

GENDER AND NEW CONSTRUCTS OF VIOLENCE AND MILITARISM: CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN A CHANGING 21ST CENTURY

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- ✘ The current Context of Caribbean Political Economy
- ✘ 21st Century Violence in the Caribbean
- ✘ The Militarist Response
- ✘ Gender, Violence and Militarism
- ✘ Challenges for Civil Society

THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF CARIBBEAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

- ✘ This Summit is taken place at a crucial period in the history of the region and the world. It is taking place at the collapse of the neo-liberal paradigm of capitalist globalization.
- ✘ It has come after a close to 20-year period where the forces of free trade and the free market 'market fundamentalism' were paramount dismantling and removing the social and economic safeguards which had been established in the Anglophone Caribbean in the aftermath of the labour disturbances of the 1930s and World War II in our region.

UNDERSTANDING NEO-LIBERALISM

- ✘ Neo-liberalism refers here to an economic and ideological system characterised by: the rule of the market — freedom for capital, goods and services, where the market is self-regulating allowing the “trickle down” notion of wealth distribution. The freedom is from the state, or government intervention or regulation;
- ✘ It is also characterised by reduction in public expenditure for social services, such as health and education and privatization of public enterprise (from water to even the internet);
- ✘ It also includes the de-unionizing of labour forces and removal of any impediments to capital mobility, such as regulations.

NEO-LIBERALISM CONT'D

- ✘ Although economies like India and China have grown at phenomenal rates, there has been an exacerbation of internal inequalities and the pauperisation of large proportions of the rural population who migrate to the cities in search of work and become cheap labour open to extreme forms of exploitation not possible in other parts of the world hence the cheap exports.
- ✘ Over this period, we have also witnessed the deterioration of social life in many quarters even as the availability of material goods for consumption has increased exponentially.
- ✘ This social crisis is most evident in our out of control violent crime and youth violence situation, a situation which is directly related to these economic and trade policies.

NEO-LIBERALISM AND GLOBALISATION

- ✘ Many of the characteristics of neo-liberalism in this phase were identified with globalisation;
- ✘ Globalisation referred to:
 - + 1. the use of new information technology to facilitate fast communication and global connectivity; and
 - + 2) the inter-penetration of capital in markets throughout the world through 'free trade' and the 'free market';

GLOBALISATION, COMMUNICATION AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

- ✘ Although globalisation is often viewed as an economic process, every process, be it economic or not, impacts greatly upon other aspects of human experience.
- ✘ Hence, globalisation involves a myriad of cultural, social, political, psychological as well as economic effects.

NEO-LIBERAL GLOBALISATION CONT'D

- ✘ One of the Characteristics of this era of neo-liberalism has been the globalisation of a predominantly US media in almost every part of the world ;
- ✘ One of the main characteristics of the US media has been the normalisation of physical violence and hypersexuality as entertainment;
- ✘ It has also served to normalise the gun as the weapon of choice for people, especially men worldwide;

BUVINIC AND MORRISON,

- Between the 1980s and 1990s, a period characterised by the shift to economic neo-liberalism these authors note that the world average of homicides rose from 5.82 for every 100,000 persons in 1980-1984 to 8.86 per 100,000 during 1990 -1994 (Buvunic and Morrison, 2000:58-59).
- But the rates for the Economic South or Third World are even more alarming. They point to the growing feelings of personal insecurity felt by us all in these times. They note that the homicide rates were - 40 per 100.000 in sub-Saharan Africa; 23 per 100,000 for Latin America with the Drug capital Cali Colombia having rate of 91 per 100,000 ((Buvunic and Morrison, 2000:59).

BUVINIC AND MORRISON

- ✘ In pointing to factors contributing to these trends these authors identify the following:
- ✘ The fight-back of the have-nots – they argue that the perception by some that they are worse off than others is a powerful instigator of violence. After a short period in the 1970s when income disparities had declined, they note these rose again in the 1980s and definitely in the 1990s in Latin America and elsewhere.
- ✘ The decline in social services attendant on structural adjustment – that early phase of economic neo-liberalism also contributed to reduction in access to pre-natal care and early childhood support which could have affected the mental health of a new generation leading to increased deprivation and violence.

TUNING IN AND LASHING OUT

- ✘ The 'global' media also plays its part in highlighting the economic disparities. Consumers in the Economic South become closely aware of the consumer items which they do not own and this increases demand as well as feelings of deprivation.
- ✘ One solution to this is to import it; another is to migrate in order to earn enough to buy it and a third; to commit a violent offence to gain access to it.

MASCULINITIES AND NEO-LIBERALISM

- ✘ But there is another factor which must be brought into the equation, that is the constructions of notions of manhood and womanhood and how these interact in the changing context of globalizing economic neo-liberalism.
- ✘ In many contexts masculinities are associated with violence, violence as protection, defence or as a mechanism for gaining and preserving power. As noted by WINAD (2005), although violence is not strictly a practice of men, it is linked to masculine identity.

FEMININITIES AND ECONOMIC NEO-LIBERALISM

- ✘ With economic restructuring the economic possibilities for many poor women decline yet the consumption demands increase not only for food, shelter, and essentials for family and children but also for a wider range of consumer items and beauty products - hair, wigs, weaves, nails etc.
- ✘ For women in low-income contexts the choices are either – low-wage employment, migration, leaving their children behind or a relationship with a male partner or child father who is economically viable, sometimes through illegal activity.
- ✘ Caribbean men's gender identity often includes both the need to be 'respected' as a man and the ability to use money to access women and/or to economically support them.

21ST CENTURY VIOLENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

- ✘ While political and criminal violence was characteristics of some parts of the region;
- ✘ Criminal violence in particular has now become much more prevalent and characteristic of the entire hemisphere;
- ✘ The fight against gender-based violence has been an important one for the Caribbean region since the 1970s;
- ✘ Yet although such violence has been de-legitimised, it has not necessarily diminished.

THE SHIFT TO GUNS

- ✘ For many countries of the English-speaking Caribbean, the majority of assaults and homicides were committed in past years with blunt or sharp weapons. The trend toward increased use of firearms in the commission of crime began in the 1970s in Jamaica, so that a court was established in 1974 solely dedicated to gun-related matters.
- ✘ In Trinidad and Tobago this change began in 2000. Before 2000, firearms were responsible for less than one-third of all homicides. By May 2006, this percentage had risen to 74 percent (see Figure 9.1 and Table 9.1). The percentage of homicides attributed to firearms in Trinidad and Tobago lies well within the range of rates of 60 percent to 93 percent seen in Latin America (Guerrero, 1998).

THE GLOBALISATION OF GUN MANUFACTURE

- ✘ One of the characteristics of globalisation has been the shift in production from the Economic North to the South where labour is cheaper;
- ✘ Smuggled firearms are sourced from South and Central American manufacturers of light arms, among others. Suppliers are from Brazil (which is licensed to manufacture Beretta, Colt, and Taurus makes); Venezuela (Smith & Wesson); Mexico; and the Dominican Republic (Klare and Anderson, 1996). ***These countries all make firearms for domestic sale and for export, ostensibly to governments and licensed private owners.***
- ✘ ***Virtually all these weapons are US Brands***
- ✘ ***Weapons in general are a major export of a number of European countries and the US. And these manufacturers need to ensure that there will always be consumers;***

SMALL ARMS AND THE CONSUMER CULTURE

- ✘ For the disadvantaged – small arms present a way to access the ‘bling’ and ‘brands’ advertised or simply normalised through the US media;
- ✘ These ‘brands’ become signs of belonging which are increasingly important for young people;
- ✘ Buying or stealing a gun takes less time than staying in school , growing up and finding a job which allows you to purchase the desired item;

CHARLES GREEN - *MANUFACTURING POWERLESSNESS IN THE DIASPORA*

- In the global information age, the roles of television and the advertising industry are pivotal for the creation of innovators. Increasingly, desperate youth throughout the Diaspora are enticed by an infinite array of ubiquitous consumer products displayed on every entertainment medium with the subliminal message that to not possess these things is to be an outcast.



THE SHIFT TO GUNS CONT'D

- ✘ The CARICOM Regional Task Force on Crime and Security recently commissioned a report on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Caribbean (CARICOM, 2002).
- ✘ The resulting report identified three levels of SALW proliferation in the region: countries with *established high levels and patterns of armed crime (Jamaica)*; countries with *emerging high levels of armed and organized criminality (Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago)*; and countries with *indications of increased use and availability of small arms (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines)*

GENDER IDEOLOGIES

- ✘ Gender ideologies can be defined as - culturally specific identities, norms, and symbols associated with social constructions of masculinity and femininity.
- ✘ In other words they refer to, for example, notions of appropriate behaviours, attitudes, mannerisms, etc. for women and men; for relations between women and men; and among women and men.
- ✘ Gender ideologies are not fixed, although some aspects can be extremely pervasive and difficult to change. They vary from society to society and from one era to another and are dynamic and constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated due to changes taking place in society at various levels.

GLOBALISATION AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

Globalisation has affected Caribbean gender ideologies in many ways:

- ✘ the influence of globalised images and musical representations of male violence in particular black male violence;
- ✘ The focus on young female hypersexuality where and the increased commodification of bodies and sexualities;
- ✘ the proliferation of small arms and light weapons through the globalised drug trade and arms trade;
- ✘ the generalisation of conspicuous consumption such as “brands” and “bling” as markers of social status and bases of ‘respect’; and a ‘get rich quick or die trying’ mentality, which is directly linked to the consumerist imperatives mentioned before.

VIDEO GAMES

- Video games and other media sometimes use prostitutes as characters that are targets for the male hero. In a game from the *Duke Nukem* series, prostitutes are forced to strip and are then killed. In the number one selling video game for 2001, *Grand Auto Theft III*, the player can clobber a prostitute with a baseball bat with a new game technique that allows the player to feel he or she is really doing this. In other popular media, prostitutes and strippers are often included to add scenes of female breasts and rear-ends on camera. These offer viewers images of women and female sexuality associated with exchanging sex for money, and associating sex with violence.

YOUNG MEN AND THEIR MOTHERS

- ✘ The Increased proliferation of small arms is linked to the drug trade and gang violence;
- ✘ All of these contribute to increasing violence and insecurity generally within the hemisphere; and to the increased murders of young men generally;
- ✘ While young male demise is often pitted against the improvement in the status of women; the truth is that – the status of young men is closely related to the status of their mothers.

YOUNG MEN AND THEIR MOTHERS CON'TD

WINAD -A WOMEN'S NGO working on small arms and violence in communities in Trinidad and Tobago noted that:

"We recognised that, although the violence is happening among our young males, when you look closer at the problem women are seriously affected," Women are the mothers or partners of both perpetrators and victims. They have to pay for legal representations or burials.

The women of Laventille don't accept this burden stoically or complacently. There is strong desire to get involved in their community and bring about change.

"There is lot of independence in Laventille," says Mutota. "People recognise that there is a problem and that it is their responsibility to clean it up.

"Women also recognise that they have a central role to play in alleviating the problem, but that there needs to be some sort of mobilisation." (Interview with Folade Mutota, 11.9 2004

http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=29314869

retrieved 15/4/09)

THE MILITARIST RESPONSE

- ✘ While militarism has usually been associated with military dictatorships and civil wars in various parts of the world, feminist activists are now using the term to refer to the increasing pervasiveness of military – based solutions to social problems and crises.
- ✘ The large scale use of arms and the organised character of criminal gangs have also led to them being described as militarist organisations.
- ✘ Domestic violence is also closely associated with the established military hence the increase in numbers also increases the risk for domestic violence among women in relationships with men in armies and the police

THE MILITARIST RESPONSE

- ✘ At a recent regional meeting of the Global Fund for Women in Mexico City – March 2009 it was noted that the drug cartel eradication process had resulted in the extensive use of the military resulting in the over 5000 people being killed most of them civilians;
- ✘ They spoke of teachers and children trying to escape from between shoot-outs between police and drug traffickers;
- ✘ Rape is also a weapon used by criminal gangs as well as armies and the police – guns often become a mechanism to facilitate rape.

MILITARISM AND NEO-LIBERALISM

- ✘ Meanwhile they noted that one of the Mexican drug dealers was listed in Forbes magazine as one of the richest men in the world;
- ✘ The values of neo-liberalism therefore – individual wealth and competition are the same values fuelling the drug trade as other aspects of globalised industry;
- ✘ Neo-liberalism in some instances has weakened and/or corrupted the state leaving it in no state to confront the militarised drug industry;

MILITARISM AND NEO-LIBERALISM CONT'D

- ✘ This economic and social context is one of increasing insecurity for all;
- ✘ The security industry became the fastest growing industry over the past 20 years – security guards, security systems, cctv systems, guard dogs, devices etc.
- ✘ This insecurity also leads people to accept increasing militarisation of our lives as we accept the reduced freedom of being searched, watched, tagged, monitored, and living behind bars.

MILITARISM AND NEO-LIBERALISM

- ✘ With this increasing insecurity, armies become perceived as saviours opening the risk for the reduction of our human rights;
- ✘ Normally peaceful communities become bloodthirsty, seeking revenge, punishment etc.;
- ✘ Demands for security often have class implications as they often mean increasing distance between the rich and the poor.

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

- ✘ Social movements have the responsibility to bring issues to public attention long before they become registered on the national consciousness;
- ✘ They also have the goal of addressing issues that governments have not yet recognized or felt necessary to address;
- ✘ Many of our governments are caught in a response mode and are not in a situation to consciously think their way out of this situation;

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

- ✘ We are now on the cusp of a new era and it is up to us in civil society to consciously work to shape the kind of society of the 21st Century;
- ✘ This century which began in neo-liberalism now has an opportunity to develop alternatives although those ideas have not died;
- ✘ The removal of inequity through a strengthening of the social sector must be lobbied for to support the vulnerable who fell through the cracks over the past 20 years;

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

- ✘ We must share experiences from our countries and learn from each others experiences of addressing these issues;
- ✘ The regional and hemispheric campaign against small arms must be generalised and expanded;
- ✘ Countries that manufacture such weapons for export must be held to account by the countries in which they are used;
- ✘ We can collectively as consumers make demands on the popular media *and* develop media alliances regarding the proliferation of violent entertainment and media images;

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

- ✘ Our critiques of neo-liberalism and the alternatives we propose must incorporate a gender analysis otherwise we may reproduce the same constructs of inequality, militarism and machista that characterised the old order;
- ✘ The work of WINAD – The Women’s Institute for Alternative Development in Trinidad and Tobago with women in violence-torn communities is a good model to study and emulate;

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

- ✘ Parents especially single parent must be supported in their role of being parents through support facilities – day care centres;
- ✘ Support for new approaches to fathering;
- ✘ Greater gender-sensitivity in teacher training and general education in order to challenge accepted constructs of masculinity and femininity;

WHAT CAN OR MUST WE DO??

✘ I leave the rest up to you

✘ THANK YOU

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