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**What Love has to do with it? Sexuality, Intimacy and Power in Contemporary Caribbean Gender Relations**  
**Violet Eudine Barriteau**

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## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

Working paper No. 17 is based on a lecture delivered by Professor Violet Eudine Barriteau Deputy Principal, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. Professor Barriteau delivered the 16<sup>th</sup> lecture in the series Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change on November 12, 2010, which is dedicated to honouring the memory of Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General of Barbados 1990-1995, and the first subject of the research project, Caribbean Women Catalysts for Change.

The paper presents and expands Jónasdóttir's concept of 'love power' and demonstrate its relevance to seeking explanations to contradictions in contemporary gender relations. Professor Barriteau is interested in the manifestations of areas of powerlessness in women's lives, and attempts to apply this conceptual framework to various experiences and conditions women face in Caribbean societies.

Professor Barriteau begins her analysis at the point where politicized sexuality and political economy converge. Where state policies, bureaucratic practices, societal norms and views, interact with privatised and politicized sexual relations in women's lives.

## **KEY WORDS**

Caribbean gender relations, politicized sexuality, political economy, sexual agency, women's economic autonomy, power relations, public and private spheres.

## **INTRODUCTION**

What is the background and context to a Caribbean feminist scholar finding the work of a Nordic feminist scholar so relevant? For some time now, the absence of various forms of power in Caribbean women's lives has been a central focus of my research, hence when I discovered Jónasdóttir's theorising of the power imbalance in women's lives through a focus on love power and sexuality, her work became immediately appealing.

A 2008 research attachment at the University of Örebro, Sweden as an International Research Fellow of the Centre of Gender Excellence provided me with the resources to begin the exploration of this topic, and in fact I am back in Sweden again, where I am pursuing another dimension of this research. I am grateful to Anna Jónasdóttir and the GEXcel project team for that vital research oasis. My lecture tonight is an outgrowth of my original research and is entitled, "What Love has to do with it? Sexuality, Intimacy and Power in Contemporary Caribbean Gender Relations."

I organise the lecture in two parts. In the first I present and expand Jónasdóttir's concept of 'love power' and demonstrate its relevance to seeking explanations to contradictions in contemporary gender relations, I am specifically interested in the manifestations of areas of powerlessness in women's lives. In the second part, I become more ambitious. I attempt to apply this conceptual framework to various experiences and conditions women face in Caribbean societies. I am particularly interested in how issues of sexual agency or

lack thereof influence women's experiences of economic autonomy and in a larger project I pay attention to conditions of work and employment to illuminate my central arguments.

I enter this analysis through the subjectivity of women. However this is an ongoing narrative about relations between women and men which seeks understanding rather than blaming. Those of you who know my work, know I do not believe in victim hood. I believe theoretically and practically women's inherent agency and power must always be acknowledged and held separate from any adverse conditions women experience. I see this as a first strategy to recognising these adverse, painful conditions are yet, artificial constructs even if, with devastating, material or tangible results.

My analysis begins at the point where politicized sexuality and political economy converge, that is, the point where state policies, bureaucratic practices, societal norms and views, interact with privatised and politicized sexual relations in women's lives. I should tell you that I think power relations are embedded in intimate, sexualised relations, and these power relations often only become apparent when the status quo is disrupted. Further, issues of dominance and control of power relations in the public, demarcate the contours, scope and sites that are perceived as private, intimate and therefore off limits.

The interplay of the conceptual\ideological and juridical spheres of the public and private is fascinating, and there is a direct relation between the operation of power in these

conceptual and ideological sites. The more power one has over the public, the greater a zone within the private, one can erect an ideological boundary around and mark as off limits. [I shall return to the power and the public\private dichotomy in my conclusion].

However, I am saying unless you can control your “public”, you have no “private”, ie, the notion of a privatised zone or site that is off limits. I do not have to tell you which sex is seen or treated as having less control over their public locations and interactions, and therefore whose intimate spaces are fair game. How many male politicians in Barbados smoke again?

I told you earlier that my analysis begins at the point where politicized sexuality and political economy converge, that is because I argue that socio-sexual unions, including marriage connect the state and economy with intimate relations. I attempt to pay attention to the dynamics of sexuality and intimacy, and the power relations that surround these, as Caribbean women navigate the intersections of the public and the private, production and reproduction, caring and desiring, pursuing sexual pleasure and often receiving and giving emotional pain (with or without sexual pleasure, but that is another lecture).

Some of the questions this research seeks to answer are (and there are six of them):

1. Are Caribbean women’s public, social lives influenced by the dynamics within their socio-sexual unions? Posed differently, are the ways women interact or experience

economic, cultural and political relations, an outcome of what happens in their private, intimate spaces?

2. If we accept the premise that there is a connection, does Jónasdóttir's thesis that women's love power can be extracted, account for women's experiences of on-going asymmetric relations of gender and unequal conditions in their daily lives, encompassing employment and political participation?
3. Does this type of explanation shift blame onto women for systemic conditions of inequality?
4. In what particular ways do love power and intimacy manifest itself in Caribbean women's sexual relations with men?
5. Do women have and should women have power in intimate relations with men?
6. Is it as Jónasdóttir stated, that women enter socio-sexual unions, owners of their capacity to love which they can give of their own free will yet are without effective control over how or what forms they can legitimately use that capacity? (Jónasdóttir 1994: 224).

Or is the situation more like the observation made to me by a close friend who has been married three times, and has had numerous lovers, that in his experience women enter relationships with power and confidence and within six months they give up their power, thinking this is what men want. Is women's love power extracted? Or do women willingly surrender or compromise more readily in their intimate relationships? And if so, why?

Towards building this analytical framework, I examine three view points on the power of love. First, Jónasdóttir, she states “*My assumption means, that women and men-needing, seeking and practicing love- enter into specific productive relations with each other in which they not only quite literally produce new human beings but also produce (and reproduce) themselves [and each other] as active, emotional and reasoning people*” (Jónasdóttir 1994: 63). Second, Tina Turner, perhaps reflecting on personal experience, asks repeatedly, what’s love got to do with it? What’s love got to do with anything? And third lesbian feminist theorists, Amber Hollingbaugh and Cherrie Moraga caution that, “*We don’t really know for instance why men and women are still attracted to each other, even through all that oppression. There is something genuine that happens between heterosexuals, but gets perverted in a thousand different ways. There is heterosexuality outside of heterosexism*” (Hollinbaugh and Moraga 1983: 395). And their last statement is really an impulse for this work, unravelling heterosexuality from heterosexism.

These women offer three, differing yet complementary perspectives on this energy called love power. Suspended between Jónasdóttir’s theorisation of women and men, needing, seeking and practising love, and the equally powerful insight by Hollingbaugh and Moraga, that heterosexuality exists outside of<sup>1</sup> heterosexism, is Tina Turner’s advice to regard love as a second hand, overrated emotion. So where is that heterosexual, socio-sexual union in Caribbean feminist scholarship? What have we done about Hollingsbaugh and Moraga’s powerful suggestion that feminists, “don’t really know for instance why men and women are still attracted to each other, even through all

that oppression” (Hollinbaugh and Moraga 1983: 395). Has Caribbean feminist analysis dismissed, downplayed, or ignored heterosexual attraction as having any significance in yielding knowledge about relations of domination in women’s public and private lives?

Feminist work from the Anglophone Caribbean, (including my own) has not examined, why unequal conditions continue to persist for women from the vantage point of what Jónasdóttir has theorised as political sexuality [and I have called politicized sexuality], and the socio-sexual relationship, governed by her concept of ‘love power’. Where there have been several studies of sexualities, none that I am aware of, have sought to link the widespread and persistent practice or experiences of patriarchal relations of domination with an exploration of the dynamics within the basic socio-sexual union, that sexual relationship.

In my theorising, I am specifically interested in the complications romantic loving **may pose** for Caribbean women in sexual relationships with men. I am beginning to explore the intersections of desire and power or the relations of power embedded in desire. As Jane Flax surmises, “Desire really has a kind of energy or force of its own, and more than that, since it is within us, it operates and undermines various other processes which like to look at themselves as separate from desire” (Grant 1997: 5).

Do Caribbean women understand the power of the erotic in their lives or even the erotic as a source of power? Audre Lorde’s pioneering work on the power of the erotic is a critical contributing strand of feminist theorising that I draw on. Lorde declares:

When I speak of the erotic then I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women, of that creative energy, empowered, the knowledge and use of which we

are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (Lorde 1984: 55).

Lorde's theorising suggests that if women can come to appreciate the erotic as a source of power within them, they can come to intimate relationships, and enter the social world with a wholesome understanding of themselves as social-sexual beings. Lorde's theorising of the erotic is much more comprehensive and wider than a notion of sexual relations]. In Lorde's analysis, the erotic includes a passion to live fully, to experience feeling. She speaks of work as having an erotic value of which women can be robbed. "The erotic is sensual (those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared. The passion of love, in its deepest meanings" (Lorde 1984: 56). According to Lorde, when women accept the erotic within themselves, they negate powerlessness (Lorde 1984: 58).

In spite of their pursuit of sexual relations with men, have women, especially heterosexual Caribbean women, embraced the power of the erotic in their lives?<sup>1</sup> Or have they instead distanced themselves from this "life force" and so contribute to their own powerlessness?

I agree that women and men come to sexual unions along a fluid and changeable continuum of sexual desires, sexual relations and sexual identities. At the two conventional extremes are heterosexuality and homosexuality. However, many individuals experience their sexual relations and desires through bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, polysexual and transgender sexual relations<sup>2</sup>. Some people harbour sexual desires that remain unfulfilled for a range of reasons. I am specifically interested in

unwrapping the mystique of love power in the socio-sexual unions women have with men, and I prioritize and focus on women's intimate relations with men for several reasons:

- First, in the Caribbean it is an unexplored dimension in the search to interrogate and make sense of women's experience of dis-empowerment in these relations and within the wider political economy.
- Second, the contours of our dominant social, economic, cultural and political institutions are shaped by heteronormativity. Yet we have not theorized the heterosexual union at the centre of a normalized notion of heterosexual society. And even though this is beyond the scope of this lecture, neither have we examined how this 'normalized' heterosexuality feeds homophobia and its flip side, heterosexism.
- Third, I maintain that interrogating the socio-heterosexual union can impart insights into combatting heterosexism and homophobia<sup>3</sup>.

Now, because, like Jónasdóttir, I do not think there are mono-causal explanations for what goes wrong for women (Jónasdóttir 2007a: 5), I believe it is necessary to integrate this developing investigation of political sexuality with ongoing work on Caribbean political economy while maintaining an explicit focus on Caribbean women<sup>4</sup>. In George Lamming's address on Caribbean Women Traders whom he termed 'the Miracle Managers', Lamming states:

We can say that all women irrespective of their social origins are an example, perhaps the most extreme example, of a dominated class. Social theorists of the Left have difficulty with that formulation. But historical and personal evidence is abundant that all men, irrespective of their economic or racial status, hold a common belief about the subordinate role of women in their lives. The Black

male labourer and the White male executive director share a profound bond of allegiance and solidarity on that question of the relation of woman to man, whether that union is marital, extra-marital, or ultra-marital (Lamming 1995: 37-38).

Lamming's identification of the sexual union as marital, extra-marital or ultra-marital (Lamming 1995: 37-38), is significant because of the central role marriage holds in Jónasdóttir's theorizing and the multiple forms of man-woman unions in the Caribbean. It is crucial to recognise the many variants of sexual unions, not from a narrow perspective of insisting on cultural specificity, but because of the material and ideological implications of these socio-sexual unions which span a range of spatial and emotional arrangements.

### **PART ONE: What's Love Got to Do With It?**

It is somewhat ironic that notions of love, sex and romance are everywhere embedded in the Caribbean imaginary, yet it is unexamined and un-theorized in the day to day lives of women in their sexual relations with men<sup>5</sup>. The implications of these relations for ongoing conditions of inequalities in women's lives are also unexamined. It is not only in the marketing campaigns of tourist destinations that the Caribbean appear as saturated with desire, lust and the promise of more love, more sex, and more romance. In a range of popular expressions, musical forms, and folk tales, love and sex are critical to, and fully articulated in the rhythms of everyday life. Evidence abounds in songs by calypsonians, dance hall lyrical chants by Reggae and dub artists, dances of the Matikor, folk songs about love affairs gone awry, letters to the press (such as Dear Christine) seeking advice on relationships, popular concoctions for building sexual stamina,

“putting it back” in the back, obeah remedies for recapturing straying lovers or claiming new ones<sup>6</sup>, appeals to psychics and spiritual healers. These all underscore the critical location of “making love as opposed to just making tools” in arriving at an understanding of the nexus of “political sexuality” and political economy in Caribbean societies (Barriteau 2011).

Yet, Caribbean feminist research to date has not focused directly on what Jónasdóttir describes as “women and men-- needing, seeking and practicing love” (Jónasdóttir 1994: 63). The majority of Caribbean countries are now heavily dependent on tourism as the major earner of foreign exchange, (McDavid and Ramajeessingh 2003), and the most valuable, even if vulnerable, economic activity. (And of course we are witnessing that vulnerability now, as Barbados and other Caribbean economies are experiencing the effects of the global recession primarily through declines in tourism revenues). Given the region’s heavy reliance on tourism, sex tourism has become an important but unofficially acknowledged product<sup>7</sup> of that sector. In the Saturday Sun of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Miriam Edwards, President of the Caribbean Sex work Coalition underscored the regional spread of sex workers by appealing for better treatment of sex workers on behalf of her membership in thirteen Caribbean countries. The widespread presence of sex workers is supported by the existence of a substantive body of literature on sex tourism in the Anglophone, Dutch, Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean (Chanel 1994; Albuquerque 1998; Kempadoo 1999; 2003; 2005; Cabezas 1999, 2004; Sanchez- Taylor 2001; Sharpe and Pinto 2006). Homosexual and heterosexual sex tourism\trade between gay tourists and Caribbean women and men and

to Caribbean destinations has also been examined from a range of perspectives (Alexander 2005; Kempadoo 2003; Puar 2001). There is research on Caribbean women working as prostitutes\sex workers and increasingly UN bodies in collaboration with United States agencies have been examining the trafficking in women and girls for sex work in the region (Thomas Hope 2007).

Yet, there is almost no Caribbean feminist investigations of love, sexuality, intimacy and sexual relations with men **and** the complications these pose for women in their everyday lives<sup>8</sup>. Even more intriguing, I am unaware of any attempts to interrogate these as possible contributing factors to the unequal relations of domination that women experience in the wider society as well as in intimate spaces.

### **Politicizing Sexuality<sup>9</sup>**

In politicizing sexuality for investigation, Jónasdóttir builds her process of inquiry around a series of questions, of which I extract the following four as the most relevant:

1. Why are women oppressed and by whom?
2. What is the valid ground for the feeling or 'sense' that 'our [women's] oppression' is rooted mainly in something other than the conditions and terms on which labour is organised and exploited? What is the valid ground for the feeling or 'sense' that 'our [women's] oppression' [Rowbotham 1974: 24] is rooted mainly in something other than the conditions and terms on which labour is organised and exploited?
3. How can we theorise *sexuality* as a field of individual agency (or performance) *and* personal experience as a complex web of socially and

politically conditioned relationships, *and* what are the consequences of what takes place in these relationships?

4. How is power understood and conceptualised as part of sexuality, in distinction from power as dominance only or power merely as the effect of discourse? (Jónasdóttir 2007a: 4).

From this ground work, Jónasdóttir moves to her key concept, love power. She states, the actualisation of love power comes into the picture, emerging as a result of her assumption, “that a crucial part of the theoretical analysis of women’s exploitation must be done within the field of sexuality, and not limited to economy or work, and **also** that the analysis has to be extended ‘beyond oppression’” (Jónasdóttir 2007a: 4). Jónasdóttir fine tunes her discussion of the basic assumptions further. She emphasizes that contemporary, patriarchal relations or male dominated society, is produced and reproduced by means of the appropriative practices, of exploitation of women’s love power (Jónasdóttir 2007a: 5).

The fact that Jónasdóttir has politicized sexuality, by subjecting to investigation the basic sexual union, provides a critical point of entry for examining the interconnections between what happens between men and women in sexual relations, and what happens between women and men in the economy, state and society. Jónasdóttir’s insistence that this union has wider meaning than legally married or cohabiting couples, is especially relevant in Caribbean societies. We know the majority of sexual unions and relations exist outside of legal marriages and even cohabiting couples. I agree with her

statement that, “social interactions between women and men in direct person to person relations are consistently overlooked” (Jónasdóttir 1994: 213).

### **Love Power Defined: Care and Erotic Ecstasy**

In answer to her question, what is being done to us as women in free and equal, yet still patriarchal, Western society, she replies, “men exploit a certain power resource in women, namely the power of love.” She continues that this is basically what the contemporary, Western sex-struggle is about (Jónasdóttir: 1994 214). “In the search for a term that could denote precisely this “practical, human sensuous activity”, a term that could distinguish it both from the power of labor or work. . . . I came to believe that love is the best term available, if care and erotic ecstasy are incorporated as its two main elements” (Jónasdóttir: 1994: 221). Even though Jónasdóttir differentiates love power from the power of work, I will attempt to apply her concept of love power to reveal some of what happens to women in relation to the world of work.

Some aspects of the two dimensions of love power, care and erotic ecstasy have been covered extensively in investigations of Caribbean women’s lives, but they have never been dis-aggregated or recombined to create any type of explanation of the power imbalances in women’s lives as Jónasdóttir does. Perhaps because of the influence (or bias) of the Liberal and Socialist informed, Women in Development\Women and Development discourse, and their early impact on feminist scholarship in the Caribbean, a great deal of intellectual energy has been expended on women’s work as caring work<sup>10</sup>. This is so whether within families, households, or the state and the economy<sup>11</sup>. There is

an extensive literature on Caribbean women and work, (Gill and Massiah 1984; Massiah 1986); Massiah 1991; Scott 1992; Elliot 2006); in households and in pursuing strategies for survival (Barrow 1986, French 1994, Bolles 1983); and in informal and formal economic activities (Barrow 1993; Seguino 2003; Bolles; Jayasinghe 2001; Barriteau 2002; Lagro and Plotkin 1990; Freeman 2000; 1998; 1997).

The research that come closest to approximating investigations in the realm of the erotic, are the investigations into sex work. However, I argue that sex work is another dimension of women's care work, since the primary emphasis is on fulfilling the sexual needs of others<sup>12</sup>, (even though it is quite possible that there are many women and men engaged in sex work who also experience sexual gratification). My main argument is that women's pursuit of erotic ecstasy is what propels and maintains them in intimate relations with men, and become for many, the eventual source of their powerlessness. I also assume that in the pursuit of the erotic, women may end up with the care work, and continue with caring. Many women continue in the socio-sexual union, either hoping the erotic would materialize, or eventually they substitute their desire to be cared for, and fulfill other dimensions of their sexual pleasure, with caring for others. They journey or migrate from being their lover's 'baby' to his 'mummy', and many will be eventually called mums or mother by their men.

Jónasdóttir's theorization of [the twin components of love power], care and erotic ecstasy is compelling at several levels, In one sense, I hypothesize that women pursue erotic ecstasy and they end up with the care work<sup>13</sup>. Caribbean women are often responsible for the care of the relationship, care of the men<sup>14</sup>, children and elders of the

family, care of the organizations in which they are members, including the University of the West Indies<sup>15</sup> and most of the caring work in the economy. Women expend a lot of ‘emotional labor’ in providing care (Hocshild 2002: 194). In another sense, in the pursuit of erotic ecstasy, there is that man-woman dynamic which Jónasdóttir calls “women and men-needing, seeking and practicing love” (Jónasdóttir: 1994 63). Women may experience satisfying sexual encounters, they may have deeply fulfilling sexual relationships, but often what many women want is a desire to be cared for by men beyond sexual encounters<sup>16</sup>. I hypothesize that when women’s powerlessness in sexual relations exists, (I am not suggesting at all, this exists for all women in all relationships), it is at the point at which their love power becomes “appropriated” or extracted, or the term I prefer, “surrendered” within the erotic dimension of Jónasdóttir’s conceptualisation of love power.

## **PART TWO: APPLYING LOVE POWER TO CARIBBEAN REALITIES**

I focus on four of Jónasdóttir’s assumptions in applying her model to Caribbean women’s sexual and work relations. These are:

- Understanding and conceptualizing power as part of sexuality;
- ‘Marriage’/Socio-sexual unions as linking the domains of the private and the public;
- Women’s love as a practical [yet] human sensuous activity;
- And the organisation (and expression) of that love being the basis of women’s ‘exploitation’.

In a 1992 journal article, I noted that gendered relations are characterized “as the ways in which *social realities* between women and men are socially constructed to perpetuate male dominance” (Barriteau 1992: 15; Barriteau 2003b: 4). Now I want to rephrase this statement to examine how *sexual realities* between women and men are socially constructed to perpetuate male dominance.

In reviewing the Caribbean evidence, Jónasdóttir’s sense that women’s experiences of relations of domination arise in something other than the conditions and terms on which labour is organised and exploited seems valid. What her analysis suggests, is that by the time we recognise that women are being exploited in relations of work, there are a set of a priori conditions in which unequal relations are already a factor. In the Anglophone Caribbean, more women than men are enrolled in tertiary educational institutions and graduate in larger ratios. They are relatively more highly skilled, and possess fair to high levels of social capital (Bailey 2003; Elliot 2006). Simultaneously, women experience higher levels of unemployment, and are the first retrenched or the last to receive training when factories become high skilled. Daphne Jayasinghe’s research demonstrates that as manufacturing becomes more technologically driven, an inverse relation quickly develops with women becoming increasingly de-skilled (Jayasinghe 2003). Caribbean women receive less wages for comparable levels of work, except in the state and governmental sector;<sup>17</sup> and of households falling below the poverty line, there are more headed by women (Seguino 2003; Jayasinghe 2001; Andaiye 2003). Camille Samuel’s doctoral research on the gender dynamics of corporate leadership in Trinidad reveal that men benefit from displaying traits and characteristics stereotypically

associated with women, while women leaders who display these traits are coded as weak and ineffective. If they display characteristics associated with men they are coded as masculinist and insecure, and the most effective leaders are men who combine the characteristics of men and women (Samuel 2010). In other words, neither masculine nor feminine traits serve women leaders. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean worry that the current economic crisis would increase unemployment among women in Latin America and the Caribbean in productive sectors such as commerce, the manufacturing industry, financial services, tourism and domestic help services (Barbados Advocate Dec. 15 2008: 13).

In political parties and electoral contests, all conditions of formal equality of access have been met since the 1950s, but in the area of political leadership and occupation of cabinet positions and senior governmental appointments the record is still uneven and in no way parallels men's hold on political positions and power (Vassell 2003). Joan French concludes, "women's political participation in the Caribbean is still generally well below parity and even the 30% target" (French 2008: 33).

Since the early 1970s, there has been the establishment of state machineries on women and/or gender in almost all government administrations. There has been the removal of punitive legislation, the production of numerous reports and recommendations on how to improve conditions of women. There has been the introduction of more egalitarian laws, and there is consistent reporting to United Nations bodies (such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women), on governments attempts to work towards gender equality in Caribbean societies (Tang Nain

and Bailey 2003). Yet relations of domination or inequalities for women remain. Joycelin Massiah summarizes six in-depth regional studies of efforts to promote gender equality in the Commonwealth Caribbean and provides greater analytical insights on these contradictions:

- Increases in the number of women in leadership positions do not necessarily lead to greater influence on policy.
- New issues such as HIV/AIDS are impacting women to a greater extent than men, but the general public seems reluctant to support an agenda for the empowerment of women.
- Although women display higher levels of participation and performance in education at the secondary and tertiary levels, this does not translate into significant gains in their economic, political or personal empowerment. While some women have benefitted from new opportunities opened by globalisation, many others have experienced new or deepening inequalities in access to opportunities and resources.
- Despite the apparent contradictory situation of women and the concern with the so-called marginalisation of men, the elimination of gender inequities is not yet a part of the core values and policy developments, programme action and administrative systems.
- Although states have signed on to various international instruments, there is no regionally agreed system for measuring progress towards the achievement of gender justice (Massiah 2003: xii-xiv).

What is missing from all these studies is a focus on women as socio-sexual beings in their sexual relations with men, and how these relations interface with economic and political developments. In other words, how politicized sexuality affects political economy. A central argument I make is that something happens in women's intimate relations that affect how they experience the economy and society. Equally, experiences in the economy and society influence women's intimate relations. I hypothesize that starting in their intimate spaces and radiating outwards, many women are either forced into or enter a set of accommodations and compromises, which exacerbate the material and ideological inequalities they meet in the economy, state and society. I demonstrate how

these accommodations, negotiations or zones of powerlessness move through three sites, the socio-sexual union, the family, the economy\state.

### **Marriage\Socio-Sexual Unions and Appropriation of Women's Sexual Resources**

Given that both Jónasdóttir and I view Jónasdóttir socio-sexual unions as a link between the private and the public, we need to examine these relations. At first blush, existing research seem to indicate that motherhood and then marriage, are the primary sources of identity for Caribbean women. The seminal Women in the Caribbean Project, WICP, also found that working class women who were in long term unions with men postponed decisions about marriage if getting married did not mean a change in their material level of comfort (Anderson 1986; Senior 1991).

According to this survey conducted in the late 1970s to early 1980s, for many working class women, marriage should mean an observable change in their standard of living. However, these findings need to be contextualized. Rates of marriages\legal unions have been historically low and continue to be so, but with Trinidad and Guyana having higher ratios than the rest of the region. For example, for a similar period as the survey, in Barbados, the illegitimacy ratio, calculated as total births out of wedlock, as a percentage of total live births, climbed steadily from 62.0 % in 1961 to 74.2% in 1974,<sup>xviii</sup> meaning that in 1974 nearly 75% of all children were born to unmarried parents (Barriteau 1994: 151). The marriage ratio, calculated as total marriages per 1,000 population as a percentage of total population, declined from 4.2 % to 3.8% for the same period (Barriteau 1994: 151).

Caribbean family structures come in multiple variations, running from extended families of several generations occupying one dwelling space, through to the nuclear family (Smith 1996) and encompassing what Rosina Brodber classified as the transnational family (Brodber 1986). The latter has key members located in several different countries and diasporic communities with several, especially women, who are very mobile and living in what Carol Boyce Davis terms a state of in-between-ness (Boyce-Davies 2007). The sexual relations Caribbean women have and their attendant complications are threaded through these family forms. Without further probing, it is difficult to determine whether Caribbean women truly do not desire formal marriages over motherhood<sup>xix</sup> or the ranking they give is a form of adaptation, an adjustment to the realities of the instability or sense of powerlessness surrounding marital and other forms of sexual unions<sup>xx</sup>.

I maintain that conventional marriage is still a dominant ideological force and regulatory norm in Caribbean women's lives. As Tracy Robinson observes, and I agree "Caribbean women generally begin their reproductive life without marriage, but that reality cannot deny the considerable force that marriage still has an ideal for women. Being able to define one-self socially and legally by reference to a man through marriage, provides a distinct form of legitimacy and acceptance for women in the eyes of the community that should not be underestimated" (Robinson 2003: 248).

### **Sexual Unions as a Source of Sexual Powerlessness**

Danielle Toppin's work with young women in Jamaica underscores economic vulnerability intersected with sexual relations as well as the early start to reproduction for many working class young women. She presents information on the sexual relations of three teenagers, one of whom is fourteen years old, five months pregnant and living with a man ten years older (Toppin 2007a). Another is fifteen and also lives with an older man. She moved out from her mother's home to avoid sexual molestation by her stepfather. The third is still at home, has a teenage boyfriend, a good relationship with her mother, and has discussed with her mother, her decision to be sexually active.

Toppin submits that these young women are grappling with the feelings and consequences of their early entry into sexual relationships. She reports that the pregnant young woman attends an organization that allows teenage mothers to complete their education and to receive developmental counselling, with one of the core areas of concern being delaying unwanted pregnancies. Despite this, the young woman states she doubts that she would use condoms with her partner. She states, he will not use them, and she would not push him to, because he might think she has another man, even though she suspects he is sexually active with other people (Toppin 2007a). Toppin also notes that according to a report by the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, one in every ten Jamaican women is married or in a common law union before her eighteenth birthday, with approximately one percent doing so before the age of fifteen. Toppin continues, "Although ideas regarding men's right to ownership over 'their' women in intimate relationships can be found across communities, the practice of cohabitation between

under-aged females and older men is predominantly found in communities marked by poverty. In many instances, young girls become bargaining tools for economic improvement, placing them in relationships in which the power imbalances affect them negatively” (Toppin 2008).

Two of these young women are living with older men because of issues of economic deprivation and for one, the additional grief of sexual harassment at her home<sup>xxi</sup>. The information on cohabitation, between older men and girls in poor communities underscore, the troubling dynamics of developments in political economy affecting women’s sexual lives. Here the life chances of girls are being shaped in a context that breeds powerlessness, despair, and lack of sexual and social autonomy.

### **Sexualized Violence\Economic Violence**

Another way of examining politicized sexuality is to link the economic violence done to women and men in the workplace, with the sexualized violence which occur in privatized spaces and sites such as the home and intimate relations. There is ample evidence that when men suffer economic hardship, loss of jobs, or reduced income, the incidence of violence against women rises. What has not been adequately tracked, is how women’s experiences of that same form of economic violence in their working lives, increase their vulnerability in their sexual unions, in the absence of ( or sometimes in spite of ) any state sponsored protective mechanisms. Economic hardship reduces women’s economic autonomy and leaves them more susceptible to abuses in their sexual unions because of their dependence on men for financial support (Pargass and Clarke

2003: 43). Gaitrey Pargass and Roberta Clarke reviewed studies on violence against women in the Caribbean, and examined some of the beliefs as to what causes violence against women, as well as revealed some of the continuities between domestic violence as a form of sexualised violence (Pargass & Clarke 2003: 39-72; Barriteau 2003d: 213). For example, they found that a key factor emerging in a study of violence in Suriname is that when women made the first report of violence, their partners had been violent for many years before (Pargass & Clarke 2003: 43).

### **Sexuality and Work**

Joycelin Massiah reminds us, that Caribbean women have always worked in fact I argue they have not stopped working since the Columbian intrusion over six centuries ago. Along with Caribbean men, Caribbean women have worked through conquest, colonisation, slavery, indentureship, emancipation, crown colony rule and independence, every permutation of political and economic systems of control and governance. Yet varying gendered ideologies and material conditions of inequalities persist in labour force participation and the work place, as if to suggest women are newcomers to the world of work. Labour force statistics reveal a consistent pattern of higher female unemployment and skewed levels of earnings.

Let us examine some data from the United Nations Human Development Reports for 1998 and 2008. In 1998 of the ten Caribbean countries reporting, men's share of earned income was 60% or greater. In Barbados, Bahamas, and Jamaica women had the highest share of earned income, yet in none of these three countries recording the highest percentages were women able to achieve a 40% share of earned income. Women's share

of earned income were lowest for women in Belize at 18.5%, followed by the Dominican Republic 24%, Suriname 26.1%, Trinidad and Tobago 26.8%, and Guyana 26.9%. This reveals on average for every dollar earned in Belize in 1998, women earned 18.5 cents and men, 81.5 cents. We can hypothesize about the state of women's intimate relations there.

Economic vulnerability is usually a good indicator of women's status within sexual relationships. Ten years later in 2007\2008, women's share of earned income has improved in six of the twelve Caribbean countries reporting, and happily in Belize, women's share of earned income as moved from 18.5% to 28.4%. Women's earned income share in Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and the Dominican Republic also improved with Bahamas recording the highest percentage at 41.4%. So one country has broken the 40% barrier. However in no Caribbean country in 2008 was women share of earned income greater than 41%. Of the twelve countries reporting in 2008, men received 61% or greater of earned income share in eleven countries..

Quarterly statistics on the Barbados labour market at December 2007, reveal the following. Participation rates for males and females were 73% and 60.7 % respectively. The sexual composition of the labour force was 52% male and 48 % female. Women accounted for 61.8% of persons who were not in the labour force, and women between the ages of 25 - 64 represented 71.5% of the total inactive population. The unemployment rate was 6.7% overall with women's unemployment being 6.9% and men's 6.6%, one of the closest the ratios have ever been. Of the 11% of the unemployed seeking jobs for over one year, 70% were female. Those seeking employment between 3 months to a year were

18% of the unemployed of which 63.% were female (Barbados 2007). These are snapshots that bear greater analysis. Yet they do indicate gender asymmetries in labour force participation rates with implications for resource distribution.

## **Conclusion**

Kathleen Jones advises that, “the test of Jónasdóttir’s theory should not be the degree of generality, but whether its account of the construction of women as loving caretakers “for” men, instead of as desiring subjects in reciprocally erotic relations, is persuasive” ”(Jones 1994: xii-xiii). I believe it is. Yet to fully test the applicability of Jónasdóttir’s theory, I would like to conduct research on the organisation of sexual unions I need to know more of the organisation of sexual unions and how love power operates in women’s lives. The situation with the young girls is more stark, they are indeed powerless, but what of the situation for women with considerable economic resources and social capital whose sexual unions seem as problematic?

I return to the issues of dominance and control of power relations in the public demarcating the contours, scope and sites that are perceived as private and intimate, and therefore off limits. I would also like to pose additional questions arising from Jónasdóttir’s basic assumptions. Can our societies perceive of women in terms of intimate relationships as other than loving caretakers for men? Can women be understood as desiring subjects in reciprocally erotic relations that move beyond constructions as temptresses, conniving schemers, Delilahs or nymphomaniacs? I suggest that the recent public discourse on women’s sexuality in Barbados is symptomatic of intense anxieties

being stirred up and major moves geared to protect existing constructions of women as loving caretakers for men. The widespread coverage in the print media of a rabid spread of lesbianism among women and school girls with headlines which include, “Schoolgirls look to each other for love: Counsellor worried about the rising practice of lesbianism” (Harewood 2010: 14A), “Girls gone wild” (Harewood 2010: 5A), “Nothing funny about sexuality.” (Goddard 2010: 9A), “Parents must speak to girls.” (Harewood 2010: 15A), “God will not tolerate same-sex unions.”(Macdonald 2010: 10A), underscore the power struggles and contestations over how women’s sexuality and intimate relations should be perceived. The reporting was sensational with media coverage featuring ‘reformed’ lesbians repackaged as born again Christians, repenting for their lives of sin and debauchery, and thanking God and the Church for saving them. Is this evidence that the unconscious fear that basic ways of organizing social life is being disrupted?

Is there a fear that women and girls are internalizing a sense of sexual autonomy and reproductive freedom and that this claiming of the power of the erotic or love power is deeply disruptive of societal expectations of how women should experience their sexual lives? Traditionally, an effective way to police women’s lives was to accuse them of lesbianism, especially if the women were or are feminists. The charge of homosexuality was to induce silencing in our region notorious for its homophobia. The policing of women’s gender identities has now shifted to the ultimate terrain in heterosexist discourses, women’s sexuality. What happens if women subvert this attempt, and remove the power of social death and silencing by claiming a lesbian sexual identity<sup>xxii</sup>, precisely at the point when the impression is being created that there is a

lesbian menace threatening and overtaking heteronormative social life? Davina Goddard starts her letter to the press, “I am a Lesbian, well, at least politically I am” (Goddard 2010: 9A).

I have tried to demonstrate that the nexus of political sexuality and political economy is dynamic and sometimes contested. For many women who may appear powerful in the public, in social, political and economic relations, there are continuous attempts to force them into powerless positions in their sexual relations with men. I recognize that the power of love - ‘love power’, care and erotic ecstasy is an un-theorized, epistemological frontier in Caribbean feminist studies. Women’s experiences of relations of domination emanate from many sources. One of them is the relationship between women and men as socio-sexual beings, and at the core of that union, love power. I would like to know more about how care and erotic ecstasy, shape women’s private and public lives. Jónasdóttir’s theory of love power underscores the need for an in-depth study of women’s sexual relations with men towards revealing the love practices around power and sexuality in Caribbean’s women’s lives.

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2. In reaction to Sigmund Freud's point that bisexuality is the decisive factor in human sexuality, Jane Flax states she prefers the term, polysexual. "Polysexual conveys the sense of a complex, usable range of possibilities, of sites with varying attributes in multiple mixtures and forms." See Jane Flax 2004.

3. I am aware of the symbiotic relationship between heterosexism and homophobia and believe patriarchal relations of power reproduce these exclusions and inequalities. In this project I focus on heterosexuality and heterosexism.

4. I cannot help but think that in the Caribbean now, it seems almost reactionary, backward and passé to say that one is interested in maintaining a research focus on women. Both within the academy and popular culture, there is a sense that the cutting edge work is on men and masculinity and, or 'alternative' sexualities, which are of course, of incredible importance. I remain intrigued that research on heterosexual women seems to be out of style, when hetero-normativity and patriarchal relations continue to be most dominant. I am also mindful of Hollinbaugh and Moraga's observation that there is heterosexuality outside of heterosexism, see Hollingbaugh and Moraga 1983, 395.

5. As my friend and colleague, Pat Mohammed reminded me, sex and love, "is reflected all around us in the music, which, out of fear of emotional entanglements, the capacity/incapacity for Caribbean men and women to profess to, admit to, speak of love, equates and embeds love and desire in material things - like I love me care, I love me

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money and most of all, mi love mi browning.” Email correspondence Mohammed - Barriteau , April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008. I must thank Pat for this wonderful insight.

6. The Mighty Sparrow sings, “you can’t make love without money.’ Reggae artist Buju Banton, declares, “mi love mi car, mi love mi money, but most of all mi love mi browning (brown skin, black woman). In another calypso by Sparrow, Melda visits an obeah man to try to get her man to marry her, (an attempt at guaranteed status and respectability even if emotional stability is not assured), while drinks popularly regarded as promoting sexual stamina include Bois bandé in Grenada, Baba Roots in Jamaica and Seamoss in Barbados.

7. Or prop,

8. Women’s sexuality has been addressed by Caribbean women writers such as Edwidge Danticat, Oona Kempadoo, and Shani Mootoo. Dorian Powell a researcher on the Women in the Caribbean Project looked at women’s sexuality through family planning and fertility and in fact the closest one comes to getting information about women’s sexual lives is through population, reproductive health, and fertility studies. Patricia Mohammed also examined women’s sexuality in Dominica and St. Lucia through family planning, See Mohammed and Perkins 1991. In her doctoral dissertation Mohammed theorized the way early Indo-Trinidadian women negotiated sexual relations, expanding their personal and sexual power in the context of migration, indenture-ship and the comparatively smaller number of Indian women in Trinidad during the early period of indentureship. Roseanne Kahnai in *Matikor* also looks at the sexuality of Indo-Trinidadian women. I am indebted to my colleague Patricia Mohammed for the foregoing information. Email correspondence, Mohammed-Barriteau April 21, 2008. However none of the existing works have made women’s sexual relations the central focus of analysis in the ways we have examined work in Caribbean women’s lives.

<sup>9</sup> I have condensed a lot of the theoretical discussion for the lecture. Jónasdóttir builds a theory of love power as parallel to Marx’s theory of labour power, so she uses similar terminology, which I don’t always accept.

10. I see this research as vital.

11. At the level of informing policy there is a great deal of convergence between Liberal and Socialist feminist theories. Both emphasized women in the public sphere, but from differing theoretical positions. Liberal feminists wanted to increase women’s participation in the state and the economy. Socialist feminists did valuable work on

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showing how women were exploited as workers and as housewives, while emphasizing how women's household work were un-remunerated even as it underwrote capitalist production, see Barriteau 1994, 1995 on Socialist Feminist theory and Caribbean women.

12. I do not deny that there are women engaged in sex work who will enjoy sexual satisfaction from this.

13. Perhaps without even recognising that in the pursuit of the erotic, they also want to be cared for by their men.

14. Even for nurturing the scholarly discourse on men and masculinity, see Marlene Hamilton, 1999.

15. In many political and social organizations women are the fund raisers, the secretaries, the organisers of social activities, key organizers of constituencies, rank and file members of parent teachers associations, but not the presidents, For some of these dynamics in political organizations, see Roberta Clarke, 1986, Barriteau 1992.

16. This assumption I would like to prove in a proposed study of women's sexual relations.

17. Except in the state or governmental sector.

xviii. Legislation in the 1980s removed the legal discrimination and social stigma between legitimate and illegitimate children.

xix. I can almost hear the strong condemnation of this point by some feminists in the region given our heavy investment in mythologizing Caribbean women as mothers, above all else. This is not to suggest Caribbean women do not make incredible sacrifices for their children and even their men. The point I am questioning is the suggestion that they actively choose this over marriage rather than they come to that position as a residual of the tenuous state of many sexual relations, see R T. Smith 1996, Michael Leiber, 1981.

xx. There are conflicting perspectives from North American anthropologists who have done research in the region, see Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow , 1981, and Leiber 1981.

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xxi. I have learnt from social workers attending CGDS's gender training programmes that many mothers deny their teenage daughters claims that they are being sexually assaulted by their stepfathers, many out of fear of losing the relationship and/or economic support the man provides. There are court cases with stepfathers being charged for rapes, or girls running away from home because of this.

<sup>22</sup>. That is women pursue what I call the Taliban model. They remove the power of being labeled lesbian, and deviant and the almost guaranteed 'social death' by claiming the status themselves, emptying the labeling of its policing and regulatory power.