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**Re-Examining Issues of "Male Marginalisation"  
And 'Masculinity' in the Caribbean:  
The Need for a New Policy Approach**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAFRA	Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action
CARICOM	Caribbean Common Market
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CGDS	Centre for Gender and Development Studies
CXC	Caribbean Examination Council
DFID	Development Fund for International Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWI	University of the West Indies
WAND	Women and Development Unit
WICP	Women in the Caribbean Project

## **MEN, MARGINALISATION AND MASCULINITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN**

*Primary school teaching and teacher education shifted from being male dominated to being female dominated as a result of the intention of those holding central positions in the society to restrict black men to occupations related to agricultural and industrial labour; to stifle the possible emergence of militant, black educated men who could possibly overthrow the power structure; to loosen the hold of the church on the education system; and to limit the upward social mobility of black men in society. In a real sense the black woman was used against the black man [Errol Miller 1991: 125].*

*Are males being marginalized? Certainly not, if the main factor being considered is power. Despite the increasing percentage of women at the University of the West Indies, it is the men who are elected to the seat of student power. At community level, whether the issue is dons or youth club leaders, there is no marginalization of males. And as far as the churches are concerned, women's over-representation in the membership and ministering groups, but under representation in the leadership echelons is well documented (Austin-Broos 1997; Toulis 1996). The marginalization discourse always ignore these facts [Barry Chevannes 1999: 33].*

*To argue that women can overpower men simply on the basis of increased income or occupational status is to incorrectly presume that income or occupational dominance form the sole basis of men's control over women [Keisha Lindsay 1997: 14].*

## MEN MARGINALISATION AND MASCULINITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

### OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine the thesis of male marginalisation and the construction of Caribbean masculinity against the background of changes in Caribbean political economy and gender systems in the late twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> As expressed in the works of Errol Miller,<sup>2</sup> social commentators and the general public, the thesis of a wilful or deliberate marginalisation of Caribbean men is a product of changes in gender systems in the late twentieth century Caribbean. The examination of this thesis juxtaposed against changes in Caribbean political economy has to be informed by the policies introduced by Commonwealth Caribbean states since the first United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico City and the beginning of the first decade on women, both in 1975.

### Focus on Men

My analysis centres on investigating existing discourses on Caribbean men. I dissect the major contributions to the discourse on marginality and masculinity to isolate its core assumptions and concerns. I examine the assumptions of the earlier marginality thesis and contrast this with the thesis

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<sup>1</sup> See, Eudine Barriteau, *The Political Economy of Gender in the Twentieth Century Caribbean*, London: MacMillan Press (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> The review of the literature reveals only Errol Miller as a scholar as theorized the marginalisation of the Caribbean male. Most academics (feminist or other) reject it. See Barry Chevannes 1999, Mark Figueroa 1997, Keisha Lindsay 1997, and Barbara Bailey 1997. However the Caribbean public and some academics who admit to not researching the area accept the thesis as an article of faith. See Dawne Bennett 13 March, 2000; Daily Nation 9 March 2000; Sunday Advocate 12 March 2000.

This fuels the need to continue to expose the problematic, contradictory and gendered assumptions in the region on gender equality. It is the right of every boy and girl, every woman and man, every citizen to participate and enjoy the resources of the state unencumbered by denial of access to these resources, or experience any prejudices in their distribution.

### **MEASURING MEN'S MARGINALITY AND GENDER EQUALITY IN CARIBBEAN GENDER SYSTEMS**

If Caribbean men are marginalised how can we determine this marginalisation and what would we need to know to introduce policies that would create conditions of gender justice? The concept of gender justice is pivotal to discussions of marginality. The investigation requires measures to determine male marginality and some means of assessing attempts to attain gender equality. I apply a comprehensive model of gender analysis I developed when I theorized Caribbean gender systems [Barriteau 1998B]. In this framework I define a just gender system as one in which there are no asymmetries of access to, or allocations of status, power and material resources in a society, or in the control over and the capacity to benefit from these resources<sup>4</sup>. There are no hierarchies of gender identities, or the meanings Caribbean society give to masculinity and femininity. In an unjust gender system there is unequal access to and distribution of material resources and power [Barriteau 1998B:

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<sup>4</sup> I thank Gemma Tang Nain for pointing out the need to add control over and benefitting from resources to a discussion of the material dimensions of gender.

192]. Accordingly the thesis of the marginalisation of the male implies that Caribbean gender systems are unjust for men.

In sifting through the different contributions on the marginalisation of males and Caribbean masculinity I focus on the two principal dimensions of gender systems, material and ideological relations of gender. The material dimension exposes how men or women gain access to or are allocated the material and non material resources within a state and society [Barriteau: 1998B :191]. Focussing on this makes visible the distribution of economic and political power and material resources. The ideological dimension indicates how Caribbean societies construct and maintain beliefs and expressions of masculinity and femininity. The statements of public officials, the bureaucratic and social practices of institutions and individuals, and representations in popular culture provide evidence of what society expects or deems appropriate expressions of masculinity and femininity. Collectively these reveal the gender ideologies within a society.

I use measurements of access to and distribution of material resources and non material resources of status, power and privilege as well as an investigation of the gender ideologies informing the gender identities of Caribbean men. The analytical framework exposes the interactions of the ideological and material dimensions of gender for Caribbean men and illuminate many of the perplexing concerns surrounding contemporary expressions of masculinity. Gender ideologies reveal what Caribbean society expects of men and how men in turn construct their gender identities. These ideologies establish sexually differentiated, socially constructed boundaries for manhood and expressions of masculinity [Barriteau 1998B: 191].

In determining whether gaps exist between a formal, juridical, gender equality and experiences that would indicate the relative disadvantages of men, this analytical frame seeks answers to the following:

- ◆ What are the policies, legislation, prejudices, practices that penalize or reward men?
- ◆ What are the deeply entrenched, policies of the state and its institutions that marginalize men?
- ◆ What are the contents and effects of the gender identities men subscribe to?
- ◆ what part do these play in expressions of masculinity that are viewed as problematic?
- ◆ What are the recommendations in the literature for dealing with marginality if it exists?
- ◆ And how do these address concerns for gender justice and equality?

In this analysis I prioritize the activities and policies of the state. Once we are interested in designing policies the activities of the state become central. If there are existing gender inequalities for men or women, actions by the state (ostensibly motivated by a desire to serve the best interests of all its citizens) would be insufficient to combat unequal gender relations. As I have argued the policies states implement may reproduce existing gender asymmetries, they may intensify them, decrease them, or even use them to advance the interests of the state but these policies will not be gender neutral. To move towards gender neutrality the Commonwealth Caribbean state must confront the inequalities that exist in distribution of resources and in the hierarchies imbedded in contemporary meanings of masculinity and femininity [Barriteau 1998: 189]. By legislative or executive decisions the state can introduce, remove, or retard, broad sweeping policies on gender equality. It is within the pores of society gender relations are experienced and meanings internalised as to what being a man or a woman constitutes in the Caribbean. The organisation and experience of social life is the final



arbiter of the reality of gender justice. The existence of marginality for Caribbean men will not be determined by the particular biases feminist or other investigators bring to research. Rather it would be revealed in the daily experiences of men.

### **Men's Marginality in Families Vs The Marginalisation of the Male Thesis**

The opening quotations identify divergent views on the notion of a problem that has engrossed the Commonwealth Caribbean for the past decade. If, in terms of state interests the 1980s belonged to Caribbean women, the decade of the 1990s was dominated by debates on the ideas that Caribbean men were in crisis and that they were increasingly marginalised in the policies and practices of States.

In the 1980s other independent Caribbean states joined Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada in institutionalizing state mechanisms to monitor gender inequalities for women. Several countries introduced legislation to remove the more blatant aspects of institutionalized discrimination against women. Caribbean women increasingly participated in the labour force in larger numbers. This was influenced by the diversification of Caribbean economies which began in the 1960s with various industrialization strategies of development and expanded educational opportunities. Women began to penetrate professions that were once historically male dominated. A politicised, organised women's movement, evident in the growth of several women's organisations and NGOs with an explicit concern for women's well being, became very vocal and very visible. Founded in 1985, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, CAFRA, became the best expression of this. By 1986, within the University of the West Indies, women's studies