

Challenges to Women's Leadership in Ex-Colonial Societies

Ann Marie Bissessar¹

Abstract

Women have held key leadership positions since the year 3000 BCE. Indeed, one of the earliest Egyptian queens, Ku-baba, ruled in the Mesopotamian City-State of UR around 2500 BCE. However, this trend to place females in key leadership roles did not emerge in the Western World until during World War I when women took on the role as members of the revolutionary governments in countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, and Ireland. By the 1960s there were to be further gains as Sirivamo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka became the world's first female President and in 1974 Isabel Perón of Argentina also assumed a leadership position. Today, there are approximately twenty nine female leaders in twenty nine different countries. Eleven of these female Presidents are in the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Finland, India, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Lithuania, San Marino and Switzerland. In addition there are three reigning queens in the countries of Denmark, The Netherlands and The United Kingdom. Twelve females also serve as Prime Ministers in the countries of Australia, Bangladesh, Croatia, Germany, Iceland, Mali, Slovakia, Thailand, and Trinidad and Tobago and in the self-governing territories of Bermuda, Saint Martin and the Åland Islands. However, according to a UNDP report (1995), women still lagged behind in the areas of political and economic participation. That report noted, that while there may have been an overall increase in the number of women actually involved in the electoral process, the increase in the number of females particularly as Members of Parliament or at the top ranks of political parties has not been very encouraging. An account by Barrow-Giles (2011), further suggests that in the case of the Commonwealth Caribbean a total of 2,736 persons contested General Elections between 1992 and 2005 (excluding Guyana). Of that total, 2,374 were males and 362 were females.² This chapter will focus on the role of women as political leaders in the countries of the Anglophone Caribbean. It will present a broad view of women and their participation in politics in the Caribbean region as a whole. It will trace the struggle of females and their entry into the political arena and identify some of the tools and mechanisms employed to allow for such entry. The chapter will, inevitably, examine the historical environment and try to map the triggers that allowed or did not allow for participation of females in the political process during the pre-independence period and afterwards. Another dimension offered in this article is to look specifically at two countries, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, and the way that females were incorporated into the political processes of these countries. It should be recalled that many of the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean have a fairly homogenous population, although that society may be stratified according to class lines as well as gender lines. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago as well as Guyana, however, what may be considered unique is the plurality of these countries in which two major racial groups vie for political as well as economic power. It will be useful, therefore, to examine the way this kind of power-brokerage between the two major racial groups may prohibit or perhaps act as major obstacles in preventing women from attaining top leadership positions. The article will conclude with an evaluation of the mechanisms employed by female Caribbean leaders in their attempts to manage a mainly male-dominated environment.

Keywords: Leadership; ex-colonial societies; Anglophone Caribbean; General Elections

¹ Professor, The Department of Behavioural Sciences, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, WI. Email: annmarie.bissessar@sta.uwi.edu, Phone: 1-868-669-0286

² See Cynthia Barrow- Giles.2011 " Introduction. The Struggle for Women's Political Participation in the Caribbean." In *Women in Caribbean Politics*. Edited by Cynthia Barrow-Giles. Ian Randle Publishers: Jamaica: xi-xv (xii)

Historical Overview of the Political Systems in the Anglophone Caribbean 1920s- 1960s

Prior to 1920, women in the countries of the Anglophone Caribbean were generally overlooked in serious discussions particularly as it related to the policies of the state. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, archival data reveals that in 1924 a delegation of women approached the then Governor of the country to discuss the issue of opening up the franchise to vote to women. Later in August 1924, the president of the Trinidad and Tobago Workingmen's Association along with the Deputy Mayor, Captain Cipriani, moved a motion in the City Council for an amendment to be made to the Port of Spain City Corporation Ordinance to make women eligible for seats in the Council. These suggestions, however, met with negative responses and the report of the Committee presented to the City Council on Thursday September 1927 clearly illustrated a bias against women. It stated:

"Women are not educationally qualified enough to deal with the issues of taxation, sanitation and engineering with which the Council dealt from time to time. In addition they are not on the same plane psychologically".³

Later, on the 20th May, 1928 Councilor E.W. Bowen presented a new motion on participation in public life which allowed women to be elected as aldermen, councilors and mayors of the city of Port of Spain. It should be recalled, however, that during this period there was no ministerial system of government nor independent government. Rather, it should be noted that what was practiced was a system referred to as the Crown Colony system of government or perhaps in its truest sense, Crown Colony administration. Under the Crown Colony system of administration there was an Executive Council which consisted of the Governor and his advisers and a Legislative Council consisting of the Governor, three ex-officio Members (the Colonial Secretary, the Treasurer and the Attorney General), four nominated members and seven elected members.⁴ The Governor had the responsibility to make laws for the peace, order and good government by and with the advice and consent of the Legislature. When a Bill was passed by the Legislature, it was accordingly presented to the Governor for his assent on behalf of the Crown. In the event, though, the Council refused to pass a Bill, the Governor could have, at his discretion, declare that this Bill, motion or resolution be passed and be assented to.

³ Rhoda Reddock. 1984. *Women, Labour and Struggle in the 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago*, (ISS: Hague): 32

⁴ Taken from the Grenada (Legislative Council) Order in Council 1936. (S.I. 1371/1936).

There were three elements in the normal Colonial Legislative Council: the official members who were civil servants; the nominated members who were local citizens appointed on the recommendation of the Governor and where they existed, the elected members usually representing special interests rather than a general electorate. At the inception of Crown Colony Administration, the original proposal was to give the people a 'stop gap' form of representation until elections should become practical. Crown Colony Administration, particularly during the period 1922-1936 was clearly proposed as a mechanism for dealing with a rapidly expanding literate population which, by this time, was agitating for inclusion in the decision-making process.⁵

A number of vehicles such as the Artisan Union in Jamaica (1898) and the Trinidad Working Men's Association (1919) had already emerged and voiced concerns for better working conditions for the rank and file. In other territories in the Caribbean there were small pockets of agitators and administrators. During the period 1922- 1950, therefore, a number of debates with respect to the type and the composition of the Legislature and the kind and number of membership were debated and proposed for the various colonies. A number of discussions were also held with respect to the extension of the franchise for voting.⁶

While these debates for more participation by the local citizenry were taking place throughout the islands of the Anglophone Caribbean, it should be noted, though, that women were not included in this discussion. In the case of the African women, while it was true that they exercised a greater level of mobility than their East Indian counterparts in the case of countries of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, generally females were expected to provide 'support' rather than actively participate in political discussions. Indeed, females had limited access to education during the early pre and post independence period in all the Anglophone countries with a few exceptions.

⁵ Charles Jeffries. 1960. *Transfer of Power: Problems of the Passage to Self Government*. London: Pall Mall Press.

⁶ Ann Spackman. 1975. *Constitutional Development of the West Indies*. Barbados: Caribbean Universities Press.

It has been suggested, however, that the Women's Movement in the Anglophone Caribbean first emerged with the Lady Musgrave Self-Help Society in Jamaica in the 19th century. It was to be expected, though, that this 'society' comprised primarily of 'white' and highly colored upper class ladies of genteel birth. One of the purpose or aim of the organization was to provide economic support 'to gentlewomen who had fallen on reduced circumstances.' This kind of organization no doubt set the pace for other organizations which were middle-strata women's clubs and then 'coteries' comprising primarily of black and colored women who later campaigned for political rights, education and early legal reforms.⁷ In the year 1901, Reddock (2006) observed that Ms Catherine McKenzie, a member of Robert Love's Peoples Convention, a member of the Pan Africanist movement founded by Trinidadian, Henry Sylvester Williams, spoke on the subject of women's rights at the People's Convention Congress.

In this she made a case for equal rights of women and for women's access to education and to the professions and this perhaps was one of the triggers that was responsible for women gaining some entry into the political arena.

For instance, on the 3rd November, 1936 an African female, Audrey Jeffers was elected as a member of the City Council of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1936, then, it was not surprising that under the patronage of the Coterie of Social Workers led by Audrey Jeffers, that the first conference of British West Indian and British Guianese Women Social Workers was held in Port of Spain. But even as these movements were emerging, it was argued that the word 'charity' and not sisterhood best described the relation between Black women of these different classes.⁸ At this time, though, these women were quite vociferous in nationalists' organizations, in lodges, in friendly societies, church groups and trade union organizations and movements. Women, primarily those of African descent, participated in protest action over conditions of work, demonstrations and labor riots for improved working conditions.

In 1934, in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, a group referred to as the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association appealed to women on real issues of economic and social hardships and in 1950 when the People's Education Movement was formed, one of that six-member committee was female.

⁷ Rhoda Reddock. 2006. *History of the Women's Movement in the Caribbean (Part 1)*. <http://www.cafra.org/spip/php?article681>: 1-8

⁸ Rhoda Reddock. 1984. *Women, Labour and Struggle in the 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago*. ISS: Hague:3

This group eventually provided the nucleus of the People's National Movement, a party that was primarily African, grass-root and would later stay in governmental power during the period 1956-1986 in Trinidad and Tobago. Emerging from a series of lectures, sixty one research areas were identified of which three examined the position of women, prostitution, marriage and the role of females in the family. Other areas were birth control and education. Although a minor aspect of the total area of research, the inclusion of these topics served to give prominence to women and the issues previously denied by political organizations. Between 1955 and 1956 women including Teshea, Leola Wood and Lucille Baptiste researched into Hansard and other sources to provide material for the then Premier's Speech and in May 1956 the People's National Movement Women's League was inaugurated at Martha House, Port of Spain with an attendance of more than two hundred and fifty women. Indeed, during the early 1960s, two African women were elected as Parliamentary Representatives.⁹

One of the critical triggers for women to be included in the political and policy making process during the 1940s was, no doubt, part of the spin-off by the movement started by Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (October 11, 1884 – November 7, 1962). She was the first Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945. She supported the New Deal policies of her husband, distant cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and became an advocate for civil rights. After her husband's death in 1945, Roosevelt continued to be an international author, speaker, politician, and activist for the New Deal coalition. She worked to enhance the status of working women, although she opposed the Equal Rights Amendment because she believed it would adversely affect women. In the 1940s, Roosevelt was one of the co-founders of Freedom House and supported the formation of the United Nations. Roosevelt founded the UN Association of the United States in 1943 to advance support for the formation of the UN. She was a delegate to the UN General Assembly from 1945 and 1952, a job for which she was appointed by President Harry S. Truman and confirmed by the United States Senate. During her time at the United Nations she chaired the committee that drafted and approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. President Truman called her the "First Lady of the World" in tribute to her human rights achievements.

⁹ Rhoda Reddock. 1984. *Women, Labour and Struggle in the 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago*. ISS: Hague.

Not only did the Universal declaration of Human Rights ensure greater participation in the political decision-making process in the United States but it may also have served to leverage the rights for women in the case of the less developed countries as well. Indeed, it may have been what policy makers may refer to as a 'policy transfer.' While there is no way of measuring the effect of this policy being transferred from the United States, what was evident, though, as Table 1 indicates, was that women went up as candidates in the General Elections in the various countries of the Caribbean during the period 1944 to 1961, albeit in small numbers.

As Table 1 illustrates, during the period 1944 – 1960 as many Caribbean territories attained self-government and later independence, few women in these countries contested the early elections. For instance, the data reveals that a female contested the election in Jamaica as Universal Adult Suffrage was introduced but was not successful. However, data also reveals that of the few candidates who went up for elections, they won seats in the early elections in the countries of Barbados, Guyana, and Belize. But as Barrow-Giles (2006:130) observed, it was not only the attainment of a seat that was important in these countries, but rather the data reveals that women were indeed entering into the political arena.

Table 1: Women contesting the General Elections in the Caribbean 1944- 1961 (Barrow Giles 2006:129)¹⁰

Country	Year	Outcome
Jamaica	1944	Lost
Trinidad and Tobago	1950	Lost
Barbados	1951	Won
Guyana	1953	Won
Grenada	1954	Lost
Dominica	1957	Lost
Montserrat	1958	Lost
Belize	1961	Won
Saint Lucia	1961	Lost

¹⁰ Cynthia Barrow-Giles and Tennyson S. D. Joseph. 2006. *General Elections and Voting in the English Speaking Caribbean 1992- 2005*. Jamaica: Ian Randle

Giles (2006) was correct to point out, however, that prior to the introduction and even after universal adult suffrage was introduced in the various islands, one major obstacle to women's entry into the political arena was that they simply did not have the right to vote. In other words, the very nature of the institutions and the political and decision-making structures in the various countries was a major factor in determining those who would enter into the arena of power. At the turn of the 21st century however, it would seem that much had changed in terms of women being able to vie for political leadership, particularly in an African dominated party.

The concept of power, it should be noted, tends to be a central theme in most discourses on women's leadership. While it is a concept which is subject to great differences in interpretation, power has traditionally been understood as power-over or power-to.¹¹ The former notion of power which is favoured by realists was clearly enunciated in Strange's (1996) definition which explains power as the ability of a person or group of persons to affect outcomes in such a way that their preferences take precedent over the preferences of others.¹² What is evidently lacking, particularly in the context of the Caribbean as it relates to feminist discourses, is a comprehensive discussion on the way that power was distributed within the society.

Perhaps, rather than using the Smith's¹³ (1974) plural model to explain power differentials, what may be more amenable to understanding power distribution is Braithwaite's¹⁴ (1960) stratification argument. While Braithwaite (1960) agreed that cultural segments in a society existed, he insisted that these were 'sub cultures' and were correspondingly amenable to an analysis based on the ranking of culture, European culture and metropolitan values providing a form of general identification and integration.

Under Crown Colony Administration it was evident that politics and decision-making was not only an essentially male-dominated arena but also, according to Braithwaite's stratification theory, an arena where color and class coincided.

¹¹ Allen, Amy. 2011. "Feminist Perspectives on Power".
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/feminist-power/>>.

¹² Susan Strange. 1996, "The Retreat of the State: the Diffusion of Power in the World Economy", Published by: Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

¹³ M.G. Smith. 1974. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Sangster Book Sores Ltd.: Jamaica

¹⁴ Lloyd Braithwaite. 1960. "Social and Cultural Pluralism in the Caribbean." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. January.

It was to be expected in this early environment that power resided primarily in the hands of the upper and middle classes. These were primarily male. Within such an environment, then, it was not surprising that the women's presence in politics did not happen automatically but rather existed and became explicit under certain conditions. Kanter's research¹⁵ (1977) proposed for instance, that in order to understand the incremental way in which women were assimilated into the political and decision-making process one had to understand the nature of groups. She accordingly looked at groups under four major categories namely: uniform groups (containing only men or only women); skewed groups (contain a large imbalance of men or women); tilted groups (15-40% of opposite sex); balanced group (40-50% of each sex). She suggested that once a group reaches a certain size, then that minority starts to assert itself and from there that assertion eventually follows a transformation of the institutional culture.

Clearly, in the case of the ex-colonial territories, females, particularly East Indian females were in the minority group. But, it can be argued that the size of groups may have contributed to the slow pace as well as to the number of females entering the political sphere. For instance, in the case of Barbados, it was not until 1944, that the income qualification for voters was reduced to £20 which created greater opportunity for representatives of the economically black Barbadians to qualify to vote.

It also provided women with the right to vote and to become members of either Houses of Parliament.¹⁶ Thus, with the lowering of the concessions on which to vote, more women would now satisfy the income requirements.

One consideration, too, particularly in the Caribbean environment, may have been cultural in nature. There is nothing novel in the idea of cultural barriers to women's advancement and indeed was a topic in Duverger's seminal study (1972).¹⁷ It has been suggested by a number of Sociologists, that culture can influence whether women are prepared to come forward as candidates for office.

¹⁵ Rosabeth Kanter Moss. 1977. : Some Effects of Proportion of Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women. *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (2) 65-90.

¹⁶ See Cynthia Barrow Giles and Albert Barn ford. 2011 " Edna Ermyntude 'Ermie' Bourne. Breaking the Ice- Barbadian Pioneer. " In *Women in Caribbean Politics*. Edited by Cynthia Barrow-Giles. Ian Randle Publishers: Jamaica: 33-36

¹⁷ Maurice Duverger, "Factors in a Two-Party and Multiparty System," in *Party Politics and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), pp. 23-32

According to a study by the Interparliamentary Union (1999) in which one hundred and eighty seven women parliamentarians in sixty five countries were interviewed, it was found that cultural attitudes and attitudes hostile to women participating in politics was cited as the second most important barrier to running for parliamentary positions.¹⁸ One of the most important issues, according to these women was that of balancing time. However, according to Inglehart (1979) another dimension may have had to do as well with religious persuasions. In her study she found that women's political activism was lower in Catholic rather than in Protestant countries.¹⁹ The extent to which religion influences participation is still to be researched in the context of the Caribbean islands.

But, it should be recalled that a number of other variables have been offered overtime to explain the paucity of women in the political arena. Some writers have touched on the agents of socialization such as the family and schools in which there is often a differential socialization of boys and girls leading to an idea of separate 'women culture.' An old argument is that these agents of socialization channel individuals into expectations about occupational and other roles which are class and gender related.

It has been suggested, too, that women were the 'victims' of this process having long been assigned roles which were often low profile and low status in most countries. Yet others have observed (Lovenduski and Hill, 1981)²⁰, and this is particularly relevant perhaps in the context of the East Indian female, that extended families, for instance, bring with it additional responsibilities. On the other hand, persons from single-parent families enjoy relative freedom and are freed from the inhibitions of traditional culture. Finally, it has been suggested that potential candidates seeking political office must calculate whether or not to risk nomination by taking into account the closed or open nature of the particular political structure.²¹

¹⁸ Interparliamentary Union. 1999. Participation of Women in Political Life. IPU Reports and Document No 35.

¹⁹ Margaret Inglehart. 1979. "Political Interest in Western European Politics." In Women and European Politics: Contemporary Feminism and Public Policy. Edited by Joni Lovenduski. University of Massachusetts Press.

²⁰ Joni Lovenduski and Jill Hill. 1981. *The Politics of the Second Electorate. Women and Political Participation*. Routledge and Keagan Paul: USA

²¹ Wilma Rule. 1982. " Why Women don't run. The Critical Contextual factors in Women's Legislative recruitment. *The Western Political Quarterly*: 60-77

The Political Environment and Women's Entry into the Political Positions 1950-1990s

While there has been little data compiled with respect to the number of women entering the arena as political candidates for the General Elections during the period 1970-1980s, accounts are available of women who did succeed in attaining political power during the period 1950-60s. Accordingly, a profile of these females is summarized to discover the factors, or commonalities, these women may have in order to allow them to enter politics (Table 2).

As Table 2 (underneath) indicates in two of the cases, the candidates were often of mixed descent, providing them with upward mobility and acceptance in societies stratified along lines of color and class. In a number of cases, also some of the candidates came from the middle and in one case the upper class of those societies. In the case of Mrs. Joshua in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Mrs. Joshua is not only influenced by her early association with the union in Trinidad and Tobago but also was married to a strong union supporter as well.

It is to be acknowledged that the entry of these women in politics was a distinct achievement for women during this period. It should be recalled during the pre-independence period, men and women, particularly under Colonial Administration operated in distinct political subcultures, each with their own bases of power, modes and participation and goals.

In the case of the Caribbean, and indeed elsewhere, however, despite these distinct boundaries women did participate in the decision making process, although their participation took less conventional forms. For instance, they took part in urban crowd actions, organized petitions and campaigns, and under took activities congruent with women identification. For instance, as Table 2 indicates Mabel James in the case of Dominica operated a supermarket and often took up calls for more opportunities for the oppressed in the community. It should also be recalled that women's participation in politics also took place in the context of their home. Essentially, then the triggering factors allowing these early political pioneers to attain political office was essentially due to their socialization, their family ties, their class base and their support bases.

Table 2: Profile of Female Politicians in the Caribbean 1950s -1960s

Country and Candidate	Period of office	Family connections	Occupation
<u>Dominica</u> Mabel Moir James	1961-1974	Mixed Scottish and African Methodist Married to a pharmacist and owned a shop (middle class)	-school teacher -identified with the grassroots and was spokesman
<u>St Vincent and the Grenadines</u> Ivy Jousha	1957-1979	Migrated to Trinidad in the 1940s	Was influenced by the Butler movement and later married Ebenezer Joshua who was involved in labor movements and eventually politics.
<u>St Lucia</u> Grace Augustin	1957-1996	Mixed- French Creole Privileged –settler group	Qualified as nurse and later in law

Evidence suggests that there was definitely a lack of gender sensitive policies and this, no doubt, constrained the political participation of women in the pre independence Anglophone Caribbean. The lack of such policies, however, did not slow women's agitation in the post independence era for representation not only in the political domain but also in executive, judicial and diplomatic positions. Indeed, following the UN's declaration of the Decade for Women, Women's Movements in the Caribbean gained greater traction and were subsequently regarded as the catalysts for the introduction of and acceptance of policies that promoted women's participation in decision making processes across the region. It should be noted, however, that the insularity of the various territories leading to a general lack of communication across many Caribbean territories proved to be a major impediment for the Women's Movement.

However, with faster air and sea travel, as the solidarity increased between the islands, so did the momentum of the women's movement. So, although Women's Movements did not consolidate their role in the region until the 1980's, from as early as the 1970's what was witnessed was a renewed fervor for gender justice which saw many women breaking the glass ceiling and creating pathways for gender mainstreaming in the political arena in the post independence era.

A noteworthy example of this was Jamaica's Angela King who in 1975 became increasingly popular, not only due to her diplomatic clout but also because she was an ardent advocate for women's rights, which at that time was still significantly undermined.

Following along a similar trajectory, Dame Eugenia Charles after several years of political engagement became Dominica's first female Prime Minister in 1980. She was not only Dominica's first female Prime Minister but also the first female Prime Minister in the Western hemisphere and was widely acclaimed for her anti-corruption stance and almost flawless political leadership record (www.caramfound.org). Several organizations emerged during the Decade for Women and have also played a critical role in creating avenues for women's involvement in politics at leadership levels.

One such organization was the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action which was established at the very end of the Decade for Women in 1985. The founding members of CAFRA highlighted one of its primary aims as seeking to break down the barriers that confronted women in the Caribbean region. Another important goal for the organization was to support the development of and the strengthening of the women's movement in the Caribbean.²² Prior to this, between 1979 and 1982 Joycelin Massaiah coordinated the Women in the Caribbean Project which undoubtedly played an equally important role as CAFRA. The Women in the Caribbean Project was regarded as a path breaking one as a result of its attempts to help women to come to an understanding of their own realities and in influencing policy making.²³ Rhoda Reddock; one of the co-founders of CAFRA, indicated that several challenges were encountered in generating interest in such an organisation.²⁴

Nonetheless, in the immediate aftermath of the Decade for Women, regional bodies such as the Commonwealth envisaged the adoption of gender management systems which would work to bolster the effects of disadvantages that may have arisen from gender inequities. The Commonwealth body proposed national women's machineries which were to take a lead role in administering these gender management systems. However, though by 1990 several national women's machineries were established in approximately forty four Commonwealth countries, men still outnumbered women in the political arena.²⁵

²² www.cafra.org/spip.php?article681 p.4

²³ Vassell, Linnette. 2001. Leadership Projects and Programmes for Women in the Caribbean: Towards an Understanding of Transformational Leadership. UNIFEM Caribbean. P.11

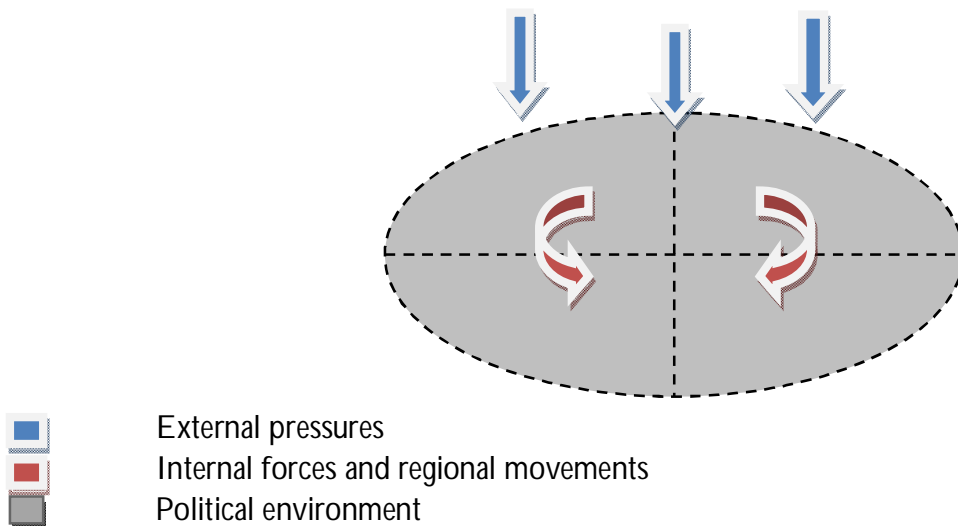
²⁴ Though Reddock (2012) lamented the fact that there seemed to be waning interest in the organisation, she remained optimistic about the role that the Institute of Gender and Development Studies could play in filling the void which came about as a result of inertia in the CAFRA membership

²⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat. 1999. *Gender Management System Handbook*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

The paucity of women in the political arena has been instrumental in the expansion of the “Put a Woman” project which has functioned as a support system for women desirous of becoming involved in politics. Hazel Brown, a renowned Caribbean feminist, suggested that the critical role of such a project did not only involve the paving of the way for would-be female politicians but indeed was a mechanism for reconciling contentious issues such as campaign financing for women and forging an alliance between female political leaders regardless of party affiliation.²⁶

It can be argued that three *primary* predisposing factors led to women’s emergence in policy discussions in the post-independence period across the region. Firstly, there was the United Nations’ declaration of 1975-1985 as the Decade for Women; secondly, Women’s Movements consolidated their role in the region during this decade and; thirdly, the portrayal of true leadership qualities by women who were determined to transform the political landscape of the Caribbean region from the 1970’s onwards. What can be surmised, therefore, is that there were a number of pre-disposing factors that allowed for entry of females into the political arena. While some of the pressures for change came from external sources they were to a large extent further supported by internal, regional movements and by many strong and politically motivated women.

Figure: 1 Women in Politics 1990 – 2012



²⁶ Interview with Hazel Brown by Ms Geneve Philip on 2012

As Table 3 below indicates, during the period 1992- 2005, there was an increase in the number of females seeking elected positions, but this number was small in comparison to the number of males seeking elected positions. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Gender and Candidacy in Selected Countries, 1992- 2005 (Barrow-Giles, 2006: 135)

Country	Total Candidates	Male	Female
Anguilla	78	69	9
Antigua and Barbuda	122	116	6
Barbados	215	191	24
Belize	217	201	16
Bahamas	342	285	57
Dominica	165	145	20
Grenada	195	164	31
Jamaica	494	433	61
Montserrat	54	44	10
St Kitts/Nevis	115	106	9
Saint Lucia	129	116	13
St Vincent and the Grenadines	105	96	9
Trinidad and Tobago	405	318	87

Indeed, on average, only 13.3 females were actually accommodated in a political portfolio during the period 1992-2005. Major arguments have already been advanced to explain the absence of women in political positions. One of the major arguments was that women were not interested. It can be surmised, however, that contrary to popular belief, it is not that women have been less interested in politics than their male counterparts have been but in many instances they have been deliberately sidelined.²⁷ In other instances, family demands have been a major hindrance to women who are desirous of entering a life of politics. Therefore, apart from being deliberately excluded from political positions, women's absence from positions of political leadership can be attributed to the fact that they have traditionally been the primary care givers in their families; which can possibly be relegated to a secondary role should they become involved in politics.

²⁷Robert, Watson; Alicia, Jencik and Judith, Selzer. "Women World Leaders: Comparative Analysis and Gender Experiences". *Journal of International Women's Studies* Vol 7 (2): 53-76. 2005.

While these factors, no doubt, do contribute to some degree to reluctance by women to seek political office, yet, as some Caribbean feminists also suggest another major constraint for women wishing to become involved in a life of politics is the structure of political systems in the region. For instance, many of the political parties in the Caribbean are yet to readily accept gender sensitive policies on their agendas. Even at the local government level not much has been done in the region over the years to increase the number of female representatives. Thus, Myers' comment that "if local government is not engendered it is endangered" stems from the observation that at the local government level women's participation has remained significantly low and limited over time.²⁸ To a large extent this was substantiated by a candidate vying for entry into the local government arena. According to this candidate there seemed to be a vast difference between the general acceptance and the concomitant support for women interested in central government and local government. The candidate also commented that while there was great support at the party level for a woman wanting to become involved in local government, this was accompanied by a degree of scepticism amongst the electorate.²⁹

However, it can be argued that what constrains the entry of women in politics is not only the absence of a 'gender-sensitive' policy by the political parties but rather the structure and culture of the political parties themselves. Many of the ex-British colonies, for instance, inherited a system of government often referred to as the Westminster Whitehall model of government. This model comprised a bi-cameral system with the lower house being one in which members were elected. It was found, however, while this model was appropriate and fairly successful in countries which had a fairly homogenous mix of people, who shared values, adhered to norms, values and traditions, the introduction of such a model in many countries which comprised a diversity of population, did not to a large extent meet the aspirations of the drafters. For instance, as Ryan, notes, it gave rise to a system of governance in which the winner 'took all.'³⁰ Overtime, this system gave rise to a voting pattern in which two traditional political parties based on certain cleavages, rotated power between them.

²⁸ Roxanne, Myers. Local Government, Decentralization and Gender. Georgetown: Presented at the Caribbean Conference on Local Government Decentralization. 2002. pg2.

²⁹ Interview with past candidate for local government elections

³⁰ Selwyn Ryan. 1999. Winner Takes All: The Westminster Experience in the Anglophone Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago: ISER

For instance, an examination of the political leadership in many Caribbean territories indicates that political power often resided in the hands of a few. In the case of Jamaica, for example, the Manley's dominated the leadership of the country, first the father and then the son. In the case, of Guyana, Burnham ruled as President of the country from 1968-1980s, in Trinidad and Tobago, Williams ruled from 1962-1980 and in the case of Grenada, Gairy became known as the 'father of the country.' Essentially, the political culture was largely patrilineal and one in which the structure prohibited the younger more ambitious from climbing the political ladder. To a large extent then, the young as well as females were largely excluded from entering into the middle and upper levels of the party's largely hierarchical structure.

Women Prime Ministers and their entry into the Political arena in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago

While it has been a challenge for women to enter and be accepted at the top echelons of a political party in essentially patriarchal societies, it is even more difficult for women to be accepted as a leader of a political party in what are often referred to as plural societies.

Plural societies, as defined by M.G. Smith (1965)³¹, R. T. Smith (1961)³² and Furnivall (1939)³³ were societies that according to Smith (1984) *'were culturally split societies governed by dominant demographic minorities whose peculiar social structures and political conditions set them apart as a category worth special study.'*³⁴ Because of the historical assimilation of two major groups, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, and the way these groups were incorporated, they are often largely referred to as "plural societies." In both these societies, the governing party and the opposition party are largely reflective of the racial cleavage of the societies. These societies also are societies that are largely based on tribal voting.

³¹ M. G. Smith. 1965. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

³² R.T. Smith. 1961, " Review of Social and Cultural Pluralism in the Caribbean. *American Anthropologist*. 63: 155=157

³³ J. S. Furnivall. 1939. *Netherland India: A Study of Plural Economy*. London: Cambridge University Press.

³⁴ M.G. Smith.1984.*Culture, Race and Class in the Commonwealth Caribbean*. Department of Extra Mural Studeis, University of the West Indies: Mona, Jamaica:29.

It is not surprising, then, in societies such as these that power largely remains in the hands of a dominant male. Males also dominate many of the senior positions within the party hierarchy. To expect women to attain leadership position in these countries then is to deviate completely from historical power structures. Yet, in the case of Guyana, a political environment dominated by two men, Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, in 1997 Janet Jagan was appointed as Prime Minister and First Vice President for the People's Progressive Party. There was no doubt a number of factors that led to the assumption of the highest office in Guyana by a Caucasian female who had deviated from norms to marry an East Indian, Hindu male.³⁵

One of the most critical factors, it seemed, was her interest, at an early age in the study of politics, particularly in 'leftist politics.' She also had an inclination to engage in activities and thus her early forays in the student organization. This shared interest with the young Jagan was no doubt the bond that led to their marriage and later her entry into her host society. As Hinds (2011:196) noted, *although her 'whiteness' posed initial cultural challenges for him, her political value served as the means of cultural acceptance. She soon became 'indianized' both politically and culturally.*

Accounts suggest that Janet was a strong and equal partner for Jagan and in 1946 she quickly adapted to her host culture and by 1947 she co-founded the Women's Political and Economic Organisation. She was also the co-founder in 1946 of the Political Affairs Committee and to a large extent followed the doctrines of socialism.

There can be no doubt that Janet Jagan had political interests that were not significantly different from those of her husband but included in that interest was a broader 'gendered' interest.³⁶ For instance, in addition to political questions she was concerned with the general conditions of the country particularly in the areas of health, housing, and education which has disproportionate negative effects on women and children. Historical accounts of the Jagans indicate that Janet, like her husband, had strong convictions so much so that even when he was deposed from office and both husband and wife were thrown in jail, this did not dampen her convictions.

³⁵ In an article by David Hinds, he notes that Janet's father actually threatened to shoot Cheddi if they went along with the marriage (196). See David Hinds. 2011 " Janet Jagan and the Politics of Ethnicity in Guyana. In *Women in Caribbean Politics*. Edited by Cynthia Barrow-Giles. Ian Randle Publishers: Jamaica: 195-208.

³⁶ A. Phillips. (ed) 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

She continued to support the political party and was engaged as the editor of the *Mirror* (the PPPs major voice) which not only propagated the party's views but provided a critique of the governing party.

In 1992, when Jagan finally assumed power, Janet continued to support her husband but strangely enough took no cabinet position but only assumed office on his death in 1997. Clearly, Janet deviated from the style of women leaders commonly displayed in the United States. One researcher, Carroll (2001) suggests that in the United States, women officeholders give greater attention than their male colleagues of the same party to women's rights as well as to concerns reflecting women's traditional roles as caregivers in the family and society.³⁷ Similar observations were made in the Nordic States where women leaders raised distinctive concerns on issues like day care centres.³⁸ In the case of Mrs Jagan, she functioned as the chief hardliner and was often perceived as defiant, calculating and uncompromising- qualities which later led to her withdrawal from politics in 1997. In assessing Jagan's leadership, Hinds observes that she was uncompromising, hard line and many persons thought she lacked humanism – quite the opposite to the behaviour of the political leader in Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar (2010-).

Persad-Bissessar, like Jagan, seemed a high-achiever. Attaining a Bachelor of Arts Degree and later a law degree, she entered politics much later than Jagan starting with her appointment as an alderman for her district in 1987. It was evident, then, that Persad-Bissessar had her first foray into politics at the 'grass-roots' level. In a surprising move, though, in 1994 Persad-Bissessar aligned herself with the existing grass-root Indian party, the United National Congress. From 1994 to present Persad-Bissessar contested the seats in her rural constituency of Siparia and has continued to boast that she gained the largest number of votes. Many suggested that Persad-Bissessar would have never attained power in a male, East Indian dominated party. Yet Persad-Bissessar went on to defeat the warrior Basdeo Panday, the founder of the party, later Winston Dookeran and then the governing leader, Patrick Manning. Unlike Janet Jagan, though, Persad-Bissessar continues to give greater attention to the rights of women and children (Carroll, 2001). The pre-disposing factors for Persad-Bissessar's victory and her continued retention of the Prime Ministerial position seem to differ from the run-of-the mill literature on women in politics.

³⁷ S.J. Carroll. (ed) 2001. *The Impact of Women in Public Office*. Indiana IN: University of Indiana Press.

³⁸ L. Karvonen and P Selle. 1995. *Women in Nordic Politics*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

One pre-disposing factor leading to Persad-Bissessar's capture of leadership in the case of Trinidad and Tobago had to do with timing. As early as 1995, research had suggested that elections in Trinidad and Tobago had moved away from a purely tribal voting pattern commonly displayed in plural societies and to one in which the balance of power resided in the hands of what were described as 'marginal voters.'³⁹ Thus, it was believed that in order to capture one had to appeal to these voters – young, female, upwardly mobile. Persad-Bissessar appealed to the female psyche. When voted down for leadership position in the run up to the General Elections- she appealed to the females using the popular song "no woman doh cry." Another factor, too, was the disenchantment by the population with the old form of politics and particularly with the leadership of the two parties. Persad-Bissessar, thus seemed to have assumed office in a period which was most opportune. According to public opinion 'her time had come.'

While a number of researchers have suggested that women leaders are usually more conservative and consistently more liberal towards the traditional left-right issues such as crime, moral censorship or the redistribution of income (Vega and Firestone (1995); Dolan (1997); Swers (1998))⁴⁰ this has not been exhibited by Persad-Bissessar. From the standpoint of feminist theory, the most important changes expected from Persad-Bissessar would be those to support the goals for increased women's autonomy by acknowledging and redressing gender inequality. To date, this 'expression of change' remains at the stage of rhetoric. Yet, as Lovenduski and Norris (2003:98) ⁴¹ observed *as expected in the system of strong, cohesive and disciplined party government that prevails at Westminster, the evidence confirms that men and women's attitudes and values within each party coincide on many issues where party competition reflects the traditional left-right ideological spectrum. Legislative discipline and the culture of party unity may exaggerate agreement between men and women in each party.* Like the true Westminster model, then, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, Persad-Bissessar continues to maintain stability through party discipline and the culture of a united party within the exported Westminster Whitehall model.

³⁹ John Gaffar La Guerre. 1996. *The General Elections of 1995*. School of Continuing Studies: Trinidad

⁴⁰ A Vega and J.M. Firestone. 1995. " The Effects of Gender on Congressional Behaviour and the Substantive Representation of Women." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 20 (2): 213-232. J. Dolan. 1997. " Support for Women's Interests in the 103rd Congress: The Distinct Impact of Congressional Women." *Women and Politics*. 18 (4): 81-94; M.L. Swers. 1998. " Are Women More Likely to Vote for Women's Issue Bills than their Male Colleagues?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. 23 (3): 435-48.

⁴¹ Joni LOovenduski and Pippa Norris. 2003. " Westminster Women: The Politics of Presence." *Political Studies*. Volume 51: 84-102

Conclusion

This paper presented a historical account of some of the pre-disposing as well as the inhibiting factors to the entry of women into political positions from as early as the 1920s. A number of factors were advanced to explain why fewer women entered into the political arena. These included factors such as socialization, lack of education, family obligations and last but by no means least the hierarchical party structures. The paper then looked at some of the pre-disposing factors– some of which included international as well as regional interventions. Finally the paper concluded by examining briefly the leadership style of Janet Jagan in the case of Guyana and Persad-Bissessar in the case of Trinidad and Tobago. What emerged were the differences in the style practiced by both these leaders.

Although women continue to outnumber men in terms of educational achievement this educational advancement has not translated into a greater involvement for women in the corridors of political power. A recent attempt to rectify this emanated from the ideas which came out of the 2011 Caribbean Regional Colloquium on Women Leaders as Agents of Change. The Colloquium sought to draw recognition to the fact that there was still inequality between the number of Caribbean men and women who occupied ministerial positions. As a result there tended to be a lack of women political leaders committed to promoting gender empowerment and justice in the region. Therefore, the Port of Spain Consensus on Transformational Leadership for Gender Equality which was born out of this Colloquium made several proposals which could increase the number of women in political leadership acting as transformational leaders. They include but are not limited to: increased women's representation in parliament to a minimum of 30%; the promotion of shared family responsibilities which would give way to the increased participation of women in politics and; the strengthening of national women's machineries and the development of initiatives that allow women's full participation in policy making processes.⁴² Only time, however, will reveal whether these 'new' initiatives will be adopted.

⁴² <http://www.news.gov.tt/index.php?news=8340>

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