

**Address to the Graduation Ceremony of the Women in Politics
Programme (Cohort II) of the
National Women's Commission, Belize¹**

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Introduction

It is an honour for me to address you at the end of your programme of Study on Women and Politics. I have seen the content of the programme and it must have been a very important learning experience for you. I recall being quite surprised when the new Belize government was announced and there were no women included so I am pleased that the National Women's Commission, whose role it is to monitor such situations rose to the challenge to initiate such a programme. Congratulations on this wonderful programme and we look forward to good things from the graduates in the future.

In my presentation this morning, I reflect on women's historic contribution to social and political change and rights in the Caribbean, calling for a wider understanding of the concept of politics. I look at efforts similar to yours in the region to prepare women for political office and conclude by reflecting that being in power is good but not enough. The issue is how women can make a difference when we do attain political office.

In 1901 this early plea for citizenship was made by Catherine McKenzie of the Pan-Africanist organisation The Peoples Convention of Jamaica:

¹ This presentation drew heavily from an earlier publication – Rhoda Reddock, Reflections on Gender and Democracy in the Anglophone Caribbean: Historical and Contemporary Considerations, SEPHIS-CODESRIA Lecture, January 2004.

Under the disadvantages of her sex, and of the peculiar social circumstances surrounding her, she makes the same hard fight for her support which a man makes, and just as much is expected of her as of a man. She must provide for her household, train and educate her children, and respond to the calls of duty in every direction. She must bear and discharge a citizen's responsibility to the State. She must pay her taxes, and the heavy "surcharges" on the tax bills...She is regarded as (and she really is) a distinct individual, an accountable entity.

Her house tax and water rates are not remitted on account of her sex, and she is required to conform more strictly than man to the standard of conventional respectability. What is expected of man is expected of her, with her it is either all this, or moral and social ruin....On what principle of justice then, is she called upon to obey laws which she has no part in making, and to which she has never given her consent, either in person, or by her chosen representatives? Is it not clear that the denial to her of the social and political rights accorded to man, under the same circumstances, is a flagrant denial of the principle that "taxation without representation is tyranny" and that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed". This is an argument to which there is no answer...(cited in Vassell,1993:19).

Feminist scholars of modern (western-derived) political systems have sought to explain their male-dominant character. Chowdhury and Nelson (1994), describe this "maleness" of politics as having two aspects. First there is the traditional fatherly characteristic (father of the nation) which sets up patron-client relationships which in turn reproduce the dependent relationship between father and son within patriarchal family structures. Such a system bestows much material reward on 'sons' but in return requires economic obligation and reciprocity.

The second characteristic which they identify is rooted in "fraternalism" that is the solidarity of brothers. They state:

To some extent all formal representative governments are descendants (through colonialism, reinvention or imitation) of British Parliamentary experiments with shared power and of the French Revolution's initial parliamentary impulses. Both of these political systems emphasized the brotherhood of men. In the British Parliamentary experience, the king grudgingly shared his exclusive power first with a brotherly band of powerful landowners and later with rich commercial entrepreneurs. In the French experience the power of the king - and the king himself were swept away in a tide of what comes to be understood as the fraternity of male citizenship"(Choudhury and Nelson,1994:16)

Throughout the post-colonial world, the large-scale participation of women in nationalist movements has been well chronicled (Jayawardena,1982;Mba,1982); Many of the male nationalist leaders of the post-war era recognized the importance of mobilizing women for the cause of Independence. Writing on Ghana, Kamene Okonjo noted the following:

Kwame Nkrumah realized from the very start of the nationalist movement that women if effectively mobilized could constitute an enormous power bloc for his party - The Convention Peoples Party founded in 1949. He made every effort to secure their support especially as he found that women were useful in the fight against colonialism. Women were already organised into market women's associations, singing bands, dance societies and various other voluntary units. (Okonjo, 1994:288)

In the Caribbean, nationalist political leaders such as Eric Williams himself learned much from this experience and on occasion spoke publicly of the role of 'market women' in Ghana in bringing Nkrumah to power and of the women generally in the success of the Peoples' National Party of Jamaica.

Other scholars highlight the independent anti-colonial action of women outside of male mobilization using traditional sanctions against men, for example in sub-Saharan Africa. The examples of the Aba Women's Riots of Nigeria in the 1920s and the 1958 *anlu* by Kom women in the Bamenda Grassfields of the British Cameroons is sometimes used. Some scholars however cast serious doubt over the autochthonous character of these events suggesting instead that in these actions as in most cases, women were used as the frontline for the political advancement of men (Konde,1990:1,3).

Nini Emma Mba in her study *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, noted that in the Nigerian political parties the women of the women's organisations tended to be much more loyal to their leadership than the men to theirs (Mba, 1982:293). She noted that in their separate women's organisations women had much more autonomy and women leaders commanded the allegiance and support of their members. When these leaders became part of political parties, their community support disintegrated and their support was limited to women members of their own party(Mba, 1982:293) In both colonial and pre-colonial Nigeria, Mba argued, women's approach to 'politics' and 'public office' took on a specific character because of their perception of themselves as "pacifiers" and "purifiers" who:

...were expected to concern themselves with the moral character and economic well-being of their families and communities and protect their interests, but they were not expected to be "political", - that is, for public office, or positions of authority. Rather they were to defend those who were then in authority, provided their own interests were being protected. Hence their political actions were limited to protecting their communities from what they saw as political, economic or moral threats-from whatever quarter, including government. When governments or parties were perceived to be advancing their communities interests, women were their most loyal supporters (Mba, 1982:299)

Similar trends can be identified for the Anglophone Caribbean, where women's loyalty to male leadership has proved to be much more reliable than that of males who, more often than women, see themselves as successors to the political leadership. In an earlier paper I noted that Eric Williams as patriarch of the Peoples National Movement in Trinidad and Tobago derived much loyalty and support from grassroots women, to an extent never received from male members. These women saw it as their duty to be loyal and saw party patronage in terms of short-term jobs for themselves and their children as their just rewards. At the same time because of their sex and class they knew they could never be members of the fraternity but never seriously sought to challenge this (Reddock,1998:44).

The Early Women's Movements and the Struggle for Political Rights

Regional studies have revealed a rich history of struggle and organisation by women both in women's movements and other social movements such as nationalist and labour organisations.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the majority of people, women and men of African and Asian descent and indigenous peoples did not have the franchise and could not compete for political office. In 1891 electoral reforms in Guyana lowered property and income qualifications and diversified the 'racio-ethnic' composition of the still limited electorate but women were still excluded until well into the 1920s. The granting of the vote to women in Britain after World War I, gave an added impetus to women in the British colonies. Although rejected by conservative politicians, it did gain the support of liberals and black nationalists, male reformers who wished to be on the side of progress. In Jamaica in July 1919, the franchise was extended to women over twenty-five who earned income of £50 or paid taxes of over £2 per year. Men could vote at the age of twenty-one if their annual income was £40 per year. Women still could not be candidates(French and Fordsmith,1984).

In Crown Colony Trinidad and Tobago in 1924, a new constitution introduced elected officials to the Legislative Council for the first time. The franchise was extended to men over twenty-one who understood spoken English². Property, income and residence qualifications also existed. With this change only six(6) % of the population became eligible to vote in the first elections after 128 years of British colonial rule. Women still could not be candidates (Brereton, 1981:166).

To a greater extent than their male counterparts, women were denied the franchise through unattainable voting requirements. In some colonies, the age at which women could vote was higher than that of men and in others, women were barred from seeking elected office in the Legislative Council until as late as the 1950s (Senior,1991:152). The experience is varied though, for in St. Vincent, women received the same voting rights as men as late as 1951. In Trinidad, universal adult suffrage was obtained in 1946, but women could not be candidates until 1951. Not surprisingly, the struggle for political rights was a major focus of the early women's movement in the region.

Transition to Independence

In the era of transition to self-government and independence, from the 1950's to the 1970's, the women's movement in the Caribbean was configured by nationalist ideologies and political positioning. In 1956, on British insistence a short-lived British West Indian federation was established and in April that year, a Caribbean Women's Conference was held in Port of Spain, on the instigation of Audrey Jeffers, aimed at forming a Caribbean Women's Association (CWA) as a counterpart organisation to the Federation.

²This was an obvious effort to exclude a small number of Indian property owners who were just emerging.

Among the stated aims of this organisation was to: provide the women of the Caribbean with a representative national organization dedicated to the principle that women must play a vital role in the development and life of the Caribbean community; to encourage women's active participation in all aspects of social, economic and political life in the Caribbean and to work for the removal of the disabilities affecting women, whether legal, economic or social. In 1958, the first Biennial conference of the CWA was held in the then British Guiana and the second in May 1960, in Barbados (Comma-Maynard,1971:89).

Notably at this time was the emergence of women's arms of the major political parties in the region, women were important members of the new nationalist political parties which were emerging in this era, providing a solid block of loyal support which however, was seldom translated into political office or power (Reddock,1998). In the 1970s, women were also involved in the radical challenge to these nationalist governments such as the Black Power movements of the 1970s and the socialist and New Left movements which accompanied or followed in its wake. What was clear at that time just as much as now is that the women activists were up to date with developments in the international movement and were keenly interested in these developments.

The New Women's Movement and the Emergence of 'Women' as a Political Constituency

The emergence of second-wave feminism internationally also had its impact in the Caribbean region. On the one hand it caused older women activists of the 1950s, many now aligned with nationalist political parties to once more become concerned with feminist issues; it also stimulated a new generation of women activists, many coming out of critiques of the New left and socialist movements of the 1970s, while through the influence of the United Nations Women and Development programmes, governments and quasi-governmental organisations at national and regional level were encouraged to establish "national machineries for women".

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of feminist-oriented organisations emerged throughout the region. Examples include - SISTREN Women's Theatre Collective in Jamaica, in 1977, Concerned Women for Progress in Trinidad, 1980; The Belize Organisation for Women and Development (BOWAND), The Committee for the Development of Women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (CDW), Women Working for Social Progress, Trinidad, Sisi No Dada, in St. Kitts - 1986; The Barbados Women's Forum among others. Additionally women's groups aligned to the labour movement and socialist political groups were also active in the movement of the 1970s and 1980s including - Concerned Women for Progress in Jamaica and the working-class organisation - National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE)³ in Trinidad and Tobago. The concerns of these groups went way beyond questions of political rights, although these were not forgotten, to larger issues of egalitarianism in social and intimate relations, sexuality and sexual autonomy, social and economic valuing of women's work, - waged and unwaged, the critique of development and unequal terms of trade and most importantly sexual and gender -based violence.

The Emergence of State Machinery for Women's Affairs and Gender Issues

³Between 1980-81, this organisation became affiliated to the International Wages for Housework Campaign and successfully lobbied for the recognition of unwaged work in satellite national statistics in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the important contributions of this phase of the women's movement has been the development of a distinct new area of policy intervention related specifically to transforming gender relations. Programme and policy initiatives on Women in/and development were significantly supported by the work of the United Nations and the declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year and the decade 1976-1985 as the Decade of Women. In this process Caribbean women were important contributors both through their grassroots activism as well as at national and international policy level. One of the first of such attempts can be found in Jamaica with the appointment of an Adviser of Women's Affairs in 1974 and the establishment of a Women's Bureau in 1975, one of the earliest such efforts in the world. Thus Jamaica was one of the few countries to attend the 1975 First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, with national machinery on Women's Affairs already in existence. Similarly, in 1975 there was the establishment of special Commissions of the Status of Women in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. I understand the Belize National Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1990. The revolutionary government of Grenada was the first to establish Women's Affairs as a ministerial portfolio followed by St. Kitts/Nevis. The establishment of the National Women's Organisation in Grenada, from which special attention was given to women, youth, farmers and workers, was also an integral part of the revolutionary activity of the New Jewel Movement in 1979 (Antrobus,1988:39). Popular mobilization led by the women's movement along with the generally more favourable international climate resulted in a number of new possibilities for women, these included improved legislation e.g. Maternity Leave Act 1979 of Jamaica and the Domestic Violence Bill, Trinidad and Tobago, 1991, 1999. It also facilitated increasing regional collaboration through such regional and international institutions as the CARICOM Women's Desk, the Women and Development Programme of UN/ECLAC and the Women and Youth Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat. National government support for these programmes and offices has always been limited both financially and in terms of the influence these agencies have had on overall government policy. This was reinforced time and again in studies

carried out by the Commonwealth Secretariat and a more recent study carried out by the CARICOM Secretariat in 1994.⁴ This 1995 study carried out by Dorienne Rowan-Campbell found that national machineries had limited government allocations and depended primarily on overseas project funding⁵; there was little mainstreaming of gender issues; staff was not trained in gender policy and analysis; inter-ministerial committees and other focal points were relatively ineffective; policy statements had no strategic priorities or measurable outcomes; there was a tendency to focus on women's practical needs, i.e. needs associated with their positioning in the sexual division of labour and limited implementation of policy objectives (Rowan-Campbell in Mondesire & Dunn, 1995:36). This however is beginning to change in some parts of the region but national and regional policy initiatives still appear to be strongly resistant to efforts to integrate gender concerns into policy-making and planning. Hence success in 'mainstreaming' has been limited. These resistances cannot be removed from the reality that policy-makers and planners are themselves human beings, struggling with the painful processes of change in gender relations in their own personal lives and relationships. These resistances point to that important early slogan of the radical feminists 'the personal is political'. The tension between the personal and the political or policy-oriented has been a major divide in programming on women and development and later gender and development⁶. Indeed efforts to make 'gender issues' more palatable to public administrative discourse has served in many instances to remove from them as noted earlier, their more political and 'personal' aspects. This of course is a major contradiction.

⁴Commonwealth Secretariat,(1984), *Ladies in Limbo: The Fate of Women's Bureaux, Six Case Studies from the Caribbean* ; Commonwealth Secretariat,(1986) *Ladies in Limbo Revisited*; Dorienne Rowan-Campbell (1994) *Study on the Functioning of National Machineries*, prepared for the CARICOM Secretariat and presented to a preparatory regional meeting in Antigua, 1994.

⁵"Jamaica recorded the highest allocation of US\$60,600 per annum, followed by St. Lucia(US\$53,000), Grenada(US\$14,815), St.Kitts/Nevis(US\$9,259) and Antigua/Barbuda(US\$2,700)(Mondesire & Dunn, 1995:34)

⁶For a more detailed discussion on this process see Saskia Wieringa, Women's Interests and Empowerment, *Development and Change*, Vol.25, No. 4, October 1994.

One central characteristic of feminist politics has been to challenge this divide and to emphasize the symbiotic interconnection of all aspects of our lives. What has passed for 'gender and development' policy has too often sought to transform policy without seriously challenging the power relations affecting how women and men experience their lives, their bodies, their sexuality, their fears, their anxieties, and their gendered and ethnic identities.

The cumulative CARICOM report to the Beijing Conference in 1995, *Towards Equity in Development*, compiled from national reports facilitated by national machineries, regional feminist activists and university personnel supported earlier calls for “a gender-sensitive approach to development which recognizes the importance of gender, class, race and ethnicity”. It stressed the twin concepts of equity and empowerment as based in notions of justice for all and on peoples’ ability to take control over their lives and concluded with a call for a change in our understanding and use of power. In its own words:

An alternative concept of power is called for - an understanding of leadership as the means to facilitate, rather than to control, the process of change. This concept will also focus on creating an environment in which women, and the poorest in our societies-male and female youth, elderly, disabled and indigenous people-can participate to achieve their full potential. The alternative concept of power implies changes in the structures and processes of economic and political decision-making-in how organisations function-as well as in the structures for democratic participation at a national level (Mondesire & Dunn, 1995:7).

***Women’s Political Participation in the Post World War II Caribbean
National Government***

In the late 1940s to 1950s, as a result of the political and labour unrest of the 1930s, the recommendations of the 1945 West India⁷ Commission Report and changes in colonial policy in the post-war period, universal adult franchise was introduced in all British Caribbean colonies. Dates and circumstances differed according to historical specificities e.g. in Trinidad the controversy over the proposed institution of an English language test as a qualification for the franchise. The expansion of the franchise however, did not mean that women were eligible to stand as candidates in national elections. In some countries this had to wait a few years longer. Interestingly also, even prior to the introduction of full party politics, many of the first women to enter Legislative Councils, were middle and upper class women, nominated by colonial governors(Duncan and O'Brien,1983:18)

Table 1: Women's Entry to Formal Political Participation

Country	Year Women given right to Vote	Year Women Given Right to Stand for Election
Antigua and Barbuda	1951	1951
The Bahamas	1962	1962
Barbados	1951	1951
Belize	1945	1945
Dominica	1951	1951

⁷ Popularly known as the Moyne Commission Report after Lord Moyne its chairman.

Grenada	1951	1951
Guyana	1953	1945*
Jamaica	1944	1944
St. Kitts Nevis	1951	1951
St. Lucia	1951	1951
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	1951	1951
Trinidad and Tobago	1946	1951

* - in some countries women gained the right to be members of the legislative council prior to all women being given the right to vote.

Sources: USAID, *Latin America and Caribbean Selected Economic and Social Data - Democracy Indicators Women in Politics*, 1998. Verene Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History*, Ian Randle, Kingston, 1999.

Analyses of the trends of political participation of women over the early period suggest that women usually comprised a minority of candidates in national elections and few are successful in being elected. Some countries have had larger numbers of women candidates than others. Looking at the period 1951 to 1979 in the Leeward and Windward Islands and Barbados, Barriteau found that a total of thirty (30) women contested national elections. Grenada, Barbados and Dominica tended to have comparatively larger numbers of women candidates while Antigua over that period had one (1) woman contesting national elections during that period. Of these, thirty (30) women, Seven (7) or 23% won their seats on the first bid for office. Two (2) of them Cynthia Gairy and Ivy Joshua were wives of charismatic male party leaders who were also premiers/prime ministers (Barriteau, 1997:16-17). These numbers do not reflect the large female membership of political parties in the region or the significant 'on the ground work' which usually characterise women party supporters.

The characteristics of women's political participation are also interesting to note. During the early period, many women's work in charity and social work became the stepping stones for political office. Additionally their position, especially with the introduction of party politics in the 1950s, was often dependent on the patronage of the political leader as opposed to their legitimate political base. Writing on the first decade of women's parliamentary practice in Barbados, Duncan and O'Brien note their largely 'low key' performance. Their positions on key issues, of relevance to women and workers, with few exception, they found not to be much different from those of their conservative male counterparts. Additionally women parliamentarians were found to speak on far fewer occasions than their male counterparts. They also found that they made little contribution on financial and economic issues(Duncan and O'Brien,1983:30)

By the end of the Century however, despite its limitations, the Commonwealth Caribbean was being seen as an area where significant progress has been made in political participation and representation in the world. While noting that levels of representation at parliamentary and cabinet levels were still problematic, Beilstein and Burgess (1996) found that:

Women in the Caribbean have attained a greater level of breadth and depth in executive bodies of government than women in the highly-touted Nordic region...Caribbean women have also made significant strides at the local government level, as councillors and mayors...In bureaucracies and local government, Caribbean women have 'broken through' the 30 per cent threshold whereby they constitute a "critical mass" (Beilstein and Burgess,1996:1)

The reasons why this local government success had not been translated to parliamentary level, they suggest as 1) the liberal-democratic constitutions which include single member "winner takes all" electoral districts and 2) the political culture of elections and parliament which is confrontational and time-consuming. Interviews with women parliamentarians and politicians suggest that while more women are entering and competing in this arena, serious conflicts exist which proscribe their ways of operating within that masculine defined space.

Table 2 - Women in Commonwealth Caribbean Parliaments 1995 and 2000 (Elected Office)

Country	1995 - % of Women	2000 - % of Women	2011 % of Women
Antigua and Barbuda	11.1	8.8	10.5
The Bahamas	10.8	19.6	12.2
Barbados	18.4	20.4	10.0
Belize	10.3	18.4	0.0
Dominica	9.4	9.7	12.5
Grenada	17.9	17.9	13.3
Guyana	20	1.5	30.0
Jamaica	12.3	16	13.3
St, Kitts/Nevis	0	13.3	6.7
St. Lucia	14.3	13.8	11.1
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	9.5	14.3	14.3
Trinidad and Tobago	20.6	20.9	28.6

Source: Commonwealth Parliamentary Union, *Women in Commonwealth Parliaments*, prepared for Commonwealth Workshop on Gender and Democracy, Windhoek, Namibia, February, 2000; Interparliamentary Union, “Women in National Parliaments”, January 2011.

Local Government

At the local government level however, possibilities for women’s political participation had started much earlier. In 1939 in Jamaica, Mary Morris Knibb, of the Jamaica Women’s Liberal Club had been successful in municipal elections to the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation. In Trinidad and Tobago, after over ten years of heated battle, the Port of Spain Municipal Council and the San Fernando Borough Council approved a motion granting women the right to be elected as candidates in local elections. This was followed by the election of Audrey Jeffers, women’s activist in 1936 to the Port of Spain Municipal Council (Reddock, 1994:174-181). In Barbados, women were not allowed to be candidates for local office until 1948 (Duncan & O’Brien, 1983:9-10). As noted by Eudine Barriteau, local government is seen as one of the main institutions for reconstructing civil and political society, by persons committed to participatory democratic structures, yet, local government in the Caribbean has not yet realised this potential(Barriteau,1997:6) as Central governments are reluctant to relinquish economic and political control.

Table 3 - Proportion of Women in Local Councils and as Mayors (Selected Countries) - 1994

Country	Year	Local Councils	Mayors
St. Lucia	1993	40.9	33.3
Guyana	1993	22.2	16.7
Trinidad and Tobago	1991	21.1	14.3
Jamaica	1994	12.8	25.0

Source: United Nations DAW, 1995, Worldwide Government Directories Inc., Bethesda, Maryland, 1995, cited in Beilstein and Burgess, 1996:28).

Alternative Organising for Political Participation and Representation:

Challenging the Party System

Much has already been written on the non-woman friendly atmosphere of the Caribbean political culture. Commentators have already referred to the aggressive and confrontational style of masculine politics; the 'dirty' and dishonest aspects of corruption and patronage which seem to be endemic to our system and the personal abuse and sexual and morality-related attacks to which women are often open. Indeed it can be argued that there are some women who can become very adept at his kind of politics and many of the women who do succeed become better at this kind of politics than some men. But this has always been and continues to be a minority.

At a Commonwealth conference on Gender and Democracy held in Namibia in February (2000) the participants came to many of these same conclusions. They also mentioned the sense of separation from their larger constituency of women felt by many of them on becoming party representatives. The existing party system in many societies acts as a device of separation rather than one of integration. Relatedly, the problem of 'toeing the party line' as it is described in the Caribbean was also noted as a problem. For example:

A number of participants focused on the difficulties that could arise for women MPs through the competing claims on their loyalty. On the one hand there was the commitment to action on issues of special concern to women and, on the other, the need for party solidarity. Often the latter was given priority so that women could not always vote freely on gender-sensitive issues; there was a discussion in this context of arrangements for 'conscience voting' (Commonwealth Secretariat,2000:8).

The divide and rule policies of colonial regimes be they by race, ethnicity, colour, or political tribalism are often entrenched and reproduced by the party system, therefore politicians and citizens, whether they like it or not are involved in an overarching structure which forces us to act like tribal denizens during what is supposed to be a serious and rational process - national elections. In the Caribbean region the race-based political parties of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana and the political tribalism characteristic of "garrison communities" in Jamaica are cases in point.

Yet the most significant characteristic of contemporary party political practice in the Caribbean is that of competition. This competitive context, discourages rather than encourages participation. In many parts of the region established differences are hardened and defined creating huge lesions within societies and communities, they also provide the basis for the distribution of patronage, for political corruption and in Jamaica political violence. Women's lack of political participation therefore is often not only the result of their exclusion but also a reflection of their disgust and repudiation of such a divisive and often violent arena. The question we need to ask therefore is - is it possible for women to challenge this divisive structure at the same time as they become part of it?

The women's movement internationally has recognised the difficulties inherent in this process and has sought to develop non-partisan approaches towards women and party politics. In the Caribbean a number of examples have taken place such as - the Women's Political Caucus in Jamaica in the 1980's, the joint Women's Political Platform in Trinidad and Tobago just prior to the 1995 general election, The Women's Parliament Project in Suriname and the 'Engendering Local Government' project of the NGO- Network in Trinidad and Tobago during the 1999 local government elections. The Women in Political Project of the National Women's Commission of Belize would be a more recent example of this. These were and are continuing historic and important developments in the struggle to increase women's representation in political leadership and to challenge the confrontational culture of politics, however, they still come up against the party system.

The Women's Political Caucus - Jamaica and The Women's Parliament Project - Suriname, were non-partisan projects of women aimed at facilitating and increasing women's political participation and representation in parliament and at forging political cooperation across party lines. In both of these programmes a training component is central. Women are trained in parliamentary procedure, drafting of legislation and motions and fielding questions to relevant authorities. While at one level challenging the adversarial character of "winner takes all" party politics, these attempts come up against decades of entrenched

and violently maintained political divisions (in which women may also be implicated) against which their efforts may have limited impact.

In the May 2001 general elections held in Guyana, for example, the deep ethnic tensions between Indo and Afro-Guyanese and the related political parties proved so intractable that regional efforts at mediation and compromise were necessary to facilitate some level of ongoing governance. These tensions have a history going back over four decades where the struggle for political power through local influence and foreign intervention now reflects a clear racial/ethnic dimension. The Network of NGO's for the Advancement of Women of Trinidad and Tobago was invited to work with women of Guyanese political parties in a Women's Political Forum initiative prior to the general elections, seeking to achieve the 30% level among candidates, and claimed some of the credit for the 20 women who became members of parliament. This achievement however was largely lost in the din of post-election controversy, violence and political crisis.

One positive outcome of this situation has been the painstaking work taking place by all political parties in Guyana to craft a new constitution which is less-alienating and more inclusive and in the end empowering, a process involving all interest groups, including women - party-affiliated or not. In such efforts these women activists, can bring their experience of non-partisan organising to bear on this process as well as their dissatisfactions with the adversarial and violent culture and practice of politics as it has emerged. It is possible that out of the difficulties of Guyana, new more democratic and inclusive alternatives could emerge which would be useful for the rest of the region. This is left to be seen.

Conclusion

What is presented above suggests that in the Anglophone Caribbean, the struggles for democratization have a long and uneven history in this region. Movements for women's rights have always had to integrate concerns based on race/ethnicity, class, nationality and anti-colonialism/imperialism. In the current heightened context of political and economic

neo-liberalism, and the resulting feelings of powerlessness within the region, the emphasis may have shifted away from transforming the system to coming to terms with the realities of the political system. The reality is that most of the change which has been effected has been the result of pressure from those outside the system than from pressure within it.

In a context of liberal democracy, having access to political office is a basic human right to which all women who are desirous should have access. But while this is an important aspect of the democratization process it is inadequate. The role of women's organisations, social movements and alternative strategies will continue to be important even as we continue to challenge the inequitable structures and seek to create new, more participatory, inclusive empowering and enabling alternatives in our political and economic systems, our communities and our households. This struggle as you can see in the Caribbean continues. This Women in Politics Programme is a welcome addition to this landscape.

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