaking out on cross cutting issues, but we have not been able to organize women as women (Harris, interview).

Jocelyn Dow, stalwart and founding member of Red Thread expressed her disillusionment and tiredness with regards to feminist struggle, and social and political outcomes in Guyana. She urged that the only way forward needs to involve new, young, and visionary women. Young women in Guyana, however, are not encouraged or motivated to become involved in politics because as Desouza pointed out, they are focused on immediate rewards as well as on survival issues. Harris believes that the only way to move forward and change the culture is to instill gender consciousness in children, while Desouza believes that change will only come with organizing and mobilizing people. Indeed the absence of a vibrant, relevant, and strong feminist movement makes it difficult to really challenge masculinist structures. Perhaps it is too much to expect that female parliamentarians can, on their own, change discourses of gender and power. In this context, Guyana's biggest tragedy is the absence of a women's rights movement. Effective change can only occur if Guyana's representatives in parliament engage and are constantly being engaged by members of autonomous, but united women's organizations in civil society. Additionally, this research suggests that change also depends on the presence of a vibrant civil society where women's activism and mobilization are strong enough to pressure political leaders, as well as to enhance the negotiating power of women in parliament. Female parliamentarians, along with civil society groups, need to collectively and powerfully negotiate with political parties and hierarchies in order to really represent the feminist agenda. It is clear that there is a serious breakdown in the relationship between governance, social movements, and civil society, and this breakdown has been largely responsible for the inability of the quota system to meet the objective of advancing gender justice in the

country. Frazer stated that, “feminism as a political movement has engaged with politics and widened the scope of political action in practically and theoretically significant ways” (Frazer 1998, 58). Guyana needs this sort of force constantly and proactively engaging with both male and female parliamentarians in order to produce real and tangible change.

One positive result of Guyana’s quota system includes perhaps better engagement among men and women. The increase in numbers of women in parliament has forced men to engage and negotiate with women more than they had to when there were fewer women in parliament. For example, more women in parliament translated into more women appointed to parliamentary select committees, which resulted in more women contributing to the design, oversight, and consideration of bills and state affairs. This sort of interaction is increasingly transforming men’s attitudes and beliefs about women, and is also challenging social norms. For example, Keith Scott mentioned that women in the select committees that he sits on are strong enough to influence the culture and decisions of the committees. The quota system has also challenged the idea of parliament as a “man’s space” by giving women greater opportunity to access and negotiate within that space. For example, APNU Parliamentarian Lurlene Nestor said that as a “young parliamentarian I feel that some felt that I needed to prove myself. There was a prevailing view which, at the time, which seemed to suggest to a young female that politics is a “big boys sport”. This notion I had to dispel in my mind in order to make me more confident and competent in my role {...} There are a number of challenges that come with being a female parliamentarian. The first one is being able to defy the notion that politics is a “man’s game” or is the business of the man. Once you are able to mentally knock this notion out of your psyche you are then pressured to prove yourself as a legitimate political contender. Efforts will have to be made to break down certain barriers which exist as obstacles for the female. The struggle to remain competitive and relevant never ends and one has to decide whether she continues to work to promote the ideas and image of her male counterpart or whether she will begin to focus on carving her own political destiny.” (Nestor, 2013).

The inclusion of assertive and authoritative women has left men with no choice but to sit up and listen; and whether or not female parliamentarians perpetuate substantive representation, their presence alone is slowly helping to influence a transformation in the patriarchal political culture that exists in Guyana.

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