NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

RE-VIEWING THE TROPICAL PARADISE: AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN FILMMAKERS

---

by

HASEENAH EBRAHIM

PH.D DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED 1998

DEPT OF RADIO/TV/FILM, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS, USA

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a new conceptual framework, a "pan-African feminist" critical model, to examine how Euzhan Palcy of Martinique, Gloria Rolando and the late Sara Gómez of Cuba, and the Sistren Collective of Jamaica have negotiated - individually or collectively - the gender/race/class constraints within each of their societies in order to obtain access to the media of film and video. I examine the aesthetic, political, social and economic strategies utilized by these filmmakers to reinsert themselves into recorded versions of history, and/or to intervene in racist, (neo)colonial and/or patriarchal systems of oppression.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Scope of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the aesthetic, political, social and economic strategies utilized by selected Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers in exploiting the media of film and video to reinsert themselves into recorded versions of history, to challenge their (mis)representations, and/or to intervene in racist, (neo)colonial and/or patriarchal systems of oppression.[1] I offer what I have termed a "pan-African feminist" analytical framework[2] as a methodological tool to examine the manner in which these Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers have negotiated, individually as well as collectively, the gender/race/class constraints within each of their societies in order to obtain access to the media of film and video, to adopt culturally relevant communication strategies and themes, and to pursue their goals of social transformation and cultural empowerment.

NOTES

[1] For the sake of brevity, I will use the term "filmmaker(s)" to include those people who work in the medium of film as well as video and/or in television production.

[2] The concept of a pan-African feminist framework, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, is one which I have constructed by drawing upon various African and African Diaspora feminisms, tales of legendary black women, and the orature of African/Diaspora female deities. I use the term "pan-African" synonymously with the term "of Africa and the African Diaspora." I use the term with a lower-case "p" to distinguish it from the term "Pan-African" as the ideology that advocates political union of all people of African ancestry.

This dissertation arises out of my broader area of research interest, i.e., cinemas of Africa and the African Diaspora. As I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, African/Diaspora women have received little attention in the body of scholarship emerging out of interest in black cinema as well as feminist investigation of women filmmakers. The absence of any systematic appraisal of black women's filmmaking around the world has provided the impetus for this project. However, difficulty of access to the films/videos directed by many black women filmmakers, especially those who live or work outside the United States, consolidates/reinforces the importance of examining the broader socio-economic context within which the filmmakers work, emphasizing as it does, the extratextual constraints independent filmmakers face in attracting attention to their work. It is my hope that this project will provide a greater understanding of the greater process of filmmaking beyond the act of making the film itself.

When I initially conceptualized this project, I did not anticipate the number of black women filmmakers existing “out there”, around the world, nor the number of film/video texts they have generated, although I did anticipate the paucity of scholarship on the work of black women filmmakers from outside the United States -- despite academia's and feminism's increasing acknowledgment of African-American/Black British filmmakers such as Julie Dash, Ayoka Chenzira, Ngozi Onwurah, Zeinabu irene Davis, and others. Even Euzhan Palcy, the first black woman to have directed a Hollywood production, and who has three features to her credit in addition to other short works, a three-part television documentary, and a made-for-TV movie for Disney, has

received little scholarly attention in English-language publications-- reiterating the continued significance of nationality/national origin as a vector of marginalization in addition to the now commonly acknowledged triad of race/gender/class. It is my regret that this project could not include all the other black women filmmakers in Africa, Europe, Latin America, Australia, and wherever else they may be toiling, usually against the odds. Your turn too, will come.

For many years, Caribbean cinema generally meant Cuban cinema, Cuba being the only Caribbean country with a long history of indigenous film production. Today, the distinctive histories and geopolitical configurations of the Caribbean islands provide a number of fascinating contexts for cinematic production, from socialist Cuba to the French "overseas territories" of Martinique and Guadeloupe, to independent nations such as Jamaica and Haiti. This dissertation will examine how black women filmmakers from the three Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Cuba and Martinique have negotiated the specific opportunities and constraints represented by the distinct geopolitical, social and institutional contexts within which they work.

The selection of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers in this dissertation represents specific confluences of modes of production and geopolitical positioning of the islands they call home. While my desire to explore the ramifications of being black *and* female has necessarily limited the scope of this analysis, I do not mean to diminish the contributions of non-black women filmmakers in the Caribbean. The contribution of

Cuban women filmmakers of all races has been documented elsewhere.[3]

Caribbean cinema reflects a vitality that mirrors Caribbean filmmakers' often cosmopolitan lifestyles and forced adaptability to a diversity of cultural influences, including African, European, North American and South American. Within this young cinema, women filmmakers are forging a space for themselves, so that a cinema which has been described as a cinema in its infancy (Cham 1992) has, nevertheless, produced a filmmaker who became the first black woman to direct a Hollywood studio production. Euzhan Palcy of Martinique catapulted to international recognition when she directed MGM's 1989 release, *A Dry White Season*, set in apartheid South Africa. Sarah Maldoror, of Guadeloupean and French parentage, is a pioneer of pan-African filmmaking and became the first black woman to direct a feature film when she made *Sambizanga in* 1972. Sara Gómez, of Cuba, directed *De cierta mañera* /*One Way or Another*, a film that is now considered a classic of both Latin American and feminist cinema.

Initially, the scope of this dissertation ambitiously aimed at including all black women filmmakers working outside the US and the UK.[4] I say "ambitiously", because

---

[3] See Benamou (1994) and the articles by Benamou and Fusco, and the short profiles on Cuban women filmmakers in Center for Cuban Studies (1992). However, these discussions either neglect to discuss the work of Rolando, or mention her only in passing.

[4]African-American and black British women filmmakers appear to be the two national black groups that receive consistent, if not frequent, critical and scholarly attention. For this reason, I had intended to exclude these two groups of filmmakers.

working under the mistaken assumption that I would identify only a handful of black women filmmakers in Africa, Europe, Australia, Latin America and the Caribbean, I fell into the trap of allowing the marginalization of black women filmmakers in North American feminist and other film discourses to cause me to underestimate the extent of their existence and productivity. When I began this project, I not only identified about 35 black women working around the world in the media of film and video, but they lived and worked in over 20 countries (these figures probably remain an underestimation). Since my approach to the examination of these filmmakers and their work emphasizes the social, cultural, political and economic contexts from which they emerge, such a research project would have entailed huge amounts of funding and time, both of which are, of course, only available to a limited extent to any doctoral candidate. For practical reasons, mainly that of accessibility to the actual works in the US, I have limited the scope of this examination to the work of black women filmmakers from Cuba, Martinique and Jamaica.[5] I have also excluded detailed analyses of the lives and works of black women filmmakers who are born in Europe or North America of Caribbean parentage, but I have included a brief overview of this category of filmmakers in Chapter 3.

It should be emphasized that the work of all the filmmakers who have been excluded as a result of this practical determination continue to demand recognition and

---

[5] Two Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers whose work I have not been able to obtain include Elsie Haas of Haiti and Lydia Rene-Corail of Guadeloupe.

are no less worthy of analysis than the ones that have been included in this dissertation. This analysis of the cinematic expression of Afro-Caribbean women will make a contribution to the scholarship on pan-African cinema as well as to feminist film criticism, both areas of research in which the absence of Afro-Caribbean women has been notable.

There are several modes of production in filmmaking, and a global perspective reveals a range of cinematic practices and politics of production, distribution, reception, stylistic and ideological frameworks and relations with the state.[6] The modes of film production that can develop and flourish in any society are inevitably constrained or supported by the overall political and economic ideologies and structures of that society. The larger social environment, within which a film industry functions, or filmmaking practices survive, is a crucial determinant of both content and style.

It is my proposition that the costs associated with film production, together with the structures of distribution and exhibition (and their control) are of major significance in the choices, aesthetic and extra-aesthetic, that any filmmaker makes in the creation of a text. If we insist on seeing films and videos merely as artistic expression, albeit influenced by the historical and geographical subject positioning of their creators, but fail to acknowledge the conditions of production/distribution, as well as the assigning of value (criticism) by those who control those aspects, then we fail to perceive the

---

[6] Bordwell (1985, xiv) describes a "mode of film production" as a "characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking."

political nature of so-called artistic expression. Auguiste (1991, 216) of Britain's Black Audio Film Collective argues that independent filmmakers have to be engaged with cinema, among other things, "as a constellation of institutional conflicts", in addition to (and I would argue as a determining factor in) cinema "as a systematising of the ways in which sound, image, colour and movement signify."

In the industrialized nations of the West, film productions are usually defined in relation to Hollywood, with its transnational reach and control, and exemplifying the industrial mode of production, i.e., studio/industrial/commercial/television production, characterized by the profit motive, standardization of production procedures and highly specialized and hierarchical division of labor and, generally, access to large amounts of capital, ease of access to distribution and high-profile marketing.

Crofts (1993, 50) observes that in most parts of the world, Hollywood "has successfully exported and naturalized its construction of the cinema as fictional entertainment customarily requiring narrative closure and assuming a strong individual -- usually male -- hero as the necessary agent of that closure", through a marketing strategy based on star-construction (performers and/or director), genre differentiation and slick production values.[7]

"Independent production" is characterized by Bernstein (1993) as "an umbrella

---

[7] However, Crofts goes on to argue that there are many types of national cinema, such as European art, anti-imperialist Third Cinema, commercial Third World, commercial European, regional, ethnic, totalitarian, Hollywood imitators and Hollywood ignorers such as Indian cinema.

term, defined negatively, to denote any production practice that is not under the aegis of the major studios of a given period."[8] Such a broad definition, however, tends to mask the wide disparity in the resources available to independent filmmakers. The US film industry continues to define "independents" as all companies not owned by, or who do not themselves own, a distribution company (Staiger 1983, 69). Nevertheless, in everyday usage, the term "independent filmmaker(s)" generally refer(s) to individuals or groups working outside the mainstream industrial/national/ structures. These filmmkers may work in the individual/artisanal or collective mode of production, which may be financed through a variety of sources, even by a government-controlled national film board. In capitalist countries, such film boards function as an alternative avenue of resources to that of the privately-controlled dominant industrial structures, while in the former socialist countries such film boards usually constituted the dominant structure, and continue to do so in countries such as Cuba.

It should also be noted that although television production in the US (or elsewhere, for that matter) may be considered industrial in its mode of production, for many black women working in countries such as France or England, such independent television stations as Channel 4 may provide the only access to distribution (and sometimes, funding) of their work. Thus, despite having completed several projects for French television, for example, Euzhan Palcy considers herself an independent

---

[8]Or, in the case of television, under the dominion of major networks or the dominant broadcast stations in any nation.

filmmaker, as does Ngozi Onwurah of England. Both Channel 4 in England, and Canal Plus in France, have participated in the production and exhibition of films and videos by black women filmmakers in these countries.

In the individual mode of production, the filmmaker usually functions as an artist, obtaining financial backing on a film-by-film basis, and exercising creative control over all aspects of the production, often performing multiple roles including producer/distributor and often writer/editor too. Other talent/crew may also be working in multiple positions. This mode of production is also referred to as artisanal.

Funding of such individually-produced independent films may come from a variety of sources -- private commercial sponsors, public funding through the form of government-sponsored grants, and from the personal resources of the filmmaker and his/her friends and colleagues. Independent filmmaker, Haile Gerima, has drawn attention to the politics underlying the connection between aesthetics and the control of film production and distribution. Gerima (1989, 66) argues that the process of obtaining film financing is a crucial site for the exercise of power regarding what constitutes acceptable aesthetics.

> Most of the time, the power structure that sits on the funding panels serving as judge and jury in the awarding of these grants also consciously and unconsciously dismisses as ‘primitive’ and ‘unartistic’ any form of African-American visual identity. The dependency relationship that emerges as a result of this patronage in the long term snuffs out vibrant, burning aspects of this

cinema movement.

In other instances, such as funding emanating from sources working within an industrial mode of production, arguments regarding the “marketability” of a cinematic text may conceal ideological agendas unacceptable to many black filmmakers. Such struggles are elaborated further in Chapter 5, which examines the experiences of Euzhan Palcy.

In the collective mode of production, groups of people work together, usually for non-profit purposes. Such groups are generally organized to promote equal participation by members, non-hierarchical forms of labor organization and collective decision-making. All film production is, of course, collaborative, but the industrial mode of production is characterized by a sharply hierarchical division of labor in which the producer, as financier, has ultimate authority. In the US, many collectives were formed in response to the various political movements in (and since) the 1960s; many women's collectives have formed in response to gender and/or neo(colonial) oppression, especially in Third World countries. Some well-known media collectives include the black British collectives, Sankofa, Retake,

Ceddo and Black Audio Film Collective (all in the UK)[9], Taller Popular de Video (Nicaragua), Third World Newsreel (US) and women's collectives such as Cine Mujer (Colombia), SEWA (India), Sistren (Jamaica), CoMulher (previously Lilith

---

[9] The Black Audio Collective is apparently no longer in existence.

Video Collective, Brazil), among others.

Such collectives can be seen as formations specifically intended to circumvent the binary structures of cinematic modes of production which pit an industrial mode of production against an artisanal one for most filmmakers. The output of media collectives tend to be predominantly in short forms or documentaries, rather than feature-length fictional films.[10]

The socialist mode of production is characterized by the centralized control by a national state apparatus of all the material resources necessary for any form of filmmaking -- including allocation of film stock, equipment, technical and other personnel, training -- as well as centralized state control of exhibition and distribution. According to Marx, the imprint of industrialization for profit's sake undermines the human spiritual capacity for harmonious artistic expression (Baxandall 1983). The socialist mode of production permits what would be an undreamed-of benefit to filmmakers working in many other modes of production -- the time allowed, with full salary, for script development as well as other phases of the production. In Cuba, for example, a filmmaker is permitted to spend a year or more writing and refining a script for any project that has been green-lighted by ICAIC.

In addition to centralized state control as the characteristic feature of the socialist mode of production, the potential of film as cultural and artistic expression in the service

---

[10]There are exceptions, of course, such as the Bolivian group, Ukamau's *Yawa mallku/Blood of the Condor* (1969) and *El coraje del pueblo/The Courage of the People* (1971); though rooted in actual events, these are fictionalized accounts.

of political goals was recognized from early on. Artistic philosophy among the ruling elites within the former socialist nations perceived the role of film as utilitarian and didactic in nature. Baxandall notes that the Marxist approach to art in general is characterized by an emphasis on historicism and a notion of art as essentially didactic and as reflecting the revolutionary values of a proletarian class perspective.

The notion of film as the "most important art", as Lenin noted, was reflected in the rapidity with which the Castro government set up the infrastructure for the construction of a new film industry to serve the needs of a Revolutionary Cuba -- a mere three months after Castro's Rebel Army entered Havana in January 1959. In fact, ICAIC (The Cuban Film Institute)was established under the first decree concerning cultural affairs passed by the Revolutionary government (Chanan 1985, 19).

This recognition of the impact of film (particularly prior to the advent of television) generally led the former socialist regimes to maintain vigilance over the activities of filmmakers, with periodic waves of relaxation of censorship, or the threat of censorship. However, censorship within the former socialist regimes has not only fluctuated in degree of vigilance and control within each nation, countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, etc. have themselves varied considerably in the degree of freedom of expression allowed intellectuals and cultural workers, including filmmakers, so that a simple dichotomy of "free" vs. "censored" cannot accurately capture what is a range of policies which would be more effectively conceived of in terms of a continuum "stretching from the total control of the Stalinists to the nearly total freedom of Czechoslovakia in 1968" (Paul 1983, 14). The greater

freedoms allowed in some East European nations have resulted, argues Paul (1983, 18), in some artists and filmmakers "playing the rather curious role of state-supported critics of the regime." This latter situation has generally been characteristic of the Cuban film industry as well.

While socialist film production has most closely been associated with socialist realism, it should be noted that this particular aesthetic style is only one of several stylistic strands emerging from socialist film production. The concept of socialist realism refers to an exploration and depiction of the dialectical process of the struggle between the social classes as the principal dynamic in history. The socialist outlook on artistic production saw the collaboration between a socialist government (representing the proletariat) and artistic workers as one of helping to limit the upper -class control of artistic resources prevailing in capitalist societies, but as Baxandall (1983, 79) notes, the "trite formula film of socialist realism self-righteously pitted ragged workers against sleek capitalists." The Marxist view that good art presents an analysis of explosive turning points in history, revealing long-concealed patterns of social structures, was replaced with uncritical versions of socialist life (Baxandall 1983, 80-81).

> Instead of explosive turning points, exemplary reinforcive anecdotes are decked out with the importance of narrative embellishment. Indeed, the impression of sameness of life in a Communist state is a political goal: a guarantee that history has no more surprises.

The delineation of modes of production as discussed here does not reflect mutually exclusive categories. Some filmmakers work in more than one mode of production. Euzhan Palcy, for example made *La Messagere* (1977), a short film for Martinican television, and followed it with an independently produced feature film, *Rue Cases Nègres*, in 1983, before directing *A Dry White Season* for MGM in 1989. In 1993, she released *Siméon*, produced in co-operation with French and other European television stations.

While such modes of production characterize intra-national film production, international co-productions have become commonplace for many Third World filmmakers in particular, hampered by a lack of funding within their own countries. Tomás Gutierrez Alea's *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1993) for example, is a co-production of the Cuban Film Institute and Mexican and Spanish financial support from both public and private sources.[11] Many African films are co-produced with European countries.

Filmmakers from the Caribbean have adjusted to working in a variety of economic and cultural contexts, ranging from the absence of infrastructural and budgetary structures in countries such as Jamaica and Haiti, to the established and, until recently, relatively stable production environment of the Cuban parastatal, ICAIC, where Sara Gómez worked from 1961 until her death in 1974. Palcy works primarily in

---

[11] The film was a production financed by the Mexican Film Institute known as IMCINE, ICAIC, the Spanish TV station Telemadrid, and Tabasco Films.

an industrial mode of production, an opportunity probably facilitated, to some extent, by Martinique's status as a "overseas territory" of France which makes Palcy a French national. Sistren is a women's collective, working in a collaborative mode. Gómez and fellow Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando work(ed) within a socialist mode of film production, although Rolando now works independently in video, including collaborative projects with US participants.

Distribution/exhibition[12]

The defining characteristic of the major Hollywood studios is a corporate relationship to a distribution firm -- often wholly-owned -- as well as to exhibition outlets. Control of all three branches of the film industry is referred to as "vertical integration", a characteristic feature of Hollywood studios in the domestic market until the 1948 Paramount Decree forced the majors to divest of their exhibition arms, a process that has seen a steady reverse since the Reagan era. In the US, as well as in many other countries, the major studios have a virtual stranglehold on distribution. This form of distribution, which I will refer to as major commercial distribution, typically involves large inter/national distribution firms which supply the first run commercial theater circuit, consisting of mainstream commercial cinemas, that screen popularly-oriented feature films. These theaters may be independently owned, or they may be

[12] I do not wish to suggest the order in which I discuss the various forms of distribution constitute a hierarchy of preferences by filmmakers.

owned by a distribution company.

Independent commercial distribution involves the purchase of distribution rights by small profit-making companies such as Kino, which generally utilize the "art house" exhibition circuit. Art houses are profit-making exhibitors, which generally screen films considered to have a limited appeal, catering to a small but loyal audience, usually in larger cities and college towns. They may screen, for profit, foreign films, documentaries, independently produced features, cult films and hold festivals of animation or experimental films (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 25). The art house circuit may be also be utilized by the “art film” subdivisions of major commercial distributors such as Miramax, which is now a subdivision of Disney.

Non-commercial distribution, usually offered by non-profit distribution companies and national film boards, targets educational institutions**,** community groups, collectives, trade unions, festivals, and film clubs. In the case of self-distribution, the director/producer controls the exhibition of his/her film, and may target many of the same groups/institutions as non-commercial distributors, or may choose to “four-wall” theaters in selected locations.[13] In some African countries, self-distribution may take the form of filmmakers traveling with their films to rural areas and villages, etc.

Non-theatrical distribution, which may be commercial or non-commercial, refers to the exhibition of films outside of motion picture theaters, including airlines, libraries,

---

[13] “Four-walling” refers to the rental of a movie theater by the producer who pays the theater a flat rental fee (the "house nut") for the cost of operating the theater, does all the promotion him/herself, and keeps most of the proceeds.

festivals, etc. This type of distribution may utilize the medium of video, and may include home video and television as distribution channels. Home video, which has become a significant form of distribution has, since 1988, brought in twice the revenues obtained from the domestic theater circuit in the US market (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 26). Television, whether by broadcast, satellite or cable transmission, is the other major form of non-theatrical distribution. The dichotomy between television and film has become increasingly blurred as cinema attendances fall globally, while the number of television outlets and stations increase due to changes in technology and regulation.

Within the socialist mode of production, distribution and exhibition are controlled by a centralized state apparatus, such as ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) in Cuba, which also controls most aspects of national film production. For collectives, the usual form of distribution is through non-profit distribution outlets or self-distribution.

This dissertation will explore three individual Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers and one collective, whose working conditions reflect a broad range of modes of production and who have developed a corpus of work that represents a variety of cinematic forms, including full-length fictional features, documentaries, short forms with mixed modes (documentary and fiction). The diversity of their concerns are reflected in themes ranging from apartheid to the IMF and international finance, from social change in Cuba to life in 1930s Martinique, from Afro-Caribbean religions to zouk music. Some have achieved a fair measure of commercial or popular recognition -- a French movie theater was even named after Palcy, while Maldoror, now in her 70s,

produces regularly for French television.

In the next chapter, I will present a conceptual framework that aims to situate Afro-Caribbean women's cinematic expression at the confluence of a number of other traditions of film criticism, none of which have -- in and of themselves – sufficiently theorized the articulation of race, gender, class, mode of production and national origin (or geopolitical positioning) that constitute the site of cinematic expression of women of African descent. This framework will insert intersections of race, class and national origin into the theoretical discourses of feminist film scholarship, gender into Third Cinema and/or black cinema debates, and cinematic expression into African Diaspora studies of cultural expression. However, I will first provide a brief discussion of terminological choices in the chapters that follow.

Terminology

While others have explored the definitions of the term "Caribbean", I use it here to encompass only the island nations of that region.[14] However, I do not restrict the term to include only the English-speaking islands, as is commonly the case. In addition, I use the terms Caribbean, West Indies and Antilles interchangeably, although the term "West Indies" is usually used in the Anglophone context and "Antilles" in Francophone discourses.

---

[14] See, for example, Benitez-Rojo (1996) and Glissant (1989) for explorations of what constitutes the Caribbean and "Caribbeanness."

I have included only those women filmmakers, born and raised in Martinique, Jamaica and Cuba, who define themselves as "black." I have adopted the criterion of self-identification to avoid the ethnocentrism inherent in adopting any one usage of the term "black", a term whose usage around the world varies considerably, challenging fixed or essentialist notions of racial identity. A chaotic multiplicity of meanings, even within an individual country, emphasizes the necessity of historicized use of such terms of identity. For example, Terborg-Penn (1987, 50) notes that "in many Caribbean and South American societies, women of African descent vary in colors that determine legal status, as well as cultural association. Hence, a mulatto woman in the British West Indies, for example, does not identify herself as black, whereas the same woman born in the United States may choose to or be forced to do so by society."

While not all people of African descent consider themselves/are considered black in many parts of the Caribbean, the term "black" may, in other contexts, also encompass people who are not of African descent, such as South Asians in South Africa and the United Kingdom.[15] I also avoid conflating the term "black" or "African-heritage" with the term "Caribbean" or "West Indian" as many scholars are wont to do. Many Caribbean societies are multicultural and the categories of race, nation and identity are not fixed and discrete. In many Caribbean nations, a range of terms may be

---

[15] However, even in these countries, such explicitly political usage of the term “black” may be passionately contested.

in use, much of which is based on parentage and skin color/phenotype, and use of a term other than "black" does not preclude acknowledgment of African ancestry. For this reason, I will explore the status of race relations within each of the islands in order to contextualize the filmmaker's subject positioning when she chooses to be identified as "black." I use the terms “pan-African” and “African/Diaspora” interchangeably to mean “of Africa and the African Diaspora” in which “Africa/n” is being used, as per common (if inaccurate) usage, to refer to sub-Saharan Africa. However, the term “pan-African”, when used adjectivally to qualify the terms “feminism” or “feminist”, is being used in the very specific sense outlined in Chapter 2, to refer to a particular framework of analysis.

I use the term "filmmaker" in the broad sense when referring to the mode of production. Citron (1988) notes that the term is generally used in the US to describe those who work primarily as independents, and those who are primarily responsible for both the financial and creative aspects of the filmmaking process, a process considered artisanal. The term "director" is used to refer to those people who work within the mainstream industrial mode of production, characterized by a highly specialized division of labor in which the director is responsible for the overall creative vision of the project. However, this distinction has become increasingly blurred in common usage, and I will use the term "filmmaker" to encompass both contexts of production, as well as those women who work in television and/or several modes of production. I will use the term "mainstream" or "dominant" to refer to those films that receive mass distribution, usually in several countries.

Literature Review

In the analysis of the texts produced by Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers and the contexts out of which they emerge and circulate, I propose the use of a critical framework (which will be elaborate upon in Chapter 2) that draws on theoretical concepts from the scholarly disciplines of women's studies, film studies, and African Diaspora/postcolonial studies. At the same time, my argument for a "pan-African feminist framework" has important ramifications for all of the aforementioned disciplines, which have each failed to provide an adequate methodology for the analysis of cinematic expression by pan-African women, particularly in terms of their engagement with multiple sources of oppression, the notion of rebellious or womanish behavior, values emphasizing self-reliance, collectivity, the oral tradition, and involvement in the struggle for social transformation, among others.

In the United States, black studies, women's studies, and film studies all emerged as academic disciplines in the 1960s. Many of the white women who spearheaded the women's movement of what came to be referred to as the 'second wave' of feminism had, in fact, developed their organizational skills within the black civil rights movement, although the relationship between the two movements remained an uneasy one (Giddings 1984).[16] Challenges to the ethnocentrism of the

feminist movement (and its academic counterpart, women studies)[17] by women of color developed a momentum in the 1980s, beginning with the anthology entitled *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave*, edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith. Others followed, including Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1983) *This Bridge Called My Back*.

Guy-Sheftall (1993, 77) notes that in the decade following the mid-1980s, Black Women's Studies emerged in academia "in part because of the failure of Black and Women's Studies to address adequately the unique experiences of Black women in the USA and throughout the world." Historically black universities, especially Spelman College in Atlanta, which is the oldest college for Black women in the world, spearheaded the movement for the establishment of black women's studies programs (Guy-Sheftall 1993).

The initial reluctance of mainstream feminism to transcend a gender-specific perception of oppression forced women of color to articulate their own kinds of feminisms. These new feminisms attempted to broaden the definitions and agendas of feminism in order to increase its relevance to their own lives. Among these, several strands of black feminisms (or womanisms), and critical frameworks have emerged.

---

[16] Giddings (1994, 303) argues that "echoing the scenario of the nineteenth century, White women developed their feminism in a Black organization and then turned the thrust of their activist energies elsewhere."

[17] Allen (1996) has noted that while women's studies programs developed within the institutions of higher learning in the US, this was not necessarily the case in other parts of the world. Her analysis looks at the US and Germany.

These black feminisms/womanisms also constitute a discourse within the field of African Diaspora studies and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Before the wave of attacks from women of color on feminism's ethnocentric assumption of "woman" as white, middle-class and heterosexual, a call for black feminist criticism had already been made by Barbara Smith several years earlier with her publication of an essay entitled *Toward a black feminist criticism* in 1977. Smith protested the invisibility of black women generally, and black lesbian women in particular, in literary criticism by black men and white women.[18] Arguing that the primary commitment of black feminist criticism must be the exploration of racial and sexual politics, and the inextricability of race and gender in black women's identity and writings, Smith also warned against the imposition of white/male frames of analysis on black women's art.

However, it was not only white feminist criticism that came under attack for its marginalization of black women but also black literary criticism. Giddings (1984, 5) argues that "despite the range and significance of our history, we have been perceived as token women in Black texts and as token Blacks in feminist ones."

Indeed, since the mid-1980s, a substantial number of anthologies of writings, and criticism of writings, by women from African and the African Diaspora have been

---

[18] Smith's "Toward a feminist criticism" first appeared in the October 1977 issue of *Conditions: Two*, and the Combahee River Collective's statement, "A Black feminist statement" first appeared in that same year (Chay 1993). The 1980s saw an increase in such challenges, including those by Dill (1983), Lugones and Spelman (1983), Walker (1983) and Spelman (1988) among others.

published. Davies and Graves' anthology, *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (1986), explores feminism in the African context, and includes critiques by both men and women and of both male and female African writers. Eldred Jones' *Women in African Literature Today* followed in 1987. Subsequently, numerous anthologies have emerged which explore women authors in various parts of Africa and the African Diaspora.[19]

While black feminist criticism has tended to focus on women *writers* from the African Diaspora, (white) feminist film scholarship has, until recently, neglected Third World women (or women of color in First World countries), and black film criticism has neglected women filmmkers. In the area of media studies in general, and feminist film scholarship specifically, Valdivia (1995, 9) notes that "although most authors begin their work by acknowledging that race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age and global issues intersect with the topic of gender and the media, the vast majority of books and articles available on this topic focus primarily on white, middle-class heterosexual, Western women."

Western feminisms have produced a sophisticated tradition of scholarship of undeniable influence on film theory and criticism. Early feminist film criticism, like

---

[19] See, for example, Christian (1980) and Brown (1981) among many others. In the 1990s, Davies and Fido (1990), Niandou (1994), Johnson (1995), Raiskin (1996), Egejuru and Katrak (1997) are among the many monograph-length publications that examine or collect the writings of African/Diaspora women. Allan's (1995) study explores the writings of both black and white women writers using a womanist framework. In addition, numerous journal articles have also been published on the writings of African/Diaspora women.

black film criticism, began with a critique of representation, particularly of stereotypic images of women, explored in such classic texts as Molly Haskell's (1974) *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and Marjorie Rosen's (1973) *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream*. During the 1970s, the British film journal, *Screen*, served as a forum for the exploration of new contributions to film theory including semiotics (positing film as a system of signification and the notion of "woman as image" as opposed to the images of women), Marxist (ideology is a function of representation) and psychoanalytic (classical cinema perpetuates unequal gender relations by constructing the typical spectator – and, therefore, the "gaze" – as male). For these early feminist film critics, women were notable for their absence both on the screen (Johnston) and in the audience (Mulvey), but other feminists soon questioned such contentions. For example, Rich (1994, 35) questions the notion the spectatorial gaze is necessarily male:[20]

> Johnston and Mulvey's texts taken together, for example, pose a monumental absence that is unduly pessimistic…Woman is absent on the screen and she is absent in the audience, their analysis argues…As a woman sitting in the dark, watching that film made by and for men with drag queens on the screen, what

---

[20] Rich's article was originally published in 1979. Mulvey's (1975) essay on visual pleasure and narrative cinema and Johnston's on women's cinema as counter-cinema are now classics in feminist film scholarship.

> is my experience? Don't I in fact interact with the text and that context, with a conspicuous absence of passivity?… For a woman's experiencing of culture under patriarchy is dialectical in a way that a man's can never be: our experience is like that of the exile, whom Brecht once singled out as the ultimate dialectician for that daily working out of cultural oppositions within a single body.

Psychoanalysis (Freudian and Lacanian) remains influential in feminist film criticism. The psychosexual emphasis of Freudian psychoanalysis in particular has ignored other types of social relations in favor of gender inequities in order to explain the manner in which classical cinema reinforces existing social relations. Mayne (1994, 61) notes:

> That the cinema is obsessed with the polarities of masculine and feminine is a basic assumption of feminist film theory. But cinema's role in orchestrating other forms of difference – sexuality outside the heterosexual paradigm, or class and race difference – has not been a central area of inquiry … The women filmmakers whose works have received the most sustained critical attention tend to be white, European, and heterosexual; hence examinations of films by women filmmakers marginalized in multiple ways could suggest new definitions of alternative film practice.

Gabriel (1989, 39) has argued that "to the extent that Third World culture and familial relationships are not described through psychoanalytic theory, Third World filmic representation is open for an elaboration of the relation 'viewer'/ 'film' on terms other than those founded on psychoanalysis. The Third World relies more on an appeal to social and political conflicts as the prime rhetorical strategy and less on the paradigm of oedipal conflict and resolution."

The hegemony of the psychoanalytic approach in feminist film criticism, with its roots in 19th century European cosmology and which draws upon the Oedipal myth (and in Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the "mirror stage") demonstrates little relevance for those who come from different cultural traditions. In many non-Western cultures, the non-typicality of the nuclear family undermines the centrality of the parents in the psychological development of a child. In addition, as Bardolph (1984, 50) has noted, in cultures with a strong oral tradition, "man here is not defined by his Oedipal relationship, but by his interaction with his whole lineage within human memory; his grandfather in particular is very important, as the Law and language are handed down in complex manner across three generations."[21] In recent years, other black film critics have argued against theories of spectatorship revolving around a de-racinated viewer.[22]

---

[21] Some white feminist film scholars, having a long-vested interest in theoretical approaches grounded in psychoanalysis, insist on its applicability regardless of the different familial structures and cultural patterns of non-Western societies. A recent example is Kaplan (1997).

One of the earliest monographs on women film directors to include women of color was Barbara Quart's (1988) *Women directors: The emergence of a new cinema*. A short chapter is allocated to Third world women directors, who Quart labels as "pre-feminist." However, an earlier anthology (Brunsdon 1986) and another (Pribram 1988) that was published the same year as Quart's, allows black women filmmakers to speak for themselves on the subject of their representations in popular culture, including film. More recent anthologies of feminist film scholarship are also beginning to integrate women of color and Third World women into their scope of analysis. Notable in this regard for going beyond token inclusion of Third World/women of color filmmakers is the anthology, *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice Welsch (1994*)*. It includes several articles on/by black and/or Third World women filmmakers and critics, as well as course files on women of color in cinema. Other white feminist critics such as Mellencamp (1994), Benamou (1994), Kaplan (1997) and Foster (1997) have joined the ranks of film scholars who have extended their interest in cinema in relation to gender issues to include considerations of race and/or the work of women of color/Third World women filmmakers.

Mulvey's (1975) stated intention that psychoanalysis be used to destroy the pleasures of narrative cinema has remained an influential force in feminist film

---

[22] For example, see Diawara, Wallace, hooks and Bobo in Diawara's *Black American Cinema*. Feminist film theories of spectatorship tend to draw heavily on Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, in which the child first recognition of itself in the mirror as a unified whole is, nevertheless, one that is based on an idealized illusion of itself.

criticism. This association of narrative cinema with an insufficient/incomplete feminist consciousness continues to plague women filmmakers, particularly black women filmmakers whose willingness to work in the narrative form reflects a cultural affinity with African oral tradition in which storytelling as a mode of communication holds high value.[23] In her Introduction to *Lionheart Gal*, Ford-Smith (1986, xv-xvi) comments on storytelling in Jamaica:

> The tale-telling tradition contains what is most poetically true about struggles. The tales are one of the places where the most subversive elements of our history can be safely lodged, for over the years the tale tellers convert facts into images which are funny, vulgar, amazing or magically real. The tales encode what is overtly threatening to the powerful into covert images of resistance so that they can live in times when overt struggles are impossible or build courage in moments when it is[sic].To create such tales is a collective process accomplished within a community bound by a particular historical purpose. The rules and process of making them suggest the possibility of a unity

---

[23] The term "narrative" in film theory has a more specialized meaning than in common usage (i.e. as a synonym for "story"), referring to the classical Hollywood plot structure in which an initial state of equilibrium is disrupted setting into motion a series of events, dictated by a cause-effect logic and ending in resolution. However, even in film discourses it is generally used in opposition to experimental/avant-garde forms which privilege formal experimentation with the medium, particularly those which disrupt the illusion of reality.

between the aesthetic imagination and the social and political process and action.[24]

Black film criticism

Black film criticism was launched in 1929 in a "little magazine" in Switzerland founded by American expatriates (Cripps 1978). The group also issued a short film called *Borderlines*, starring Paul and Eslanda Robeson, and its release at the same time as Hollywood's all-black cast productions, *Hearts in Dixie* and *Hallelujah!* elicited a flurry of critical comment on black participation in cinema. Critical inquiry into black cinematic expression began to develop momentum in the mid-1970s with the publication of several explorations of the stereotyping of black Americans in cinema, primarily in Hollywood cinema.[25] These include Bogle's (1973) *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, Leab's (1976) *From Sambo to Superspade*, and Cripps' (1977) *Slow Fade to Black*.

In 1982, in the anthology *Black Cinema Aesthetics* which he edited, Yearwood attempted to delineate a black cinema aesthetic which emphasized the transformation of dominant cinematic practices, particularly the means of cinematic production (and, presumably, distribution/exhibition). He defined a black film as "any film whose

---

[24] Ford-Smith also notes, however, that such tales demand to be de-coded in order to heighten awareness of social contradictions.

[25] See Cripps (1978) for a decade-by-decade review of black film criticism in the US. He also briefly mentions black film criticism in England and France until the 1970s.

signifying practices… emanates from an essential cultural matrix deriving from a collective black sociocultural and historical experience and [which] uses black expressive traditions as a means through which artistic languages are mediated." While Yearwood's essay remained US-centric and male-centered, the anthology did include an essay on the images of black women in cinema and another on African cinema. More diasporic in scope was Cham and Andrade-Watkins' (1988) anthology on black independent cinema which included essays on parts of Africa and the UK, by scholars from Africa and the UK. Also included was Third Cinema theorist Teshome Gabriel's proposal of the notion of a traveling/nomadic aesthetic as appropriate for the analysis of black or Third World cinemas.

During the 1980s, black film criticism and the critical paradigm known as Third Cinema began to converge. Downing's (1986) anthology, *Film and Politics in the Third World* includes an essay on blacks in Brazilian cinema and an interview with Afro-Cuban filmmaker, Sergio Giral.[26] I will return to the subject of Third Cinema later.

Also during this period, Pfaff (1988) and Diawara (1992) published analyses of African cinema, the former focusing on individual filmmakers, and the latter on the political, economic and social context of filmmaking in sub-Saharan Africa. Ukadike's comprehensive *Black African Cinema* followed in 1994, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to provide both textual readings and contextual analysis of the diverse cinemas

---

[26] However, of the four articles on black African cinema, three focus on Ousmane Sembene, and all four discuss cinema only in West Africa.

of Africa. Cham subsequently expanded his diasporic interest in cinema to include anthologies on Caribbean cinema (1992) and African cinema (1996).[27] A recurring theme in the scholarship on African cinema by these key scholars in the field reveals the importance of the *griot* (storyteller) and the role of oral tradition in African cultural expression, including cinema.[28]

In 1993, Diawara published an anthology, *Black American Cinema*, which argued that the "new Black realism" of films like John Singleton's *Boyz in the Hood* (1991) and the symbolic, expressive style of Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) reflect two primary paradigms in black (American?) cinema aesthetics, a time-based aesthetic in the former, and a space-based one in the latter. The new Black realist style is characterized by linear storytelling, and a firm grounding in the materiality of black life in American society. Diawara (1993, 24) notes that "a key difference between the new Black realism films and the Blaxploitation series of the 1970s lies in character development through rites of passage in the new film... As characters move obstacles out of their way, they grow into men, and develop a politics of caring for the community."[29] The symbolic expressive style of space-based narratives, "where the past

---

[27] I am here considering English-language publications in the field. It should be noted that a number of European-language publications on African cinema already existed at this time, primarily in French but also in German and Russian. See, for example, Vieyra (1969), Bachy (1982) and Budiak (1983).

[28] See, for example, Cham (1982), Pfaff (1984), Diawara (1988) and Ukadike (1994).

constantly interrupts the present, and repetitions and cyclicality define narration (13)", and "their themes involve Black folklore, religion, and the oral traditions which link Black Americans to the African diaspora (10)."

In addition, Diawara and several other contributors (Michele Wallace, bell hooks and Jacqueline Bobo) attempt to theorize black spectatorship in terms that challenge the re-racinated (but gendered) spectator rooted in psychoanalytic approaches dominant in film (especially feminist) theory, arguing for "blackness" and "black femaleness" as categories of experience that impact on the degree of oppositionality to dominant/preferred readings of a text.

Third Cinema

Gladstone Yearwood's call for an analysis -- and transformation of -- the power relations structuring film practice itself, is echoed in the concerns of Third Cinema. An often misunderstood concept, Third Cinema arose in an attempt to re-pose the question of the relationship between the cultural and the political in the context of cinematic practices that could not be fully understood within the dominant commerce/art theoretical formulations prevalent in Euro-American film production and scholarship.

---

[29] While Diawara does not make a link to gender in his characterization of these styles, the films he cites as exemplifying the new Black realism style deal with rites of passage in manhood. However, more recent releases such as *Set It Off* (1996), in which the protagonists are female, would appear to fall into the same category. The example cited as being expressive in style, however, are films that may have protagonists of either gender, and are directed by both male and female directors, including Charles Burnett, Bill Gunn, Zeinabu irene Davis, Julie Dash, Marlon Riggs, among others.

Third Cinema posits a view of film as primarily neither art nor commodity, but as a tool for social transformation. The central concern of Third Cinema is collective empowerment (Gabriel 1989).

As an idea, the concept of Third Cinema is rooted in the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and Brazil's Cinema Nôvo.[30] However, the term “Third Cinema” itself was coined by Argentinian filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, in their 1969 manifesto entitled "Towards a Third Cinema", in which they promoted the notion of cinema as a weapon of decolonization, and the documentary (but one that no longer echoes that common in the West which position viewers as passive consumers of information) as the chief form of revolutionary cinema. Published in 1970, the Cuban filmmaker, Julio Garcia Espinosa's essay, "For an imperfect cinema", echoed the political commitment to the use of cinema as a weapon for social and cultural transformation. In fact, Solanos and Getino’s (1983, 24) likening of a camera to a rifle, the film to a detonator, and the filmmaker to a guerilla fighter who “travels along paths

---

[30] Cinema Nôvo refers to a cinema movement in Brazil that spanned the 1960s and early 1970s in which filmmakers sought to introduce issues such as underdevelopment, poverty and exploitation in Brazilian films which had, until then, tended to ignore social realities. The Cinema Nôvo filmmakers drew on Italian neo-Realism (use of non-actors, location shooting) and French New Wave (low budget /creative financing, collective production, disruptive narrative techniques). In addition, their Marxist ideology drew on issues relating to the working class, but also to folklore. Arising out of this movement was a film important in terms of pan-African cinema, Carlos Diegues’ *Ganga Zumba* (1963), a historical account of a successful slave revolt on a 17th century sugarcane plantation. A later phase of the movement was characterized by more allegorical narratives to circumvent the censorship of a repressive military dictatorship. The relationship between the Cuban Revolution and cinema is elaborated in Chapter 4.

that he himself opens up with machete blows" also invokes a vision of the filmmaker as an embodiment of the Santería deity, Oggun, god of metals and technology, and in whose iconography in the New World, the machete reigns supreme.

Third Cinema distinguishes itself not only from First cinema (industrially-based entertainment cinema), or second Cinema (the art cinema of the petit bourgeoisie), but also from other Third *World* cinema. Third Cinema is not synonymous with Third *World* cinema precisely because not all cinematic output from Third World countries can be said to have a revolutionary consciousness. In 1982, Teshome Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, attempted to delineate a methodological framework based on the concept of a Third Cinema. Gabriel (1989) argued that Third World films may characterize one or more of three phases (which he labels as unqualified assimilation, remembrance and combative). Only the third, the combative phase, in which filmmaking is practiced as a public service and in the interests of Third World peoples, constitutes Third Cinema. In this sense, Third Cinema's emphasis on the use of a cultural form as a combative tool mirrors Frantz Fanon's "literature of combat." Gabriel's framework drew criticism for its essentialist approach to film practice in many parts of the world and for lacking consistency.[31] Nevertheless, the concept of Third Cinema foregrounds a

---

[31] See Willemen (1989) for a discussion of some of the problematic aspects of Third Cinema approaches to film practice and criticism, which include its reliance on Western paradigms (such as Italian neo-Realism, Griersonian documentary and socialist realism), its ascription of revolutionary consciousness to the oppressed

common determination by many Third World filmmakers to transform/challenge existing modes of film production and structures of dissemination.

The centrality of Frantz Fanon in both postcolonial theory and African/Diaspora studies is echoed in this formulation of Third Cinema as a critical methodology, being explicitly based on Fanon's three phases of cultural decolonization as outlined in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

According to Harris (1993), the African Diaspora as a subject of study gained impetus from the International Congress of African Historians convened in Tanzania in 1965. Azevedo (1993) notes that the study of Africa has a long history outside the US, where efforts to systematize the study of Africa began in the 1950s but gained impetus from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and the wave of political independence sweeping the African continent, resulting in the establishment of Black Studies (usually specifically African-American) and African Studies programs.

Today, these programs may be combined to form programs in pan-African Studies (under various names) or they may remain separate academic entities within many institutions.

St. Clair Drake (1993) characterizes African Diaspora studies as being concerned with the interrogation of the experience of African dispersal. This conception of African Diaspora studies is limited to the Diaspora (and in Drake's case, specifically to the diaspora in the Western hemisphere) and is seen as a sub-field

---

without due regard for the psychological/ideological effects of domination, and being too universalistic.

within African studies. For this reason, I use the term African/Diaspora to refer to both Africa and the African Diaspora.[32]

I will draw upon a broad spectrum of ideas from disciplines within the arena of African/ Diaspora studies (and in instances where applicable, postcolonial studies) including the political and psychological writings of Fanon, identity discourses and debates on representation by Stuart Hall, Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, literary and cultural analyses by various authors including Carole Boyce Davies, Selwyn Cudjoe, Maryse Condé, E. K. Brathwaite, political, economic and social analyses of the Caribbean and of specific islands by Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Carlos Moore, Aggrey Brown, Gloria Joseph and Colin Clarke among others.

The connection between African Diaspora studies, Third Cinema and black cinema has been an intimate one, not only in terms of the centrality of Fanon's political thought in Third World and black film criticism, but also because of the influence of Third Cinema on the revolutionary consciousness of many of Africa's

---

[32] While some scholars use the term "African Diaspora" to include the African continent, African colleagues have noted that it is inaccurate to include Africa in the term since there can be no "diaspora" without the notion of a "homeland." My use of the term African/Diaspora avoids this linguistic inaccuracy. Of course, internal diasporas within the African continent are an ongoing process due to political and economic instability, war, famine and natural disasters. The term African/Diaspora also includes the African-descent Caribbean diasporic populations in Canada, the US, Europe and the UK. Azevedo uses the term "Africana" synonymously with "African and the African Diaspora" without any comment on the usage of this term, which reappears in other African Diaspora studies literature.

earliest generation of filmmakers, among them Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo and Sarah Maldoror, as well as some Black British filmmakers.[33]

While none of these traditions paid much attention to the specific role of women in their formulations until the more recent advent of black feminist and womanist criticism, it was in the mid-1980s that an awareness of the contributions of black women to black cinematic practice and aesthetics began to emerge. Taylor's (1986) essay on the so-called "L.A. Rebellion" explored the re-definition of cinema aesthetics including those emerging from African-American women filmmakers such as Julie Dash, Alile Sharon Larkin and Barbara McCullough. Alile Sharon Larkin herself published an essay in 1988 in which she challenged the imposition of white feminist definitions and priorities on black women filmmakers, and Jacqueline Bobo (1988) attempted to broaden the discourse by examining black women as cultural consumers.

In the United States, the journal *Black Film Review* has been the most consistent among periodical film publications in profiling black women filmmakers, conducting interviews and discussions of the work and working conditions of many African-American women filmmakers including Kathleen Collins Prettyman, Madeline Anderson, Julie Dash, Saundra Sharp, Michelle Parkerson, Ayoka Chenzira, Camille Billops, Carmen Coustaut,[34] British filmmakers such as Ngozi Onwurah, Martina Attile,

---

[33] Pines and Willemen (1989) provide a series of discussions that reveal the mutual influence of critical endeavors circulating within these two traditions.

and Maureen Blackwood, as well as some Caribbean/European filmmakers such as Elsie Haas of Haiti, Euzhan Palcy of Martinique and Gloria Rolando of Cuba. However, most of these are interviews, or essays written in a journalistic style, and do not constitute a critical tradition. Nevertheless, such interviews constitute a crucial source of information for critics whose aim is to provide insights into the relationship between aesthetics and politics/economics, or between aesthetics and various black cultural practices.

The European bilingual (French and English) film publication, *Ecrans d'Afrique*, has graced its covers, and has included profiles on – and/or interviews with – a number of women filmmakers from Africa and the Caribbean, including Sarah Maldoror, Euzhan Palcy, Safi Faye (Senegal), several Tunisian women filmmakers, such as Moufida Tlatli, Selma Baccar and several others, as well as Kadiatou Konate (Mali), Margaret Fombé Fobé (Cameroon), Zimbabwean producer Miriam Patsanza, among others.

Among the issues that have emerged in black film criticism is one that also appears as a recurring theme in African/Diaspora feminist criticism, namely, the necessity for greater contextualization of production in analyzing cultural texts. What are considered aesthetic choices may, and frequently do, arise not only from the specific ideological/stylistic preferences of the filmmakers but also out of the conditions of

---

[34] Notably, while the cinematic output of African-American women may have begun to receive some increased critical attention, these filmmakers have attained little commercial recognition.

production, distribution and beliefs about the possible reception of their work. Recognizing this connection refutes the "the commercial industry's own split between its institutional and textual practices" (Allen 1992, 180), as well as the assumptions of many film scholars and film critics, who, in divorcing the text from its broader socioeconomic context, confer upon it, as Clyde Taylor (1988, 83) would say, "a specious autonomy", succinctly articulated by independent filmmaker Zeinabu irene Davis (1990, 28) in a rebuttal to David Nicholson and (ironically) Clyde Taylor in the pages of *Black Film Review* :

> Black critics seem to take the question of style and form in Black independent filmmaking as a simple matter of aesthetic choice. It is not. It is a matter of extreme hardship -- political and economic factors, lack of opportunity and equipment and more that influence and form aesthetic decisions...
> In my latest film, *Cycles*, I made a decision to use black and white film and to do without sync sound because it was cheaper to produce. This was an aesthetic choice bound by the limitations of economics and equipment access.

With regard to the cinematic production of black women, however, few inroads had been made into the abyss that constituted critical inquiry into black women's cinematic endeavors by the 1990s. Black women outside the United States have been particularly marginalized. It has only been in the mid-1990s that critical analyses of gender *and race*, or the work of black women filmmakers, began to appear as a steady

(if small) trickle within the discourses of black or feminist film scholarship. These include several essays by Gloria Gibson-Hudson (1991a, 1991b, 1994), a womanist analysis of three films by black women filmmakers by Reid (1991), and essays by Benamou (1994) and Mellencamp (1994).

In past two or three years, scholarship on black women in cinema has begun to encompass African women. Petty's (1995) analysis of a television series produced and directed by a Camerounian woman, Ngona Ambassa, explores how the conventions of narrative structure and mise-en-scène, which are usually utilized in television series such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty* to create psychologicaly-laden representations "are subverted in *Miseria* to create social or issue-oriented representation (142)." 1997 saw the publication of an entire issue of the European journal, *Matatu*, dedicated to African women in cinema, although there is a preponderance of articles exploring the representation of women in African films, rather than analyses of films made *by* African women. Cham's (1996) anthology on African cinema, however, integrates women and gender issues through the inclusion of both the voices of African/black women filmmakers such as Sarah Maldoror and Anne Mungai, as well as examinations of women and feminism in African cinema by both male and female critics, black and white.

With regard to black women filmmakers in the Caribbean, Euzhan Palcy's success in breaking through Hollywood's barriers gained her a degree of recognition rare for any black woman, much less one from the Caribbean. Press attention in the US reached a peak after the release of Palcy's *A Dry White Season* in 1989. In France,

however, it was her earlier adaptation of Joseph Zobel's novel, "La rue cases-nègres", that elicited scholarly interest in her work, including a monograph on *Sugar Cane Alley* by César (1994). An English translation of Ménil's essay on *Sugar Cane Alley* has been included in Cham's (1992) anthology on Caribbean cinema, *Ex-Iles.* [35]

Although there do exist a few scholarly analyses on Palcy's work in English-language publications, these remain fewer in number than one would expect considering her pioneering achievement in becoming the first black woman to have her film produced by a Hollywood studio. These include an essay on militant resistance in *A Dry White Season* by bell hooks (1994), while Kolocotroni and Taxidou (1992) and Nixon (1991) discuss white mediation and ideological substitution in that film, respectively. A short essay by Keith Warner (1985), the translator of the Zobel's novel on which *Sugar Cane Alley* is based, and an interview with Palcy are also included in Cham's (1992) anthology. Herndon (1996) explores the affirmation of Afro-Caribbean identity in *Sugar Cane Alley*.

The late Afro-Cuban filmmaker, Sara Gómez's *De cierta manera/One Way or Another*, has received scholarly attention from feminist film critics such as Lesage (1979), Kuhn (1982) and Kaplan (1983), and from scholars of Latin American cinema such as López (1990a, 1990b), Burton-Carvajal (1994), Martínez-Echazábal (1994) and Chanan (1985). Benamou's (1994) examination of women in Cuban cinema remains exemplary in feminist /Latin American film scholarship for its efforts to

---

[35] Menil's essay was first published in *Présence Africaine*, no. 129 (1983).

provide some insights into race as well as gender in Gómez's *One Way or Another*. The tendency of film scholars to privilege full-length feature films over short forms/documentaries, duplicating the US film industry's biases, may explain why, despite her prolific output of short documentaries within a decade, so little attention has been given to Gómez's other work, except in Cuban publications such as the film journal, *Cine Cubano*, and Chanan's *The Cuban Image*. However, critics in North America may be constrained by limited access to Gómez's documentaries, only two of which are available in the United States.[36]

The Sistren Collective has been the focus of scholarly attention in several journal articles (Katrak 1989; Cobham 1990; di Cenzo and Bennett 1992; Ford-Smith 1989/90; Wilson 1993). In addition, there have been two books (Ford-Smith 1986, 1989), one of which, *Lionheart Gal* (1986), was published by Sistren itself, as well as a master's thesis (Noel 1988), and several popular or journalistic articles (Katrak 1990; *Jamaica* 1985). These publications focus primarily on Sistren's organizational structure as a primarily working-class women's collective, and on their use of socio-drama to raise political consciousness about women's issues. Katrak (1989) and Cobham (1990) discuss the use of oral tradition, Jamaican patois and ritual frameworks in Sistren's plays. None of these, however, deals with the Collective's production of video documentaries and

---

[36] Nevertheless, it is apparent from their writings that several of the film scholars who write regularly on Latin American cinema, including Cuba cinema, travel regularly (or have traveled) to Cuba, where Gómez's documentaries are available at ICAIC for screening.

docudramas.

In 1997, Gwendolyn Foster's *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora* was published. As the first monograph-length examination of the work of black and Asian women directors, this publication has to be welcomed as a valuable contribution to a long- neglected area of scholarship. Providing detailed, scholarly analyses of selected works by Zeinabu irene Davis, Julie Dash, Mira Nair, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Prathiba Parmar and Ngozi Onwurah, the book tends to be overly celebratory and displays a linguistic bias. It clearly privileges -- without comment -- English-speaking (and primarily, British or American) filmmakers. Although an important historical figure in terms of black women's cinema, Euzhan Palcy has been relegated to a section entitled "Other Voices", and Sara Gómez is omitted entirely. Perhaps predictably, collectives such as Sistren are also invisible. This marginalization of Afro-Caribbean women, regardless of their achievements, continues to provide an impetus for this dissertation, which will analyze the work and social, economic, political and historical context, of Afro-Caribbean women's cinematic expression.

I emphasize, however, that their absence from the critical literature does not reflect an absence of actual production by Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers. The four filmmakers discussed in this analysis have produced a substantial body of work in the relatively short history of their participation in film/video production. For example, the four filmmakers whose work I explore in this dissertation have produced 23

documentaries of varying lengths, 4 feature films (a 5th is currently in production), 1 made-for-TV movie, and 3 fictional shorts (30-60 minutes in length).[37]

The inadequacies of feminist and black/Third Cinema film criticism in the area of black women's cinematic production leads me to the discourses of African/Diaspora feminism in order to construct an appropriate framework . Thus, in Chapter 2, I offer a conceptual framework for the analysis of African/Diaspora women's cultural expression that draws on various black feminisms from around the world, as well as on African/Diaspora cultural traditions and values. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Caribbean, including the geopolitical and economic context of the region, the discourses of identity, and the role and nature of the mass media in the region. Chapter 4 explores the work of two Afro-Cuban women filmmakers, the late Sara Gómez, and videomaker Gloria Rolando. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of selected texts from the body of work produced by Martinican filmmaker, Euzhan Palcy. Chapter 6 examines the video documentaries produced by the Sistren Collective in Jamaica. In Chapter 7, I offer concluding remarks about the modes of production, stylistic elements, and thematic concerns evidenced in the work

---

[37] For practical purposes, I only discuss films and videos released up to, and including, 1997. As a result, while I have included Palcy's made-for-TV movie, *Ruby Bridges*, in general commentary, I have not provided a detailed discussion of this work.

CHAPTER 2

of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers as seen from within the framework of a pan-African feminist critical perspective.

CHAPTER 2: TOWARDS A PAN-AFRICAN FEMINIST CRITICISM

In terms of the critical lens with which all of the aforementioned analyses have approached the work of black women filmmakers, little attempt has been made to identify an appropriate framework that is cognizant of the black women's cultural, social and political positionings, or of the multiple nature of black women's oppressions or marginalizations. In this chapter, I propose the use of what I call a pan-African feminist framework as a useful conceptual framework for undertaking a critical examination of the work of black women filmmakers in particular, but which may also be utilized to explore the work of filmmakers falling into other categories of identification. For this purpose, I will draw upon the broad interdisciplinary arena of African/Diaspora studies, which necessarily includes black feminist discourses, as well as Caribbean and African discourses on cultural expression, including those of black cinematic practices, to delineate (what I have tentatively termed) a "pan-African feminist" framework for the analysis of black women's cinematic expression.

While the various critical trajectories of African/Diaspora feminisms co-exist in uneasy alliance, I argue for a broader critical lens, one which like a river draws upon it many tributaries as it flows towards the goal of illuminating pan-African women's cultural expression. Currently, various strands of feminism/ womanism exist in different parts of the African Diaspora. These include black feminism, womanism and Africana womanism in the United States, various articulations of African feminisms

including those by Filomina Steady, Carole Boyce Davies' "genuine African feminism" and Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism, as well as discourses on the dynamics of feminist consciousness and movements in the Caribbean.

It is necessary that a viable framework be able to draw upon all of these diverse strands of feminisms, African/Diaspora cosmologies, as well as theories of black aesthetics and discourses of identity formulation and representation. If, as Rose (1982, 28) remarks, "black art forms have freely taken from one another forms, techniques, ideas as they seem appropriate," African/Diaspora studies provides us with the tools for analyses of the films of black women by allowing us to consider the specific manifestations of art forms emanating from African/Diaspora cultures -- including performance, dance, music and drumming, mythologies and folklore, the visual arts (whether adornments of dwellings or of the person, fabric design and decoration, painting, etc.). Such characteristic elements of African/Diaspora cultural expression include repetition, improvisation, exaggeration, antiphony (call and response), polyrhythmic and multivocal structures, and verbal dexterity.

I will begin by reviewing the status of the dynamic field of inquiry involving feminisms relating to women from Africa and the African Diaspora, before delineating a methodological formulation for the analysis of cinematic expression by pan-African women that draws on all of these discourses.

African/Diaspora feminisms

The search for a discourse appropriate to understanding the cultural expression of pan-African women leads to an emerging field of knowledge upon which I wish to draw for this purpose, viz., African diaspora women's studies, and within its sphere of analysis, the lively discourses of African, African-American and Caribbean feminisms.[38] A central concern emerging from these discourses is the necessity of exploring the broader social context of black women's lives in relation to their cultural expressions, rather than the individualist, psychosexual and ahistorical concerns of white feminist approaches. Honor Ford-Smith (1988, 22), a Jamaican scholar and a former member of the Jamaican women's media collective, Sistren, articulates the methodological approach favored by black/African/Caribbean feminist/womanist (hereafter referred to as African/Diaspora feminisms) approaches to the analysis of the works of black women, when she argues that we need to understand "cultural expression as an integrating factor in society rather than as a series of actions and products cordoned off from social and political processes." It is for this reason then, that this dissertation will draw upon a number of other theoretical discourses in order to fully interrogate the interventions of black women filmmakers from the Caribbean on the constructions of cultural identity in that region, as well as on religion, economics, health, etc.

---

[38]The term “feminism” is used here to refer to theoretical and/or practical approaches addressing women's oppression, and to other issues relating to the status and power of women in their societies.

Johnson-Odim (1991) has pointed out that although several schools of feminism may exist among First World (white) feminists, the most widely-held perception of feminism emerging from white, middle-class Western women is that it conceives of the feminist struggle solely in terms of gender oppression.[39] This type of feminism, i.e., liberal, bourgeois, or reformist feminism, clearly fails to engage most women of color beyond a common concern to promote gender equality as a major goal. Such common concerns include freedom from physical and sexual abuse and equality in opportunities and rewards not only in the workplace, but in all spheres of existence. The reason for such lack of engagement is not always obvious to white women, viz., that the eradication of gender discrimination may end oppression for white, middle-class (and heterosexual) women, but it does not eliminate oppression for women for whom the sources of oppression are multiple, arising out of a confluence of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, poverty, and other factors. The history of the black woman's struggle in the United States, for example, indicates pervasive racism within the women's movement (Giddings 1984; Carby 1987). One of the best known black women participating in the early American suffragist movement, Sojourner Truth, regularly encountered disdain and opposition

---

[39] This type of feminism has increasingly become more receptive to challenges to its ethnocentrism. In addition, Marxist/socialist feminists have themselves challenged the ahistorical nature of much feminist theorizing. Nevertheless, even an otherwise excellent reference, Kuhn and Radstone's (1990) *The Women's Companion to International Film*, makes no mention of Marxist-feminist approaches to film theory, confirming the dominant status of liberal feminism in feminist film scholarship.

from her fellow white suffragists, many of whom objected to both her blackness as well as her peasant origins, eliciting her now famous "Arn't I a woman?" address at the Second National Woman's Suffrage Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851-- one of the earliest documented challenges to the norms of Eurofeminist aesthetics (Forman 1994).[40]

The divergent perspectives of women of color and white feminists have led to clashes between Western feminists and those from the Third World at several international women's fora, when Western feminists demanded that "politics" be kept out of the conferences and concentration be focused on women's issues![41] This is not to say that some white feminists have not seen the interconnection of race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and gender in the oppression of women of color, but these radical feminists have, according to Johnson-Odim, "been displaced by the far more popular liberal feminism which has not sufficiently defined racism and imperialism as major

---

[40] Painter (1996), however, claims that the phrase “ar’n’t I a woman” was invented by a white feminist comrade of Truth’s many years after the event. However, despite noting that the convention was well-covered in reports of the time, she bases her refutation on the fact that one other reporter did not document this phrase in reporting Truth’s speech. Painter argues that “today the one historians judge the more reliable – because it was written close to the time when Truth spoke – is Marius Robinson’s” (174). Also, I use the term "aesthetic(s)" as a notion that is profoundly political, a site for the contestation of power.

[41]See Cagatay, Grown and Santiago (1986) and Okeyo (1981). Of course, this argument undermines white feminism's own goal of linking the personal to the political.

feminist issues" (1991, 316), necessitating the involvement of women of color to reincorporate race/ethnicity and class into feminist analyses.

The narrow agenda of waging a battle solely on the gender front will result, if successful, in benefiting only a small percentage of women, viz., white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists, who will be in a position to take their places alongside their male counterparts in continuing to perpetuate other forms of oppression that continue to exist. The initial reluctance of mainstream feminism to transcend a gender-specific perception of oppression forced women of color to articulate their own kinds of feminisms that attempt to broaden the definitions and agendas of feminism in order to increase its relevance to their own lives. African-American feminists who have examined the problematic relationship of white, middle-class feminism with the lives and concerns of women of color, or who have advocated black feminist critical approaches include Barbara Smith (1977), Deborah McDowell (1980), Hazel Carby (1982), bell hooks (1981), Barbara Christian (1985), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), and Clenora Hudson-Weems (1995), among others. Proponents of African interpretations of feminism include Filomina Steady (1987, 1992), Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985), Deidre Badejo (1989), Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Obioma Nnaemeka (1995). Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (1997), Consuelo López Springfield (1997), Rhoda Reddock (1989), Honor Ford-Smith (1989/90), Magali Roy-Fequiere (1994), Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (1980) have all attempted to elaborate on the dynamics of feminism(s) in the Caribbean.

Paravisini-Gevert (1997, 7) argues that in the Caribbean, women's responses to local conditions have resulted in a variety of feminisms that often clash with each other as "women of different classes and races strive to achieve sometimes contradictory goals." She notes that the specific historical conditions of the Caribbean make women's concerns focus on issues different from their Euro-American feminist counterparts:

> The insular factors affecting the development of feminist movements in the region -- the indivisibility of gender relations from race and class, the intricate connections between sexual mores, skin pigmentation, and class mobility, the poverty and political repression that may have left women's bodies exposed to abuse and exploitation – seem alien to the concerns of European American feminist thought.

Western mainstream feminism's reluctance to engage manifestations of oppression other than gender may have concealed a desire to hang on to existing privileges. As Steady points out, "the issue of racism can become threatening, for it identifies white feminists as possible participants in the oppression of blacks" (1987, 3), a potential already borne out by history, as in the participation/defense/perpetuation of racial oppression by white women in South Africa.

The inextricability of women of color's experiences of oppression arising out of their various identities *simultaneously* is cogently expressed by Nnaemeka (1995, 93)

here responding to the Africanist Katherine Frank's conception of African female subjectivity:

> Contrary to Frank's assertions, subjectivity is not well-delineated and hierarchized for many women whose multiple identities and resultant multiple oppressions are experienced simultaneously. Furthermore, because these multiple identities/subjectivities shift constantly, thereby defying a fixed hierarchy, it is difficult for black women to determine which identity is acted upon at every given moment. A black woman does not get oppressed in the morning because of her race and summoned back in the evening to be oppressed because of her sex; she is not that lucky.

To counter this privileging of gender, some black feminists have chosen to use the term "womanist", introduced by Alice Walker (1983), to distinguish their expanded conceptualization of feminism which, argues Walker, encompasses a sense of commitment to the "survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female." (1983, xi). Allan (1995) identifies the major features of a womanist ideology as “audacity, women-centeredness, and whole(some)ness of vision” which she appropriates as the principles of a womanist critical praxis.

Walker’s introduction of the concept (and the term) intensified the theoretical and critical discourses that would challenge white feminism’s Eurocentrism, as women

of color, especially those of African descent, have attempted to develop a framework for the analysis of black women's cultural expression that goes beyond the simple insertion of race into traditional feminist enterprises with their focus on gender.

Some (white) feminists, such as Elaine Savory Fido, in a discussion with Carole Boyce Davies in an anthology they co-edited on Caribbean women and literature (Davies and Fido 1990), dismiss "womanism" as simply a cultural manifestation of feminism, which Fido sees as having a political agenda, while the former does not. Again, the term political is construed in a very restricted sense, but more importantly, it suggests that womanism is only useful in expressing a different cultural tradition from white, middle-class feminism, thereby minimizing the different perspectives and experiences, as well as political positioning and, therefore, political agenda, of most women of color.

The existence of the terms "black feminism" and "womanism" alerts us to the inaccuracy of perceiving the question of feminism among black women in monolithic terms. Charges of womanism's insufficient political commitment comes from some black feminists too (hooks 1989; (charles) 1997).[42]

One of womanism's foremost detractors has been the cultural critic, bell hooks, who argued that feminism's commitment to struggle made it superior to womanism because the latter was not sufficiently radical. hooks (1989, 181-182) is

---

[42] (charles) (1997) also criticizes Walker's assumption that the term "womanish", rooted in southern African-American culture, would be equally applicable to black women globally.

baffled at the ready acceptance of many black women of the term “womanist”, while claiming they cannot identify with the term “black feminist.”

> I hear black women academics laying claim to the term “womanist” while rejecting “feminist.” I do not think Alice Walker intended this term to deflect from feminist commitment, yet this is often how it is evoked. Walker defines womanist as black feminist or feminist of color. When I hear black women using the term womanist, it is in opposition to the term feminist; *it is viewed as constituting something separate from feminist politics shaped by white women* [my italics]. For me, the term womanist is not sufficiently linked to a tradition of radical political commitment to struggle and change.

Why then, did Walker coin a new term? If a womanist is the same as a black feminist, what is the purpose of clarifying the non-separatist (from men) agenda of womanism? Even if Walker had not intended to use the term as oppositional to feminist, but rather as something more complex (“womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”), as an intensive form of feminism, once out in the public arena, the term was appropriated by many black women as their own, precisely because they wanted something that would not bring with it the baggage of white feminism’s racism and/or ethnocentrism, and an agenda that was not shaped by white women. Womanism attempts to reframe the gender debate around the issue of racial/cultural difference,

while black feminism simply advocates racial inclusion into the existing frameworks and agendas of white feminism.

In addition to charges of insufficient political commitment, Walker's conceptualization of womanism has been criticized by black women as essentialist and universalist (Allan 1995) and her own practice of it as imperialist (Nnaemeka 1996). Nevertheless, it was clearly an attempt to carve out an affirmative space for women of color who did not want to engage in a gender war that would exclude the men who shared with them oppression rooted in racism even as they wished to challenge their sexism.

The initial refusal of white feminist cultural critics to accept the multiplicity of black women's concerns has led to a consistent pattern of devaluation of the cultural work of black women. In her now classic essay, *Toward a black feminist criticism*, Barbara Smith (1977) notes the systematic devaluation of the work of black women writers not just by male literary critics (both black and white) but also by white feminist ones. I have already referred to a similar devaluation of Third World and women of color's attempts to define their own agendas in the field of film studies by characterizing their work as "pre-feminist."

Allan (1995, 11) notes that "for Walker, the white feminist bulwark against sexual oppression falls short of the intrepidity that compels the womanist to turn over every stone in the complicated masonry of power relations." Thus, the kinship of the term "womanist" with the term "womanish" as audacious is rooted in an awareness of the strategy of defiance as one the major weapons a black woman has with which to respond

to the unequal distribution of power in which she is frequently at the bottom of the pecking order.

Even Allan's otherwise insightful analysis, however, conflates the terms "black feminism" and "womanism." Arguably, those who choose to call themselves black feminist, rather than womanist, are strongly invested in integration into white feminism's structures and institutions while attempting minor reform that would allow for their inclusion. Some of the best known early proponents of black feminism, whose writings on the subject have attained the status of classics in the field, include Hazel Carby and Deborah McDowell whose calls for black cultural critics to move beyond celebration and idealistic discourse argued for the development of a sophisticated theoretical framework that would maintain its ties with both black male literature and white feminist criticism (Allan 1995).

Criticism of womanism appeared from other sources as well. Nnaemeka (1996, 230), an African feminist, notes in her review of Allan's (1995) womanist analysis of four women novelists, two white and two black:

> In actuality, Walker's imperialistic insurgency starts gathering momentum *in The Color Purple*, progressively developing a full-fledged war as the author's writing careened towards her two latest works, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Warrior Marks*. Allan identifies [Virginia] Woolf's and [Margaret] Drabble's complicity with patriarchal thought as the distinguishing element between the two women, on the

one hand, and Alice Walker's, on the other hand, without exploring Walker's complicity with white Western feminist thinking.

Any degree of complicity with Western feminism appears to be the key objection to all other forms of black or African feminisms/womanism behind the concept of "Africana womanism," as proposed by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1995). Africana womanism advocates a complete separation from white feminism, while womanism suggests only periodic separation (presumably, from men *and* whites). Africana womanism is dismissive of African feminism and black feminism on the grounds that the retention of the term "feminism" suggests "an alignment with feminism, a concept that has been alien to the plight of the Africana women from its inception (19)."

Espousing a qualified degree of support for the notion of "traditional" gender roles, Hudson-Weems' US-centeredness becomes apparent in her perception of these roles which are characteristically First World Western even though she speaks for all women of African descent. Despite statements to the contrary, Africana womanism appears unable to transcend its African-American roots, and pays only lip service to its diasporic scope, utilizing the African-American historical experiences of slavery, racial oppression and economic marginalization as the basis of its formulations, with little regard for alternative experiences/social structures in Africa and other parts of the African diaspora, such as the Caribbean. However, Hudson-Weems posits an agenda that emphasizes self-naming and self-definition for women of African descent as well

as family-centeredness and sisterhood, which are recurring themes in all African/Diaspora feminisms.[43] What Africana womanism shares with other forms of African/Diaspora feminisms is a belief in self-reliance and autonomy, the struggle for "Africana liberation" and a refusal to see black men as enemies.

In contrast, Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism" is explicitly non-essentialist,[44] and names itself from the acronym for "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa" as a self-conscious ploy to avoid becoming embroiled in refutations of charges of imitativeness of Western feminisms, while refusing to repudiate any common concerns with Western feminisms. Ogundipe-Leslie points to the long-established existence of indigenous forms of feminisms in Africa, and addresses such issues as the collusion and participation of women in patriarchal oppression, and draws attention to the role of

---

[43] Hudson-Weems makes a passionate argument against the use of the term "feminism" and her discussion suggests that this is her primary objection to African feminism with which she otherwise considers Africana womanism to have a high degree of affinity. Her use of the term "womanism" bears no relation to Walker's use of the term, according to Hudson-Weems and is, instead, based on the fact that only a female of the human species can be called a woman.

[44] Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, 216) is not only inclusive of North African/Arab societies in Africa, but also challenges notions of Africa that freeze it in some kind of mythically "pure" past, arguing that "with regard to color, and the following is particularly important for Africans of the diaspora, there are no color purities in Africa…Everything, biology and culture, has been mixed or shall we say, "dynamized", by Africa's historical movement of peoples. These movements are not only the result of Western influence, as hegemonic Euro-Americans like to think. They have been going on since the beginnings of time. Africa has been open to the world since the dawn of history." My own conceptualization of pan-African feminism is, regrettably, restricted to sub-Saharan Africa, but it is a purely practical strategy as the inclusion of North African Arab cultures and their diasporas would make this entire project unwieldy.

the international economic order in the dynamics of gender oppression.[45] Reiterating the need to recognize the multiple nature of African women's oppressions as well as the existence of multiple African feminisms, Ogundipe-Leslie refuses to engage in adversarial gender politics with men (1994, 229), proffering a holistic approach that emphasizes the argument that "women's liberation is but an aspect of the need to liberate the total society from dehumanization." In addition, Ogundipe-Leslie (222) challenges the valorization of a notion of African culture "immobilized in time to the advantage of men as most men in Africa want it to be", while also noting that "feminism is not a choice between extreme patriarchy on the one hand or hateful separatism from men on the other."

Black women differ in terms of a number of potentially oppressive (and potentially divisive) characteristics such as age, religion, class, sexual orientation, national origin, access to formal education, marital/family status, language, and so on, but they share with one another, and *simultaneously*, two pervasive and overarching sources of discrimination and oppression, racism and sexism. The commonality of experiences arising out of these two forms of discrimination does not always bridge the differences, particularly between women on the African continent and those of the diaspora. Consequently, black women from the industrialized nations who often take their own privileges (relative to African women) for granted are often surprised when

---

[45] The Sistren Collective's video documentary *Carrying a Heavy Load* (1992) examines the impact of international economic policy on Jamaican (and other Caribbean) working-class women.

differences emerge at conferences or film festivals (Andrade-Watkins 1995; Plant 1994) or as a result of specific issues, such as Alice Walker's approach to the practice of female circumcision.[46] Andrade-Watkins describes such a conflict between diaspora and continental women at the FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in 1991. Such confrontations highlight the need for continual vigilance and self-consciousness about one's own positionality. As Plant (1994, 52) states, "by unmasking the presumption of categorical unity based on skin color, the dynamics of the conference underscored the need for a greater awareness of and respect for cultural differences among Black people."[47] In acknowledging the dangers of essentialism, however, one cannot go the other extreme of complete denial of commonality of

---

[46] The critiques of Alice Walker's *Warrior Marks* (1993), directed by Pratiba Parmar, appear to revolve around their approach to African women, rather than disagreement with the necessity for eradication of the practice of female genital mutilation. Many of these arguments have come from African women (as reflected in Nnaemeka's comment quoted earlier) or Africanists such as Harrow (1997, ix). Harrow contends that in *Warrior Marks* (which he mis-labels/renames *Women Warriors*) "there is little concern, except for occasional lip service, paid to the politics of representation or identity. Women are defined, their oppression detailed for them, their path to liberation laid out for them – sometimes by men, sometimes by non-Africans, sometimes by other African women… the goal of social reform is consistently presented throughout as though the issues of realism, representation, and voice had never been problematized in feminist theory." (Curiously, Harrow is very approving of Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose films on African women does not even have the redeeming agenda of social reform but is simply an exercise in intellectual and cinematic experimentation). However disagreeable Walker's approach may be to such critics, they must tread warily in case they appear to be defending the practice itself. Predictably, reviews by US feminists are unqualified in their celebration of *Warrior Marks*.

[47] Plant (1994) is referring to the Conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges Across Activism and the Academy, held July 13-18, 1992 in Nsukka, Nigeria.

experiences. Much of the discourse surrounding the issue of essentialism tends to confuse shared struggle with sameness.

In this context, black women from Third World countries may share a greater understanding of the experience of being marginalized on the basis of national origin, language, neo-colonialism and economic marginalization within a global economic system, with other Third World women than with their black sisters in the US or Britain. Thus, black women have the opportunity to form alliances and coalitions with particular groups on the basis of those vectors of marginalization they share, without necessarily excluding themselves from other groups.

Women in the Third World are aware that economic surplus in the West is often directly related to oppression in the Third World, and that a demand for equal opportunity for them on the basis of gender alone will simply be a formula for the equal sharing of poverty rather than the eradication of it. What's more, African feminists have drawn attention to the hierarchies among African women themselves (on the basis of age, social status within the family or within a marriage -- such as the power of the first wife over subsequent ones, etc.).

Still, women of color cannot afford to neglect the struggle against gender oppression either. Being cognizant of multiple and interlocking forms of oppression should not blind us to the need for continuing the struggle against gender-based inequities. Jayawardena (1986) discusses the role of feminism in anti-imperialist struggles in the Third World, and points out that one of the problematic aspects of such struggles is that their nationalist nature often invoked notions of national identity based

on traditional culture. In many cases, these traditional cultures were strongly grounded in patriarchal structures, so that such nationalist strategies did not permit women to encompass certain roles that were perceived to be a negation of traditional cultures, or as a "Western import", including the concept of feminism itself. Johnson-Odim (1991, 319) points to the dangers of subsuming the battle against gender oppression to the battle against racism or imperialism:

> The need for feminism arises from the desire to create a world in which women are not oppressed. If there is no term or focus, no movement which incorporates the struggle against sexism, women run the risk of becoming invisible. We do not have to look far to understand why women fear this invisibility. The revolutions in Algeria and Iran raise serious questions about the degree to which women benefited from their participation. Even in socialist revolutions where women's positions have been greatly improved and continues solidly towards a goal of equality, such as in Cuba, Nicaragua, Angola, and Mozambique, the changes have required not only the commitment of men but also the constant vigilance and organization of women. The need for feminist theory and organization is clear.

The relevance of gender issues in post-revolutionary socialist societies is addressed in the work of filmmakers such as Sara Gómez, an Afro-Cuban filmmaker, in her best known work (and her only feature film), *De cierta manera/ One Way or Another* (1977), as well as in a documentary entitled *Lady Marshall* by black Nicaraguans María José Alvarez & Marta Clarissa Hernández. Both films explore the contradictions of post-revolutionary socialist societies in which women continue to battle entrenched patterns of *machismo*, and continue to face discrimination and restrictions based on gender.

In Africa, indigenous women's societies promoting women's rights have a long history, having existed since pre-colonial times. Steady (1993) argues that African feminism integrates indigenous patterns of feminist activism with other struggles in human rather than solely gendered terms, i.e., African feminism is a humanistic feminism. Ogunyemi (1985, 68) notes, in her discussion of black female writers, that "while the white woman writer protests against sexism, the black woman writer must deal with it as one among many evils; she battles also with the dehumanization resulting from racism and poverty... Black women writers are not limited to issues defined by their femaleness but attempt to tackle questions raised by their humanity." As such, African feminism echoes Walker's notion of womanism as being committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female, and that as a theoretical approach, “it can talk both effectively and productively about men" (Williams 1994, 517).

The work of Steady and other African women scholars have pointed out that in many pre-colonial societies, there was a strong tradition of female power and participation in all domains of life, economic, religious, political and associational. The sexual division of labor was essentially along parallel lines rather than hierarchical, giving women's work equal value to that of men (Steady, 1987). Through social organizations that emphasized group values, communal living and even polygamy, women shared mothering and household and other duties, ensuring some degree of personal freedom, greater mobility and developed strong bonds with other women. As a result, they experienced a more limited, rather than absolute, form of patriarchy. Ekejiuba (quoted in Steady 1993) points out that women were expected to order their own space and their own affairs to protect their interest as women.[48] This notion of a parallel autonomy is considered a crucial component of African feminism, which emphasizes the complementarity of males and females and which rejects an exclusivist perspective of gender relations, as well as individualism and competition instead of cooperation and interdependence.

---

[48]For example, women's membership of the secret Sande society in West Africa affords women access to spiritual rituals separately from men as well as allowing women to deal with domestic violence through collective humiliation of the offending male. Similarly, men belong to the Poro society which can impose sanctions on women. See Steady (1993) for a fuller discussion of how colonial structures eroded African women's autonomy in areas of taxation and financial independence, health care, etc.

The slave trade was the single most important historical event in the massive dispersal of Africans to the western hemisphere.[49] While the notion of parallel autonomy was impossible to achieve under slavery, which allowed Africans no autonomy at all, the closely related concept of self-reliance was substituted as an ideology, together with a strongly activist stance in the struggle against slavery. According to Bilby and Steady (1987, 457-60):

> In the New World, resistance to slavery was a widespread condition which involved both men and women and took several forms, the most spectacular of which was marronage. Maroonage, or flight from slavery, was quite widespread and became a major problem for all the great European slavocracies.

Not only were women the "main source of stability and continuity" within such groups, but some Caribbean oral traditions such as legendary tales continue to celebrate the rebellious activities of female warrior leaders such as Nanny, Mama Juba (Jamaica), Melchora (Cuba) and Queen Mary and her aides Queen Agnes and Queen Matilda (Danish Virgin Islands), all of whose femaleness, in terms of both their sexuality and their religious power, played an important role in their military prowess

---

[11]However, the African presence in the Americas did not begin with the transatlantic slave trade; archeological finds increasingly attest to global explorations by, and presence of Africans, in the Americas prior to their arrival as enslaved people. See Van Sertima (1987). Since World War 2, the global dispersal of African-descended people has continued in the form of migration due primarily to economic factors.

and their tactics against their slave and colonial oppressors.[50] The legend of Nanny as an invincible warrior became a cornerstone of Maroon feminism.[51] Bilby and Steady (1987, 450-60) note:

> Nanny's significance goes beyond that of a mere mortal leader. To the maroons, she is a mythical original ancestress, from whom all present-day maroons are descended... In the various maroon legends recounting Nanny's great deeds of the past, there is one dominant theme: the supernatural...Although the ... stories about Nanny are examples of legend and should not be seen as actual history, there is no doubt that an important personage named Nanny really existed...There are references to her in the contemporary British literature as a powerful obeah-woman, or sorceress...there are indications that she was not the only woman of influence among the maroons.[52]

---

[50]Davies (1990, 16-70) argues that "Legendary stories seem the only avenue for the portrayal of heroic women...Few stories of Nanny the Maroon ever surface in collections [of oral literature Davies studied], which validates the thesis about the more revolutionary stories being submerged."

[51] See Terborg-Penn (1987), Bilby and Steady (1987), Mathurin (1975), and Tuelon (1973).

[52] The strong black woman who obtains her power through her affinities with supernatural forces, reappears as Nana Peazant in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, in Zeinabu irene Davis' *Mother of the River*, and as Nana in Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, not as a sinister character (as in mainstream productions such as Christophene in *Wide*

The paradigm of "marooning" in which the rebel figure becomes the icon of black Caribbean identity is notable in some parts of the Caribbean for the prominence of women. Drawing inspiration upon female models like Nanny, Caribbean women have been able to appropriate the rebel figure, viewed largely as a male construct by male-centered nationalist ideologies, to create a paradigm of the "rebellious woman." This paradigm is pervasive in Caribbean culture as mentioned above.

While I find the notion of the "maroon woman" a useful concept that appears in various manifestations in African/Diaspora feminisms, legendary tales and biographies of historical figures such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Sister Nanny, etc., as well as in the characterization of African female deities, the notion of "rebellious women" is problematic for some scholars, such as African literary critic, Nnaemeka (1995, 107). Nnaemeka criticizes the concept when used by Western (presumably Euro-American/European) feminists in relation to African literature, arguing that "feminist literary criticism of African literature is always posed to herald the emergence of the rebellious African women and if she fails to appear, it invents her." Nnaemeka's concern lies with the lack of recognition of the culture-boundedness of the notion of rebellion by Western feminists, who may impose on African characters definitions of rebellious activity (or lack thereof), without questioning whether their

---

Sargasso Sea) but as one who uses her supernatural powers as a tool of resistance to oppression.

understanding of what constitutes rebellion coincides with that of the particular African context out of which the literary text emerges.

Nnaemeka posits, instead, a "feminism of negotiations" – negofeminism," in which independent women exercise freedom within the limits of certain cultural boundaries, because in certain African cultures (in Nnaemeka's argument, the Igbo culture of Nigeria), both independence and female self-affirmation are possible within the structures of power-sharing and parallel (dual-sex) governance.

Bearing Nnaemeka's caveat in mind, I argue that the paradigm of the "rebellious woman" remains valid in the context of the search for an critical framework for approaching the work of black women filmmakers -- if we are careful to establish that their rebelliousness is recognized as such within their own sociohistorical context. In other words, it is important to note that such figures as Nanny have been recognized for their rebellious heroism within the Caribbean context, and that it has not been imposed by foreign notions of rebelliousness or heroism.

Many of the women of influence mentioned above were what the maroons called "Science-woman", i.e., a woman well-versed in the supernatural arts. They were healers and priestesses.[53] In fact, the role of African religious practices in subversive activities against slavery and colonialism can be inferred from many of the tales told in the oral tradition. What is also important from a pan-African feminist perspective is

---

[53] López-Springfield (1997, xvii), notes that even today Jamaican health traditions are largely female-centered because "the healing arts were not wrested from women (as they were in 'Western' cultures)."

that the indigenous African religions included women as not only healers and priestesses, but as revered ancestors and potent deities, or *orishas*. The female deities of the Yoruba-based religions point to notions of femininity that encompass power, strength, courage and beauty, i.e., power and femininity are not antithetical. Oya, Oshun, Yemanja -- the riverain/sea goddesses -- are often symbolized as women with swords.

According to Badejo (1989), the essence of African feminism is grounded "in the ancient/contemporary wellspring of ...African women's oral literary images" such as the orature of the Yoruba deity Oshun, in whose oral literature we find pivotal images, concepts and ideals of African femininity. Oshun is more than just the Aphrodite of Yoruba deities, a love goddess of great beauty; she also embodies superior military prowess. In addition, she is skilled in the use of magic and potions. Oya and Yemanja, too, are supreme in the arts of mystic retribution and protection against evil. Olorun, the supreme deity, is neither male nor female, as is the case of many of the deities of the Vodun religion of Haiti. There is no distinction in prestige between a *houngan*, an officiating male figure at Vodun ceremonies, and his female counterpart, the *mambo* (Marks 1980).

Christianity brought with it a greater spiritual distance between the world of the deities and those who worshipped them, in addition to patriarchal structures within the Church and a male triad as its object(s) of worship (Ford-Smith 1988, 29):

> In the Caribbean context, the African religious practice seemed not to have laid down rigid codes for the conduct of male/female relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The arrival of the missionaries challenged both female autonomy and its religious/aesthetic base. It accelerated the process of conversion of the image of woman as warrior/priestess as epitomised by Nanny to the domesticated nanny, black Mammy of the Great House, by insisting on an end to "concubinage" and by insisting on virginity and marriage. In addition, Euro-Christianity upheld both a male diety [sic] as the centrepiece of human affairs and the male as the centrepiece of Church hierarchy.

In the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the Caribbean, the Catholic Church outlawed the worship of African deities, but many Africans evaded these restrictions on their beliefs and rituals of worship by superficially catholicizing their deities -- the many saints of Catholicism facilitated this practice -- evolving into the now widely practiced syncretic Afro-Caribbean religions of, among others, Santería (Cuba), Vodun (Haiti), Pukumina (Jamaica), Shango (Trinidad) and, in Brazil, Candomblé and Macumba.[54]

---

[54] Pukumina is also known as Cumina, Kumina or Pocomania. In addition, many Jamaican slave runaways fled to Cuba where they converted to Roman Catholicism because Cuban law required that such converts should receive sanctuary, thereby preventing their return to their former slaveowners. See Mathurin (1975).

The significance of female deities of African origin for black women in the Caribbean and many parts of the Americas is evident in the survival of deities such as Yemanja/Yemaya, Oshun and Oya in the rituals of Candomblé and Santería. Tributes paid them in black women's creative and cultural expression, include those working in the media of film and video, such as Osuntoki Majisola's video documentary entitled *Osun: Her Worship, Her Powers* (1994) or Zeinabu irene Davis's invocation of Erzulie, the Haitian goddess of love, and Oshun, Erzulie's Yoruba counterpart in other parts of the Caribbean in her short film, *Cycles* (1989). In the Lilith Video Collective's video documentary entitled *Mulheres negras/Black Women of Brazil* (1986), black Brazilian women invoke the female deities of Candomblé, which they explain as constituting an important part of racial and cultural identity for black Brazilians. Positing Candomblé as a "black space" in Brazilian culture, the women also note that its mythology is very feminine. One interviewee articulates the importance of Candomblé for black Brazilian women, stating that "Medea and other Greek divinities are not real to us. In Candomblé, Oshun, Yansan, Yemanja are real to us."[55] Another reflected on the possibilities represented by the existence of an archaic ancestral feminism related to that mythology. "I stared to think," she says, "that a black feminism could exist if it took roots from this vision, a different vision of how blacks have survived even if we are in this society that oppresses us as individuals and as a culture."

---

[55] Yansan is one of the names of the deity, Oya (Bastide 1978).

Such a culturally-based feminist vision, however, faces serious challenges in the Caribbean. Paravisini-Gevert (1997, 9) argues that class and race differences "have played a continuous role in the emergence and evolution of feminism in the region. As a result we can only speak of women's *movements*, since feminist goals have often meant very different things to women of different races and classes." Roy-Fequiere's (1994) analysis of the women's movement in the early part of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico notes that class identification was more powerful than solidarity based on gender among educated Puerto Rican women. Paravisini-Gevert maintains that not only did women of the more privileged classes openly oppose the extension of political and legal rights to women of lesser privilege, but that feminism among grassroots movements in the Caribbean defined feminism more broadly. For example, the Women's Guild in Dominica was concerned primarily with workers' access to power, land and property and women's roles in national movements often centered on decolonization and autonomy.

Most importantly, Paravisini-Gevert (1997, 11-12) notes the dangers of uncritically imposing Euro-American feminist theoretical notions of what constitutes an emancipated woman upon women whose historical experiences have developed an alternative mode of resistance to gender and other oppressions.

> A central feature of US feminist theory is that of the emergence of a fully emancipated woman out of the mire of patriarchal culture. It is an

> image born of the myths of rugged individualism that have shaped the image of
> the United States at home and abroad. Woman as maverick, as we can see in recent biographies of women like Eleanor Roosevelt, who emerges from the brilliant pages of Blanche Wiesen's recent biography as a symbol of US feminist womanhood in all its mythologizing power…But you can scan your memories in vain for similar images in the Caribbean and conclude that we lag behind the United States when it comes to heroic feminine material. To do so would be to judge heroism by standards that would never apply to the Caribbean region, where heroism, especially female heroism, has been sought in the subsuming of individual aspirations and desires into the struggle for the betterment of the community where women have followed a tradition, in history as in literature, of grassroots activism, courageous resistance, and, at times, even martyrdom.

Scanning Caribbean history for examples of female heroism is not an exercise in futility. The passage quoted above confirms that it is the conceptualization of what constitutes heroism that is crucial, as in the African context. The paradigm of the "rebellious woman" in the Caribbean draws not only upon the heroism of historical figures such as Nanny, but also on the female deities of the Yoruba pantheon that survived the Middle passage –

notably, Oshun, Yemaya and Oya. Thus, while Eleanor Roosevelt's feminist consciousness was inspired by her particular personal suffering, that of figures like Nanny was inspired by that of her people.[56]

In a recent interdisciplinary anthology on women in the Caribbean entitled *Daughters of Caliban* (1997), the editor contends that the title represents a re-appropriation of Caliban (of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which has become a paradigmatic colonial text for many Caribbean cultural critics) who, she notes, has figured largely as a male construct. Surprisingly, there is no mention at all of Sycorax, the mother of Caliban, even in this explicitly feminist anthology. In her discussion of African and Caribbean literature, Andrade (1992, 68-69) notes Sycorax's absence and its symbolic significance in the writings of such Caribbean luminaries as Aimé Césaire (Martinique), George Lamming (Barbados) and Roberto Fernandez Retamar (Cuba):

> Through all these retellings and readings, however, the category native female as personified by Sycorax, Caliban's mother, is notably absent.

---

[56] I do not mean to minimize Eleanor Roosevelt's activities in support of civil rights, the eradication of poverty, etc. I merely wish to note that her personal and familial conflicts are considered to have inspired her feminist consciousness. Another crucial difference, of course, is that Roosevelt's status as First Lady provided her access to the highest echelons of power, and that she could not be considered "of the people" in this sense.

> Though a liminal figure in Shakespeare's play, Sycorax is the locus of great power. As former ruler of the island that Prospero now controls, she signifies a direct link to a pre-European, specifically African, history. And as magician (or witch) she poses the greatest threat to this power, that of the book. The figure of Sycorax is important to more than just a reappropriation of Caribbean historiography, however, for as a witch she also signifies an empowered Caribbean female power and sexuality.

Thus, Caribbean traditions which invest a degree of power and heroism in female legendary figures such as Nanny, and which draw inspirations from African-origin female deities such as Yemaja, Oya and Oshun appear to exist in a parallel, rather than intersecting, relationship with feminist organizing and activity instituted in the form of women's movements. Ford-Smith (1988) notes that it is a commonly held belief in the Caribbean today that feminism is a white, middle-class import. Arguing that Caribbean feminism actually has its roots in the black nationalist organizations formed at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, she points to black nationalist women such as Una Marson, a Jamaican writer, who attempted to find a link between black consciousness and women's liberation and who introduced an approach "which expresses and articulates women's issues through aesthetic forms and which uses process associated with producing these forms to mobilize and organize

women, and to analyze their reality." The Sistren Collective's work (discussed more fully in chapter 6) reflects this approach in Jamaica today.

However, I argue that feminist consciousness can take a variety of forms, and the role of legendary female heroines and strong female deities should not be discounted as influential (and inspirational) models for the how ordinary women view themselves. In fact, I would suggest that it is in the confluence of various feminist traditions in the Caribbean that one may find arguments that can be successfully utilized to counter charges that feminism has no “indigenous” roots in the Caribbean. Any model of African/diaspora feminism that is relevant in the Caribbean context must look the role of African female deities, and legendary and/or historical female figures in order to provide an effective framework for interpretation or analysis of Caribbean women’s lives and cultural expression.

Before I outline how these divergent traditions can be combined with other African/Diaspora feminisms to offer a useful framework of analysis, I would like to provide an overview of film criticism relating to the cinematic expression of black women filmmakers to date. One of the first scholars to analyze the work of black women filmmakers was film historian, Gloria Gibson. In 1991, Gloria Gibson-Hudson proposed that African American literary criticism be used as a model of analysis for films made by African-American women. Gibson-Hudson draws on Vattel Rose’s (1982) argument that “the black art forms have freely taken from one another forms, techniques, ideas as they seem appropriate” and that, therefore, Afro-American

literature, with its rich traditions, should be proffered as a resource for a black cinema aesthetic.

It is unclear why Gibson-Hudson privileges literary tradition if, in fact, there is a tradition of borrowing among various art forms themselves. Logically, and I would argue appropriately, black film criticism should therefore feel free to borrow not only from literary criticism but from music, performance, dance and oral literature. Cinema generally, and black cinema in particular, is a medium which draws on all of these other art forms in various combinations and simultaneously. As such, the privileging of literary frameworks of analysis is inadequate at best. Gibson (1987) herself acknowledges the cultural significance of music in black independent cinema in the US in her doctoral dissertation. Gibson (1987, viii) notes that the use of music "is a vital communicative component within the film context relaying social, political and cultural ideology" and that the sound, concept and /or structure of music is an active component of black cinema aesthetics.

In a later article, Gibson-Hudson (1994b, 28) presents a set of evaluative principles which includes the acknowledgement of, and respect for, alternative knowledge systems and the means by which black women "recall and recollect." These alternative knowledge systems, I argue, include collective histories that are embedded not only in tales, proverbs, riddles and legends, but also in songs, dance, personal experience/testimony, and in folk beliefs. As such, I believe that Gibson-Hudson's call for the acknowledgement of alternative forms of knowledge constitutes a crucial element of a pan-African feminist critical praxis.

Gibson-Hudson (1991a) has also argued (as a result of drawing upon the literary models she favors) that a characteristic feature in films made by women in Africa and the African diaspora is female-centeredness, i.e, the utilization of a female-centered narrative which allows women to become the cinematic focal point, and which creates an ideological framework that permits the identification and examination of black women's responses to political, economic and social oppression. That this is a defining characteristic of much (though not all) of the work of black women filmmakers in the US, in the UK and in Africa is undeniable, particularly when one considers feature film production (*Daughters of the Dust*, *Sambizanga*, *Saikati*, *Mossane*, among others), as well as numerous documentaries that chart autobiographical journeys into history and memory, or explore issues of identity, as well as those that have a strongly social agenda. This pattern is, of course, both necessary and understandable as black women begin to utilize the cinematic medium to reinsert themselves into recorded versions of history and to challenge their systematic misrepresentation and/or to intervene in patriarchal, imperialist, neo(colonial) and racist systems of oppression.

It must be stressed, however, that while the notion of female-centeredness in the work of black women filmmakers is being adopted as a recurring theme in scholarly analyses of black women's films, a strong caveat is in order.[57] One has to be

---

[57] For example, (black) female-centeredness is also celebrated by Reid (1991) and presented as a principle of womanist criticism (Allan 1995). I do not intend to suggest

extremely cognizant of allowing the notion of female-centeredness to become a prescriptive one, a trap constraining the expression of all women, but particularly of black women or other women of color, for whom the sources of oppression may be multiple. It is not unknown, for example, for some feminist distribution organizations, such as Women Make Movies in New York, to restrict their distribution only to films that center women or "women's issues."[58] To demand that a woman's only (or even primary) concerns be those related to gender is a position that emerges out of the traditional Western perspective that sees gender as the primary (formerly exclusive) source of a woman's oppression.

This is illustrated in a familiarly patronizing tone apparent in one of the earliest works on women film directors to actually include women of color. Quart (1988, 241) labels the work of women directors of color as "pre-feminist," remarking that for Third World women filmmakers "often other social problems in these cultures seem more pressing." Precisely. This practice of imposing white feminist priorities on black women filmmakers continues, so that a recent article by Pallister (1997) criticizes Palcy for being insufficiently feminist because her films do not explore the alienation of black women as do the filmmakers whose works Pallister analyzes in her article. Filmmaker Alile Sharon

---

that female-centeredness in black women's films is a problem, merely that its valorization should be problematized.

[58] Confirmed by Erika Vogt, Associate Director of Distribution, Women Make Movies, in personal correspondence with author, March 24, 1998.

Larkin (1988, 171) has noted that radical and Marxist feminists have criticized her film, *A Different Image* (1982), "[demanding] that I condemn Black men and align myself with white women against the patriarchy" and that some white progressives labeled her pan-Africanism as "a naïve and incorrect solution for the problems of black people."

Another scholar who has attempted to analyze films made by black women is Mark Reid (1991) who uses Walker's womanist ideology as the basis of his critical approach. Defining a womanist film as one that dramatizes the shared experiences of black women, and one whose narrative and receptive processes permit polyvalent (black) female subjectivity (regardless of its creator), Reid's reliance on Walker's universalist conception perpetuates the limitations of womanist ideology. Although he calls it "an international black womanist theory", Reid (377) then maintains that "black womanist films resist dramatizing one-dimensional struggles which ignore the black woman's three-pronged oppression," after having noted that "black female subjectivity, as woman and African, is historically positioned at the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and race." Reid's reliance on Walker's womanist ideology thus reduces the supposedly polyvalent subjectivity of black women to the three that are at the center of womanist discourses – race, gender and sexual orientation. A truly transnational form of pan-African feminism must consider, among other things, imperialism, economic dependency, poverty, class, religion, pigmentocracy, age, marital status, etc.

As Western feminist scholarship begins to recognize its definition of "woman" as one that is primarily white and middle-class, so black feminisms/womanisms emerging

out of the United States, in particular, face a similar challenge – in particular to recognize their own propensity to define, see, deny, or ignore, the privileging of African-American women's experiences and perceptions. Nnaemeka (1996) has warned that African-American women must be vigilant against imperialistic tendencies so pervasive in their national culture. A more global perspective, I argue, challenges the applicability of any argument that insists that a black female-centered aesthetic is sufficient as a liberatory trajectory for black women.

It is for this reason that I have drawn upon the field of African Diaspora women's studies to formulate a theoretical framework that can be utilized as a framework for analysis in this study of Afro-Caribbean women's cinematic expression. A viable framework must recognize both the similarities as well as the dissonances in the work of African/Diaspora women filmmakers. In doing so, I draw upon the above discussion of African/Diaspora feminisms to eliminate the 'white filter' and look to black perspectives and standards for interpreting the cultures, values, norms, activities, institutions and organizations of black women (Terborg-Penn 1987). This requires a willingness to address and analyze a variety of variables in addition to gender, including age, religion, class, race, ethnicity, etc., to ascertain not only how women were/are victimized but also what they achieve(d) in spite of oppressive conditions.

Arising out of the above discussion of African/Diaspora feminisms, and drawing upon the legendary tales of black female heroic figures such as Nanny of the Maroons, Harriet Tubman, among others, as well as upon the orature of African-origin

female deities, I offer the following as some characteristic features of what I have termed a “pan-African feminist” critical praxis:

a) a recognition of the mutifaceted nature of black women's oppression, and consequently, the need to fight oppression on multiple fronts,

b) involvement in the struggle for social transformation,

c) the paradigm of the “rebellious woman” and/or “womanish” behavior, drawing upon the African-origin female deities that survived the Middle passage – notably, Oshun, Yemaya, Oya and Erzulie, the heroism of legendary figures such as Nanny, as well as the everyday defiances of oppression by ordinary black women,

d) a more inclusive form of feminism stressing male-female complementarity and the totality of human experience,

e) values emphasizing survival, female autonomy and self-reliance,

f) collectivity over individualism,

g) recognition and respect for alternative systems of knowledge, such as the oral tradition, and the role of memory as a means by which black women perpetuate cultural knowledge,

h) cultural expression as a major forum for political struggle for black women,

i) an emphasis on contextualization of cultural production and dissemination, including the recognition of both local specificities and transnational patterns of values, attitudes, and practices.

A pan-African feminist criticism is not predicated upon biological factors such as race or gender, whether relating to the critic or the creator(s) of the text. Rather, a pan-African feminist analysis is a way of seeing, as one of many ways of seeing. Nor does it adopt the notion of "the black woman." There is no prototypical "black woman" in pan-African feminist criticism, there are only black women.

As a critical methodology, it is hoped that a pan-African feminist framework will constitute a useful tool with which one can approach not only cinematic expression, but also other forms of cultural expression, such as literary and other visual expression. For this reason, and also bearing in mind Rich's (1994, 42) warning that "if we fetishize the long take, the unmediated shot, and such, as feminist per se, then we will shortly be at a loss over how to evaluate the facsimiles proliferating in the wake of such a definition", I have not included within this framework any such specifically formal elements of cinematic language.

In formulating a pan-African feminist framework as the primary critical framework for exploring the work of black Caribbean women filmmakers, I do not suggest such an analysis will uncover an oppositional unity in the works of

black women filmmakers, nor is it intended to be prescriptive. By presenting a framework that is inclusive of various divergent experiences and viewpoints as well as those that present a pattern of convergences, I hope to de-nationalize black feminisms/womanisms in order to counter what Allan (1995, 13) labels as "Walker's univocal black/Third World female subject." A pan-African feminist framework offers a culturally relevant perspective that is at once transnational in scope while remaining cognizant of local specificities – it is at once both local and global. A broad framework such as that posited by a pan-African feminism, will permit the identification of any recurring characteristics in the cinematic expression of pan-African women filmmakers, while also enabling the analysis of the specificities of their historical, geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural positioning as determining factors that influence the final forms of the texts they produce.

The last item delineated above bears in mind Paravisini-Gevert's (1997, 4) reminder that as "unpopular as the thought may be in academic departments that have heavily invested in theory and the concomitant disconnection of the text from the historical materiality of real women's lives, I would posit that as scholars committed to studying Caribbean women we must anchor our work in a profound understanding of the societies we (they) inhabit." It is hoped that this crucial component will counter the increasing tendency in film scholarship to privilege purely aesthetic approaches to filmic texts, as well as the kind of universalistic logic that has characterized much of white feminist film discourses and which we wish not to replicate. For this reason, I will

include, in each of the relevant chapters, an examination of the historical, geopolitical, economic and sociocultural context of each of the geographical entities from which the women filmmakers foregrounded in this discussion emerge, i.e., the three geopolitical configurations represented by Cuba, Martinique and Jamaica.

However, I will begin with an overview of the Caribbean as a whole and some of the issues of relevance to all Caribbean societies.

CHAPTER 3: THE CARIBBEAN - AN OVERVIEW

> We know what threatens Caribbeanness: the historical balkanization of the islands, the inculcation of different and often "opposed" major languages...the umbilical cords that maintain, in a rigid or flexible way, many of these islands within the sphere of influence of a particular metropolitan power, the presence of frightening and powerful neighbors, Canada and especially the United States. This isolation postpones in each island the awareness of a Caribbean identity and at the same time it separates each community from its own true identity.
>
> (Glissant 1989, 222)

Is the desire to promote the notion of a pan-Caribbean identity too idealistic in a region whose historical and geopolitical formations have long been characterized by such "historical balkanization"? Glissant's somewhat pessimistic outlook bears re-examination, particularly in light of interventions by Caribbean filmmakers, and especially women filmmakers, in the process of identity construction. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989, 217) has noted that "all of us inhabit an inter-dependent late-twentieth-century world marked by borrowing and lending across national and cultural

boundaries that are saturated with inequality, power, and domination." The Caribbean is no exception.

The Caribbean region is a large one, covering 2000 kilometers from Cuba in the west to Trinidad in the east, with sometimes great distances between individual countries or islands. It stretches from Bermuda in the north, off the coast of South Carolina in the US, to Trinidad and the Netherlands Antilles in the south, close to Venezuela in South America. The larger islands include Cuba, close to the Florida coast, Hispaniola (which consists of two countries, Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Jamaica. Of the non-island units, Guyana, Suriname, Belize and French Guiana constitute the larger nations. Most Caribbean island territories are quite small in size and have very small populations. Cuba is the most populous of the Caribbean nations with a population of about 10 million, while the Grenadines, which are dependencies of St. Vincent and Grenada, each have only a handful of residents. Even islands like Barbados have a population of only 250,000 inhabitants occupying a mere 430 square kilometers; the smallest, Saba is only 13 square kilometers in area.

The West Indies, as the Caribbean islands are often called, consists of 4 major island groupings: (a) the Bahama Islands, (b) the Greater Antilles, namely, Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico, (c) the Lesser Antilles which, in turn, are divided into the Windward Islands, namely, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, the Grenadines and Grenada; to their north, the Leeward Islands, include Anguilla, St. Martin, Barbuda, Antigua, Montserrat, Marie Galante, Guadeloupe, Nevis and St. Kitts and (d) the Netherlands Antilles consisting of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire.

The Caribbean achieves much of its regional coherence not only from its geographical configuration, but largely from the related historical influences of slavery, sugar plantation and colonialism. Haiti was the first of the Caribbean nations to achieve political independence -- in January 1804. The slave population there had overthrown the French as early as 1791 under the military leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Cuba, once a colony of Spain, underwent a nationalist revolution in 1959, which was declared a socialist revolution in 1961. The ousted Batista regime had been heavily manipulated by the United States. Today, Cuba remains a thorn in the US flesh. By 1966, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and Guyana had declared themselves free of British rule.

Clarke (1991, 2) classifies Caribbean territories into 4 political categories: [59]

(1) "Colonial" states, in which the political administration is overseen by, or integrated with, an external power - these include (a)"overseas possessions/territories" like the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico (US) and the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, Anguilla (Britain), (b)"overseas departments/département d'outre-mer" include Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana (France), and (c) "autonomous states" such as Curaçao and St. Maarten (Netherlands), (2) Independent states, which include the islands generally referred to as the Caribbean Commonwealth, namely Jamaica (independent in 1962), Trinidad and

---

[59] Clarke points out, however, that these assignments are not fixed. Recent developments in Haiti probably would require a reassignment to category (2).

Tobago (1962), Barbados (1966), Grenada (1974), St. Lucia (1979), Dominica (1979), St. Vincent (1979), Belize (1981), Antigua and Barbuda (1982) and St. Kitts and Nevis (1983) plus Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, (3) Leftist-socialist units, such as Cuba, Guyana and Suriname, and, (4) Conservative-authoritarian states - Haiti.

Economic survey of the Caribbean

Caribbean countries face a host of chronic economic problems, including shortages of productive capital, trade and balance of payments deficits, high levels of unemployment, and declining standards of living for large sectors of the population (Watson 1994). Burki and Edwards (1995) note that "not only is poverty widespread in Latin America and the Caribbean, it has increased during the past decade." They point out that the bottom 20% of the population receives less than 4% of total income and that a World Bank survey found that determining factors in income inequality are education, sex, race and locality. The most economically advanced of the Caribbean islands are Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe and the Netherlands Antilles.

Sugar is the region's most important commodity export. Until 1981, the United States permitted sugar exports, from the Caribbean Basin countries, without imposing quantitative restrictions. The US's 1981 Agriculture and Food Act, however, contained a new sugar program which imposed restrictive quotas on the region's sugar imports to the US in order to buoy up US sugar producers -- quotas that have been continuously

reduced in subsequent years. In addition, many of the Caribbean nations' guaranteed markets for cultural exports are weakening in the face of global and regional economic trends towards the establishment of regional trade blocs and free trade agreements. European economic integration, for example, is likely to weaken, if not remove altogether, the reservation of the UK market in bananas for the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP), forcing Caribbean countries to compete on the wider EC market.[60] Harker (1994, 10) stresses that "all major export-earning merchandise activities are in decline" and that there is "no future in dependence upon primary commodities." Tourism has, therefore, become one of the major pillars of Caribbean economies. Declining economic performance in most Caribbean nations has resulted in endemic unemployment and, consequently, high levels of external (i.e. outside the Caribbean) emigration. For those unable to participate in the outward shift of labor, the informal sector provides a means of survival.

These developments have given fresh impetus to what has been a rallying cry by intellectuals in the Caribbean for the past three decades -- regional integration. Harker (1994,12-13) notes that the rationale for the prescription of regional integration to solve much of the regions woes has both a qualitative as well as a material component.

---

[60]Bananas average 50% of the export earnings of the Windward islands and 70% of Dominica's (Harker, 22).

> Qualitatively, it includes elements of culture and ethnicity, common legal and constitutional modes, and the strengthening of affinities and kinship that have grown across the region over time, due to physical proximity, and that have created a shared view of the world...At a more material level, integration is viewed as mechanism for accelerating the rate of growth...The present market, while recognized by some as still being too small by any objective measurement, is believed by most to provide a viable basis for infant industries to grow beyond the national level.

As in other instances of the formation of regional trade blocs, the Caribbean countries are increasingly recognizing the benefits of the economies of scale, such as greater bargaining power, greater stability of institutions, cooperation in joint policy-making, and the rationalization of the use of resources across the region including labor and skills. A number of regional economic institutions already exist in the Caribbean, the largest of which is the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC), with 21 members. It acts as a forum for the exchange of ideas and agreement on areas of cooperation. CARICOM (The Caribbean Community and Common Market) is perhaps the best known of such institutions, formed in 1973. Comprising fourteen members, it is an association of the English-speaking nations of the Caribbean, all of whom share a common socioeconomic and cultural heritage and

all of which were monocultural, agricultural societies (Brown 1990).[61] Others include the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) which covers seven small islands and the Caribbean Development Bank (CBD).

Despite the existence of such institutions, however, intraregional trade is low, usually below 10% of total trade overall, although the intraregional exports among OECS countries ranged from 33% to 73% in 1982. (Harker, 24, 27). With the establishment of NAFTA perhaps acting as a catalyst, the heads of 30 Caribbean countries and dependent territories convened in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in August of 1995, to launch a new regional organization called the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) --one which would include Cuba, despite objections by the United States -- with the primary objective of creating a free trade bloc among its members. ACS's combined GDP of US$500 billion makes it the fourth-largest trade bloc in the world. Its annual total trade volume amounts to almost US$180 billion, although only 10% of this trade occurs among the members (*Leaders gather*, 1995).[62]

The 1980s saw increasing foreign indebtedness becoming a characteristic feature of Caribbean economies, forcing them to enter into structural adjustment programs imposed by multilateral lending institutions, such as the IMF, as a condition for obtaining loans. Such SAPs, as they are often called, usually require governments

---

[61] Of the thirteen CARICOM members, one -- Montserrat -- remains a British colony (Brown, 1990).

[62]Predictably, the inclusion of Cuba led to a US decision to refuse Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands permission to participate in ACS.

to move towards privatization, and impose cuts in state subsidies, reductions in government spending, opening up of their markets, and the promotion of a free market economy. Such policies have not only often resulted in extreme hardship for the poorer sections of the population, but have also discouraged foreign investment because interest rates are required to reflect market conditions, raising the cost of capital.

Bryan (1995, 246) notes that trade liberalization often results in macroeconomic disequilibrium in the form of increases in unemployment, underemployment, crime and the poverty index. He contends that in many Caribbean and Latin American countries, the much promoted free market reforms have resulted in "benefits for a few, uncertainty for the many, and the further impoverishment of the masses through fiscal inability of governments to maintain essential social and infrastructural services."

The incorporation of the Caribbean into the economic sphere of influence of the United States was formalized through the establishment of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and later, the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI), which resulted in the proliferation of "export-processing ones" (EPZs) or "free trade zones" (FTZs), a development which situates the Caribbean primarily as a site for cheap labor for US businesses (Green 1994, 168-9), -- and it is women who provide the bulk of such cheap labor.

Lewis (1994, 175)) notes that the majority of workers -- over 80% -- in FTZs in Third World countries are women between the ages of 16 and 24. Working conditions are often dangerous and injurious to their health and reproductive systems within a short time.

> In short, international capital takes advantage of the gender differentiation in society, particularly at the working class and LDC levels where law and custom are far more indifferent to the plight of women. The insistence of international capital on a nonunion labor force leaves these women in vulnerable industrial situations.

Green (1994, 169) also notes that while EPZs provide employment to women, female employees continue to be the lowest wage-earners, and that males workers in the female-dominated garment and electronic manufacturing industries earn, on average, double the income of women in those fields. Generally, in the Caribbean, men do not have to rely on formal schooling to the same extent as women do in order to gain access to better-paid, higher-level management positions. Gershenberg (1994, 322) found that in Jamaica, women entered the labor force better prepared educationally than their male counterparts, and were more successful in rising to middle- or top-level management positions than women in most other countries, but "we found little evidence to suggest that subsidiaries of multinational firms played any singular role in facilitating this transfer of know-how or promotion of women to the rank of middle- or top-level manager."

Momsen (1993, 1)) sums up the status of women in Caribbean societies:

> Within the Caribbean regional diversity of ethnicity, class, language and religion there is an ideological unity of patriarchy, of female subordination and dependence. Yet there is also a vibrant living tradition of female economic autonomy, of female-headed households and of a family structure in which men are often marginal. So Caribbean gender relations are a double paradox: of patriarchy within a system of matrifocal and matrilocal families; and of domestic ideology coexisting within the economic independence of women.

Race, color and class in the Caribbean

> And if anyone is still under the illusion that questions of culture can ever be discussed free from and outside of questions of power, you have only to look at the Caribbean to understand how for centuries every cultural characteristic and trait had its class, colour and racial inscription.
>
> (Hall 1995, 6-7)

Unlike other colonized regions of the world, the Caribbean's particularly brutal history of European domination resulted in the decimation of the indigenous (Amerindian) populations and the importation of most of the current populations. The majority of the populations in most of the Caribbean islands is of African descent,

having been brought to the western hemisphere as slaves in order to cultivate sugar for European slaveowners/colonizers. After the abolishment of the slavery in 1838 in the British Caribbean and in 1886 in Cuba, Asians (Indians and Chinese) were brought to the Caribbean as indentured laborers. Many were stranded when their return clauses were not honored. On some islands, such as Trinidad, Asians constitute at least 50% of the population. Significant numbers of Jews, Portuguese and Syrian-Lebanese are also visible in the French- and English-speaking Caribbean.

Except for Haiti, white elites survived in small numbers in the former British and French territories but in larger numbers in the Hispanic Caribbean, i.e., Cuba and Dominican Republic (Maingot 1992). The meaning of the term "Creole" varies considerably in the western hemisphere, but in the Caribbean it generally refers to Caribbean-born descendants of the early European settlers (the so- called békés), or those designated as being of European descent, whether white or of mixed-blood (Creoles 1992).

By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually every Caribbean island had become a plantation society in which white ownership and slave labor producing an export crop -- sugar plantation was the primary mode of production on the various islands at different time periods -- was replaced by white ownership and black wage-earning labor. Maingot (1992) points out that in such plantation societies, it was the racially-based stratification that distinguished the plantation enterprise from other type of capitalist ventures such as the European factory:

> Because master and slave were of different races, power relationships developed a specific social dimension more closely associated with caste than with social class relations. In plantation societies, conceptions of racial superiority and inferiority became the essential ideological underpinnings of what otherwise would have been simple exploitation of labor. (Maingot 1992, 220)

Intellectual debates on the development of race relations in the Caribbean resulted in several theses, some of which followed a strict historical materialist analysis in which it was argued that since economic development is the decisive force in historical change, it was simply the development of an industrial bourgeoisie's preference for the purchasing power of a wage-earning labor force that resulted in the abolishment of slavery. Its major proponent, Trinidadian Eric Williams, believed that race and color were only superficial symbols of property relations. Of course, such an argument fails to explain why race and color are factors at all. Opponents to this thesis gave agency to moral and religious challenges to the institution of slavery (Frank Tannenbaum) or to the slaves themselves (Rebecca Scott).[63] Maingot, however, observes that notions of racial purity and related notions of a "natural" leadership class had deep roots in medieval Europe and were certainly not invented in the Americas. He argues that the Spanish simply imported the racial and religious prejudices of the

---

[63]See Maingot (1992) for a discussion of these positions.

Spanish crusade against the Jews and the Moors. Such prejudices were extended to Africans, Amerindians and any mixed-blood progeny, but did not, of course, preclude the actual practice of racial mixing on the part of such "racially pure/superior" slaveowners/colonizers.

Such interracial mixing, however, did little to minimize the relationship between social status and race/color. By the mid-eighteenth century, a bewildering range of terms of classification had developed, indicating proportions of African or Amerindian blood, with attendant legal privileges or taboos. A Spanish royal edict that allowed an individual to purchase an improved classification - a scheme which permitted the raising of funds without actually endangering the essential dichotomy between white and non-white - was strongly opposed by the Spanish colonial elites, and many colonies refused to enact it.

Today, the Caribbean's variety of colonial legacies and varying responses to colonial systems, as well as present-day geopolitical relationships, reveal various and complex systems of race/color stratifications. One consistent feature, though, is that neither the emancipation of slaves, nor the end of colonialism, has changed the fundamental hierarchy of the racial stratification system in which white, or white-likeness, is privileged.

Joseph (1980) notes in her study of women in the Caribbean, that the complex system of color-consciousness plays a dominant role in the Caribbean. It also functions at some level in a manner similar to racism. Joseph's discussion of this aspect of Caribbean societies, however, does not capture the complexity of race and class

confluences in some societies which, unlike the US, do not use the "one drop" rule to determine race. Aggrey Brown's (1979) discussion of an incident in Kingston, Jamaica, demonstrates a deeper analysis of class/color relations in many Caribbean countries. He recounts an incident in which a black Jamaican doctor goes into a store and fails to receive the courtesy due him as a customer until he invokes his status as a doctor. Thus, observes Brown (1979, 2-3), a structural-functional paradigm fails to ascertain the relationship between class and color which, in Jamaica, parallel each other but are not strictly congruent :

> Using the structural approach, it would be difficult, for example, to explain the above confrontation between the black doctor and the store attendant in Kingston. The store attendant's rebuff was a reaction to the doctor's color, and the about-face was a reaction to his socio-economic class and status. No white individual in Jamaican society would have been the recipient of such a rebuff because, in structural terms, such an individual's class could easily be determined from his color.

Culture and identity in the Caribbean

The demographic makeup of the Caribbean raises important questions about issues of identity. In the 1960s, debates over whether there was a trend towards cultural homogenization in the Caribbean resulted in two camps, one which maintained that there was a trend towards "creolization", or cultural homogenization, and an opposing

camp, the cultural pluralists, who argued that the cultural persistence of various ethnic groups has resisted any such tendency toward homogenization. However, Caribbean intellectuals, such as C.L.R. James (Trinidad), Frantz Fanon (Martinique) and Aimé Césaire (Martinique), had generally attempted to draw on Pan-African notions of blackness. In recent years, there appears to be an increasing tendency in the formulation of theories of a "Caribbean aesthetic", or a Caribbean identity, to reject the *emphasis* of Africa-based ideologies, because they cannot address adequately the complexities of the Caribbean experience:

> The philosophy of Pan-Africanism does not address the competing, localized notions of blackness within its various constituencies, and therefore cannot adequately account for the role of black discourse in intra-Caribbean discourse...blackness is not a fixed and absolute entity. Caribbean blackness - as contrasted to the black experience in Africa and, more relevantly, the United States - moves in and among so many other cultures and is so dependent on context that it can be reasonably argued that the essential blackness of Pan-African ideology is essentially a *political* metaphor.
>
> (Edmondson, 111-112)

Shelton (1993, 717) maintains that the Caribbean has now entered an era that could be considered post-Négritude, one in which the Caribbean is increasingly being

viewed as "neither a detached piece of Africa nor a remote province of France nor the backyard of the USA." This view constitutes the foundation for the notion of *antillanité*, which reformulates historical agency in terms of *métissage*, one which emphasizes mixture and diversity, with its linguistic parallel in the concepts of *créolité* or *oralité*.[64]

In the mid-1980s, several proponents of a Caribbean sense of identity that stresses the diversity of the Caribbean nations' histories, languages and cultures published a "manifesto" entitled *Éloge à la Créolité* , (*In Praise of Créolité*) which promoted the notion of *créolité*, characterized as "mosaic, disordered, open, and unpredictable" and as constituting "a continuation of as well as a shift away from a history of intellectual, cultural, and political practice in the Caribbean ranging from Negrismo in Cuba, Indigènisme in Haiti, Négritude in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and Pan Africanism." (Cham 1992, 4-5) Thus, creolization has become a term that no longer means cultural homogenization but encompasses the notion of diversity and continuity as strands making up a new pan-Caribbean identity.

Glissant (1989) argues that synthesis is what constitutes a Caribbean identity, but he is also careful to emphasize the importance of recognizing one's various origins

---

[64]The French term "metissage" connotes forced racial mixing; it has been translated by Michael Dash as "creolization", a term which some scholars find less satisfactory on the grounds that it suggests greater freedom of choice than the original French. The term "metissage" is used by Edouard Glissant in *Les discours antillais* to imply cross-cultural, non-hierarchical relations across different components of Caribbean history. See Herndon (1993).

in opposition to the "ideology of the *assimilé* (the deculturated, assimilated person)", or one who "will claim that he is Indian, European, and African at the same time, that all of that is irrelevant" (202).

> Today the French Caribbean individual does not deny the African part of himself; he does not have, in reaction, to go to the extreme of celebrating it exclusively. He must *recognize* it ... He can conceive that synthesis is not a process of bastardization as he used to be told, but a productive activity through which each element is enriched. He has *become* Caribbean. (7-8)

In this heady atmosphere of celebration of diversity and mélange, however, it can be easy to miss an underlying assumption that privileges the mixing of African and European, with at best, only nominal reference to other cultural infusions into the Caribbean cultural pot. One is more likely to read about the contributions of people of South Asian -- generally referred to as (East) Indian -- descent to Caribbean culture in the popular press than in the more scholarly discourses on Caribbean identity. Syncretism, it seems, is only conceived in black and white terms. So-called "chutney or "chutney-soca" music, a fusion of Indian and Afro-Caribbean music, for example, has been in existence for over two decades, but receives little acknowledgment in scholarly examinations of Caribbean music. Renowned Caribbean novelists of Indian descent (V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Sevon, Ismith Khan) have been, on occasion, dismissed as

"minority" writers, even when they are from Trinidad or Guyana, where they constitute at least 50% of the population. Nor, it might be added, have they ever classified themselves as Indian writers.

The political tensions between Afro-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans does not always translate into cultural or social separation, however, as "a slow but rising tide of inter-marriage [is] contributing to the development of a culture that is wholly Caribbean", and in Trinidad, "Indian singers perform in traditionally Afrocentric calypso tents" and "Indian women especially participate in the annual pre-Lenten Carnivals with extraordinary verve and vivacity" (John 1995).[65] Virtually no mention is made of the Chinese, Syrian or Lebanese and Jewish communities, except in demographic descriptions.

Stuart Hall (1992), in an essay on cultural identity and cinematic representation, argues that we need to stop thinking unproblematically of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent. Instead, we should think of identity "as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation." Such a view, says Hall, "problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term ‘cultural identity’ lays claim" (220).

---

[65]The success of Droopathi, an Indian female calypso performer in the calypso tents of Trinidad, is perhaps a reflection of the increasing creolization of Indian and African cultures in parts of the Caribbean; significantly, as a Hindu woman she had overcome resistance from the conservative and deeply patriarchal Indian community, as well as from an antagonistic black one.

There are, according to Hall, at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. Firstly, that which refers to a notion of one shared culture or ancestry, reflecting common historical experiences and shared cultural codes; this conception played a crucial role in all the postcolonial struggles and is the basis of such movements as Négritude and the Pan-African project. Secondly, the position (which qualifies the first) that recognizes that in addition, to the similarity, there is difference, "since history has intervened. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past." (223) Cultural identities, Hall points out, have histories and like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation. Identities "are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past ... Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence there is always a politics of position..." (223-225).

Guadeloupean novelist, Maryse Condé, echoes Hall's sentiment that people in the Caribbean "must not collude with the West which... 'normalizes' and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the 'primitive unchanging past'" (Shelton 1993, 230). Condé also shares with African-American feminist critics such as Barbara Christian, a belief that women of color do not see theory as a separate set of fixed principles, but that theorizing occurs in the narrative forms chosen, in the stories told and in riddles and proverbs. Her novels, *Hérémakhonon*, and *Une saison à Rihata*, do not present us with a romanticized Africa, but reiterate what Condé sees as the difficulty many Caribbean people face in reconnecting with Africa and her people, and with those attempting to find an authentic Caribbean in Africa. Responding to criticism

of her condemnation of African neocolonialism in *Hérémakhonon*, Condé counters that "some readers were shocked because they wanted to believe *Présence Africaine* and the myth that we people of the black world are one" (120-1).

Religion in the Caribbean

Many scholars still refer to the Caribbean peoples as having been "thoroughly dehumanized and stripped of their cultures" (Lent 1990, viii). Not only is such a statement blatantly offensive, but the latter part of the statement is inaccurate.[66] Probably, the best proof of refutation lies in examining the religious beliefs of many Caribbean peoples whose cultures reveal a blend of influences, including African roots. Benítez-Rojo (1992, 159) notes the significance of African religious beliefs in the Caribbean is a totalizing one.

> When we look out over the complicated and obscure panorama of beliefs that the African slaves introduced into the Caribbean, we must bear in mind that these ... had as well a decisive influence upon spheres that are quite distinct from the strictly cultural. They affected many fields which are studied, as referents, by a whole array of disciplines of knowledge that are quite distinct from ethnography, cultural

---

[66]However unwittingly, it suggests that the population was stripped of its humanity -- making them what, non-human? It would be more accurate to say that such dehumanization was *attempted* by slaveholders and colonists.

> anthropology, and the like. We can understand this better if we see that African beliefs don't limit themselves to the worshiping of a given group of deities, but rather inform an authetic body of sociocultural practices extending through a labyrinth of referents as diverse as music, dance, theater, song, dress, hairstyle, crafts, oral literature, systems of divination, medicinal botany, magic, ancestor cults, pantomime, trance states, eating customs, agricultural practices, relations with animals, cooking, commercial activity, astronomical observation, sexual behavior, and even shapes and colors of objects. Religion in black Africa is not something that can be separated from knowledge, politics, economics, or the social and cultural spheres ... we're dealing here with a discourse that permeates all human activity and interferes in all practices.

Elements of West African religions originating in the beliefs of the Yoruba, the Congo, the Mandinga, the Ashanti exist side by side (Abakuá), or in syncretic form with elements of Christianity (Santería in Cuba, Pukumina in Jamaica, Shango in Trinidad and Grenada, Candomblé in Brazil, Vodun in Haiti). Other syncretisms also exist such as Hinduism/Christianity in the Maldevidan religion of Martinique and Christianity/Amerindian traditions as seen in the Pidima religion practiced in Surinam. Other elements of African religious traditions that continue to be practiced in the Caribbean include the use of herbal medicines, and a belief in magic and witchcraft --

originating in a worldview that perceives all entities, human or non-human, as possessing inherent powers which may be channeled towards good or evil purposes.

In Cuba, Santería (or *regla de ocha*) is the dominant form of Afro-Cuban religious expression and is a syncretic form combining Yoruba and Catholic imagery. In Haiti, Vodun developed as a modified version of several older African beliefs, with that of the Fon people of Dahomey constituting the primary element -- adapted to local conditions, with some additions from Roman Catholicism. The most common convergence in such syncretic religions is in the association between African deities and Catholic saints. In Cuban Santería, for example, the Yoruba god of thunder, Shango, is associated with the Catholic Saint Barbara, and in Vodun, the Virgin Mary with Erzulie-Fréda, the goddess of love, etc.[67]

In Jamaica, the Pukumina movement involves rituals inviting possession by ancestors, angel-spirits and so on, but also involves baptism in the style of Spiritual Baptists, and Holy Communion resembling Protestant church forms. The Bible is accepted, but primarily as a textual source to confirm revelations through dreams and visions, rather than as an independent source of guidance. However, Pukumina and other more Christian forms known as Revival or Revival-Zion have been in decline

---

[67] This association does not reflect a simple sharing of traits by these deities and saints. Erzulie-Fréda, for example, is a complex contradiction, both loving and tender, but also willful, indifferent, demanding, even savage. See Dayan (1994). As Bolívar (1993, 141) points out, "no orisha represents pure concepts and all admit contradictions."

since the advent of the Rastafarians and new Pentecostal churches from the USA (Turner 1980).

Rastafarianism is probably the best known religious movement associated with Jamaica and has been described as the most dynamic religious development in that nation. Its origins in Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement of the 1920s resulted in early philosophies that emphasized repatriation to Africa, but since the 1960s, the emphasis has changed to promoting the Africanization of Jamaica. The stress on social change and militant political activism has attracted intellectuals and a young following. Rastafarianism is characterized by a radical rejection of white cultures, considered as evil particularly when adopted by blacks. Blacks are seen as a superior people, the true Hebrews, who are in temporary subjection to the white race as punishment for their evils. Haile Selassie was considered a living god or messiah of the black race. Despite their strong sense of affiliation to Africa, possession phenomena are absent, and any associations with magic and witchcraft are rejected, while their preachings are based on Old Testament Bible readings and study of the Old Testament. Followers of Rastafarianism are mainly men who regard themselves as the superior sex (Turner 1980).

Dayan (1994) notes that those fragments of African religious rituals that form the basis of many Caribbean cultures may have been viewed as the marks of savagery by many historians, "but for the majority of people, these folk or local religions not only gave collective strength, but preserved the histories ignored, denigrated, or

exorcised by the standard, ‘imperial’ histories" (5) and "kept alive the lives and deaths of the ancestors" (10).

Thomas-Hope (1980) finds a general correspondence between socioeconomic status and religious affiliation, with adherence to African-derived religions and other non-Christian religions being primarily among the lower end of the socioeconomic stratum, while the middle and upper classes are usually members of the denominational churches. However, the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches also enjoy considerable lower and middle class support. Ethnic minorities such as Asian Indians have maintained Hindu or Muslim faiths in those countries where they constitute significant proportions (one-third to half) of the population such as in Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam, although in countries where they constitute only 2% to 4% of the population, such as Guadeloupe, Martinique and Jamaica, they have been absorbed into the local religious patterns in which religious affiliation is associated with socioeconomic class.

Women in the Caribbean

Joseph (1980, 154-5) argues that in the Caribbean, the impact of class on women is the most divisive of the class/race/gender grid, forming the major barrier to the growth of womanism. The "high-siddity" (high society) women, educated and professional or semiprofessional, do not identify with their sisters of a lower socioeconomic status and guard their privileges.

> Too many Caribbean women in the upper strata are unmitigatingly guilty of elitism. They cannot identify with the women in the working classes. They feel a rightness and righteousness in their positions and operate primarily on the "pull yourself up by the bootstrap" philosophy, not realizing that most of the women do not even have "boots."

Many women's organizations promoting gender equality have been formed by middle- and upper socioeconomic class Caribbean women. Such groups do not, according to Joseph (157), express the same concerns as working-class women, showing little concern to incorporate struggles against oppression arising from racism, capitalism and imperialism. She also found that most Caribbean women did not only show disdain or indifference towards the feminist movement in the United States -- which they felt had little relevance for them -- but that they also demonstrated "an obvious lack of identity with Black American women and their participation in the feminist movement. As a matter of fact, a substantial percentage of Caribbean women did not even identify with the term Black."

Derogatory images of women abound in the Caribbean. Davies's (1990, 185) analysis of women's representation in the oral literature of the Caribbean -- proverbs, folktales and the premier song form, the calypso -- generally reveals disturbingly negative images of women.

> It is worth reiterating that some of the themes of calypso have remarkable concurrence with the proverb. The ugly woman references, the portrayal of mothers, the condemnation of females, the stereotyping of women as chasers after material wealth or prostitutes at heart and lack of portrayal of any heroism in women. While the folktale provides a wide selection of female characters, there is a preponderance of the negative and again a lack of female integrity and heroism. In reality, the Caribbean woman's strength and ambition to radically improve her social and economic situation became a direct threat to male superiority. So, in much of the oral literature studied she became "deadly to the male."

If such forms of literature or cultural communication, popular and pervasive, are assumed to provide insights into a culture's social dynamics, Caribbean women's struggles against economic and political inequality appear to have a long road ahead.[68] However, the mass involvement of women in the carnival and their calypso-singing on the streets are beginning to introduce some changes in the creation, performance and

---

[68] Davies (167) also points out, however, that although Caribbean "women are known to use proverbs with as much facility as men ... a survey of several collections reveals that informants tend always to be men." Thus, a study of the proverbs used by women may reveal whether a separate tradition of proverbs, folktales, etc., circulate in women's discourse.

reception of calypso (184-5). Legendary tales, notes Davies, is the only form which celebrates the activities of heroic women.

Dance (1993) notes that familiar stereotypes of women -- the submissive virgin/goddess to be protected and revered, the assertive and strong bitch/shrew to be avoided and despised, and the passionate and active whore/temptress to be resisted and feared -- are observable in Caribbean literature as well, with the specific characterization being strongly determined by race. Thus, Caribbean writers tend to portray black women as strong matriarchs dedicated to nurturing their male children, Indian women as docile, insipid, self-effacing with no minds or personalities of their own, and white women as sex-starved nymphomaniacs eager to be desired and seduced or violated by a black or Indian male.

In recent years women writers of the Caribbean -- Maryse Condé, Michelle Cliff, Sylvia Wynter, Mayotte Capécia, Merle Hodges, Opal Palmer Addison among many others -- have begun to receive an increasing degree of recognition. O'Callaghan (1990) argues that among many Caribbean women writers, the presentation of women in different stages of mental breakdown is a not uncommon theme. Fido (1985) observes that another recurrent theme is the exploration of "the complex interlinking of emotions, spiritual responses and physical involvement" of the female protagonist's rites of passage from girl to woman as lover, mother, wife -- and sexuality is a major area of conflict -- in the closed, secretive and repressive societies of the Caribbean. Intimate disclosure of women's experiences is a difficult but recurring concern for Caribbean women novelists. This pattern of psychosexual exploration is not

characteristic, however, of the work of black women filmmakers in the Caribbean whose work reveal a more social rather than psychological focus.

Few studies exist documenting the representation of women in the Caribbean mass media. Thurlow's (1992) thesis on women and alternative media is limited to Jamaica where the portrayal of women on radio is "dynamic in terms of the portrayal of women in a variety of social roles and the inclusion of low-income and rural women in these representations" on locally produced educational programming and soap-opera formats (Thurlow quoting Cuthbert 1979). Television images are mixed, sometimes ambiguous in execution even if intended to promote sexual equality, and women are generally absent from news coverage unless they have achieved high government office or are the wives of prominent politicians.

In terms of Caribbean women's material conditions of existence, Hamilton and Jones (1992) argue that while legal reforms during the 1980s in the English-speaking Caribbean removed most of the *de jure* barriers to economic equality for women, *de facto* obstacles such as a reluctance by commercial banks to provide credit to small-scale agriculture which is dominated by women, insufficient access to land rights and sociocultural factors, still remain.[69] It is in the area of small-scale agricultural production and food processing that women in the Caribbean have attained a small

---

[69]According to Hamilton and Jones (1992, 348), the financial markets in Caribbean countries are dominated by subsidiaries of international commercial banks whose lending criteria and loan assessment standards bear little relevance to the developing economies and actual needs of the people in these countries.

measure of economic independence, extending their contributions to micro-enterprises and marketing their products across islands.

In his review of the effects of US economic policy on the Caribbean, Coppin (1992) notes that a policy promoting off-shore manufacturing has helped augment the female-to-male employment ratio in Caribbean countries where there has long existed a history of higher female unemployment. He points out, however, that one has to be wary of inferring that such a policy therefore fosters equality of employment opportunities in the workforce, since evidence from other countries indicate high turnover rates. In addition, documented evidence suggests that US firms in Third World countries hire along lines of race, ethnicity and gender to minimize costs and their practices do not improve opportunities for women in male-dominated fields.

Filmmaking and mass media in the Caribbean

Brown (1990) notes that a UNESCO study conducted in 1987 revealed an 8.5% increase in imported programming (from 78.5% to 87%) in the television content of the four nationally-owned television services of Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua and Trinidad and Tobago in the decade 1977-1987. The level of dependency on foreign sources for films and/or television programming shows a steady increase in all the Caribbean countries. According to Lent (1990), during the Manley administration, Jamaica had the highest percentage of local programming in the Caribbean (25%). By 1985, however, Jamaica had increased its reliance on foreign television programming to 88.3%, due mainly to competition from satellite broadcasts and home video. In countries such as The Bahamas, television programming is 100% foreign in origin.

Only Cuba shows a commitment to local production. In 1987, Cuba produced 70% of its television programming locally, with the remaining 30% being primarily from the former Soviet Bloc. Cuba's local production is of sufficient volume for Cuba to seek overseas markets. In the French West Indies, all three territories (Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana) are served by Telediffusion de France (Lent 1990, 280-282).

Added to the heavy dependence on imported television programming is access to satellite transmission. Several Caribbean nations have satellite ground stations, while the signal overspills from US domestic satellite transmissions facilitates the pirating of signals. Despite the cost, ownership of satellite dishes among the Caribbean middle classes is substantial.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, the most penetrated region of the world in term of foreign TV content, Brown (1995) ascribes the heavy consumption of foreign media programming to a combination of factors including the easy access to US satellites signals, the shared language of English which reduces the time required to bridge any cultural gaps, the continued monopoly of television broadcasting by governments in the region and the ease of travel between the CARICOM countries and North America which maintains a flow of both media consumer hardware and software to the Caribbean.

Surlin's (1990) survey of media exposure among college students in the Caribbean, Canada and US found that, in general, Caribbean respondents indicated that between 75% and 100% of their TV viewing is US produced. This is not surprising,

considering that most of the television programming in the Caribbean is imported, primarily from the US. In a commentary on this situation, a verse of a popular calypso song by the Trinidadian calypsonian, Commentator, entitled "Satellite Robber", states (Manuel 1995, 196) :

> I said please, Mr. Robber, I beg you to remember
> I am independent since 1962
> He said, "Don't aggravate me,
> when it coming to TV, it is I who control you."

In an attempt to reduce the heavy dependence on foreign sources for television programming, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) was formed in 1970. This 22-member regional organization consists of both privately-owned and government media organizations. In 1988, the CBU established Caribvision, a television news exchange service which provides regional news from a regional perspectives. In 1974, the government of Jamaica had established CARIMAC (Caribbean Institute of Mass Communication) at the University of the West Indies, with the aid of UNESCO. CARIMAC was a response to a perceived need to improve the level of professionalism among media practitioners in the region. CARIMAC offers degrees that provide training in radio, television, film, journalism and small-media techniques. In the 1980s, two additional media organizations were formed in the Caribbean; the Caribbean Media Workers Association (CAMWORK), formed in 1986, is a federation of national

journalists associations and the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), formed in 1987, deals with administrative and regulatory matters in relation to telecommunications in the region (Brown 1990).

Although women's involvement in the broadcast media has an early history, women appear to have made few inroads into the mainstream mass media in subsequent years. Ford-Smith (1988, 27-8) notes that the Jamaican black nationalist and feminist writer, Una Marson, was involved in the establishment of a BBC radio program, called "Calling the West Indies", in England as early as the 1930s :

> The program built links between black people scattered over Europe during the war years and between black people in Britain and the Caribbean. It offered one of the few chances to develop a supportive and critical atmosphere within which Caribbean cultural expression could grow. Writers around the Caribbean submitted unpublished work to representatives on each island. Over 200 authors first gained exposure through "Caribbean Voices", the literary segment of "Calling the West Indies."

While media imperialism debates continue to revolve around the effects of media consumption on local cultural identity, the exclusion of opportunities for local producers within their own countries tends to be subsumed. The dominance of foreign television programming in the Caribbean and the control of film distribution in the

Caribbean leave few outlets for Caribbean filmmakers to develop local audiences for home-grown films and videos. The popularity of local television productions such as Trinidad's *Gayell*e and *No Boundaries* and Jamaica's *Oliver at Large* suggest that, given the opportunity, Caribbean audiences are as likely to support homegrown media content in the visual media in the same manner as they have their local soca and reggae music genres.

Filmmaking in the Caribbean

According to Cham (1992), filmmaking in the Caribbean, by Caribbean filmmakers, is primarily a phenomenon of the 1980s, although a small number of films had emerged in the prior decade in countries such as Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Haiti. Nevertheless, many of the Caribbean countries have had a long history of exposure to the cinema, with countries like Haiti having films screened there as early as the turn of the century. In addition, of course, the Caribbean has a long history of being used in foreign films as an exotic backdrop for the adventures of white protagonists, in a manner that provides what Menil (1992, 162) calls a "journalistic synthesis of the three 'S's (*sea, sex and sun*)". The region was used extensively by Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s as a backdrop for romances, gangster movies and adventure films, all with white protagonists. Caribbean filmmakers, on the other hand, have attempted to foreground the Caribbean and its people.

Cham (1992) maintains that the Caribbean's shift from being positioned as receiver/consumer up to the 1970s and the 1980s to a producer/transmitter (at least the

beginnings of such a role) occurred as a result of several local and international developments in the political, economic and cultural arenas. These included US military intervention (Grenada), changes in governments (Jamaica's Manley-Seaga-Manley shuffle, the Duvaliers' reign of terror in Haiti and post-Duvalier developments such as the ousting of Aristide by a military dictatorship) and the beginnings of militant pro-independence activism in Guadeloupe and Martinique, which are still colonial possessions of France. The World Bank/IMF's often harsh imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs did not spare the Caribbean, which together with the US - inspired Caribbean Basin Initiative, increased the control of international capitalism over the region and brought severe economic difficulty. Together with declining infrastructure, over-reliance on tourism or other single commodity economies, combined with declining terms of trade resulted in deteriorating quality of life and a resultant wave of emigration.

For many years, Caribbean cinema had generally meant Cuban cinema, Cuba being the only Caribbean country with a long history of indigenous film production. Nevertheless, in several of the islands, attempts *were* made to start a film industry through the establishment of 16mm and 35mm production units, mainly as commercial ventures. In the 1970s Guyana established state-run postproduction facilities. Due primarily to the difficulty Caribbean filmmakers have in obtaining funding, and the lack of an infrastructure of support from either their governments or private sources (including distribution) most of these production facilities have been underutilized and have become obsolete. Except in the Hispanic Caribbean (Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto

Rico) where cinema's historical development is different, there is no Caribbean film industry, although Trinidad has a well-developed video production infrastructure (Cham 1992). Individual filmmakers, most of whom are trained outside the region, continue to produce works in both films and video formats for both cinema and television, although video production for television is the main media activity in the region (Kuhn and Radstone 1990). Nevertheless, as previously noted, television programming continues to be overwhelmingly foreign**.**

Even Cuba, the most prolific film producer in the Caribbean with a well-established and highly-respected film industry, imports half of the films shown commercially (50.8% in 1990, 54% in 1989), of which 31.1% are imported from the United States and the rest from the former Soviet Union (8.2%), France and Japan (3.3% each) and Italy and Germany (1.6% each).[70]

The advent of satellite transmissions and videocassettes in the Caribbean has resulted in declining cinema attendance. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, cinema attendance at 70 commercial cinemas and 4 drive-in theaters was 8.5 million annually in the 1970s, but by 1986 cinema attendance had dropped to 1.26 million per annum at 57 cinemas and 3 drive-in theaters. However, 39% of households owns a videocassette recorder (VCR) and while only 2% own a satellite dish, Trinidad- Tobago's only television channel TTT (Trinidad and Tobago Television) transmits satellite

---

[70]These figures are for 1990 and were obtained from Unesco's *Statistical Yearbook, 1993*. Unfortunately, the yearbook does not provide statistics for Jamaica, Haiti, Martinique or Guadeloupe.

programming originating primarily from the United States, which attracts 86% of television owners (Skinner 1990, 49-50).[71] In Barbados, the number of cinemas dropped from 5 in the early 1980s to 1 in 1987 (Alleyne 1990, 59).

The difficulty of obtaining training as well as financial and other resources (such as trained personnel, access to film stocks and equipment, research resources, etc.) applies to both men and women, resulting in many Caribbean filmmakers being based in Europe. Despite the fact that most Caribbean filmmakers are forced to travel back and forth from Europe or the US (and many reside in Europe/North America for part of the year), Caribbean cinema reflects a vitality that may, in turn, reflect the filmmakers' own forced adaptability and cosmopolitan lifestyles and a diversity of cultural influences. The Haitian-born Raoul Peck, for example, lived in Germany until his recent return to Haiti, but spent part of his childhood in Zaire.[72] His *The Man by the Shore*, shown to acclaim at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, is a feature film dealing with the terror of life in Haiti under the Papa Doc Duvalier dictatorship as seen through the eyes of an eight-year old girl, while *Lumumba, Death of a Prophet* (1993) is an unconventional documentary – a visual meditation -- on the soft-spoken, revolutionary African leader and first prime minister of Zaire, Patrice Lumumba, who was overthrown after only six months by Mobutu, the recently ousted dictator of Zaire. Peck has resided in and made films in Canada and the United States. His *Haitian*

---

[71] 93% of Trinidad-Tobago's population owns a television set (Skinner 1990)

[72] Raoul Peck has returned to Haiti where he is currently the Minister of Culture.

Corner (1988), was shot in New York's Haitian community in Brooklyn where a Haitian poet now released from prison seeks revenge after he catches a glimpse of his former torturer.

Felix de Rooy of Curaçao and Aruban writer/producer Norman de Palme established their production company, Cosmic Illusions, in the Netherlands. De Rooy has made three feature films (in addition to about 10 other short films) that deal with religion and draw on Curaçao folklore.[73] Still, opportunities for black Dutch Antillians are limited even in the Netherlands where the Dutch government, which labels all people of color as "migrants" even when they are Dutch nationals, requires that majority of students at the Dutch National Film School be of Turkish or Moroccan descent and Dutch Antillians have lower priority (Blackwood and Givanni 1988,117).

The lack of available facilities, opportunities and training in the Caribbean explains why so many filmmakers born in the Caribbean live and work in Europe. One can add to this a corpus of work that emerges from the experiences of women filmmkers born in Europe of Caribbean parents, films and videos which confront the varied faces of the Caribbean migration experience, themes of exile and longing, alienation and discrimination, color complexes and identity issues -- and which frequently feature strong roles for women. Together with the work of their male counterparts, black

---

[73]De Rooy's features include *Desire* (1984), which he made at New York University Film School, where he received his training, *Almacita de Desolato* (1985) which won the Jury Prize at the first Images Caraïbes Film Festival in 1988, and *Ava and Gabriel* (1990).

European women filmmakers are drawing attention to the black presence in postwar Europe, their work marked by a diversity of styles and stylistic reinterpretations that reflects the "hybrid" nature of black cinema in Europe (Blackwood and Givanni 1988, 114).

In Britain, such filmmakers include Karen Alexander (Guyana), who co-directed the video production, *Ms Taken Identity* (1986) and Maureen Blackwood (Jamaica), a well-known member of SANKOFA, the black British independent filmmakers collective, who directed the group's *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986) and her own A *Perfect Image* (1989), *Home Away From Home* (1993). Martina Atille (St. Lucia), also working in Britain, directed *Dreaming Rivers* (1988) and Wendy Williamson (Jamaica) made *Castles of Sand* (1986).[74] Also working in Britain are Jamaicans Claudine Booth, whose short film, *No Virginity, No Nationality* (1981), examined Britain's racist immigration legislation and Denis Elmina Davis,[75] who has directed *Omega Rising: Women of Rastafari* (1988), which examines the part played by women in the Rastafarian movement (Kuhn and Radstone 1990).

In The Netherlands, Guyanese director, Gloria Lowe, works for Dutch television, and uses her salary to fund her independent video production. She has produced a variety of documentaries for the Educational TV Service. Her 40-minute docudrama, *We're*

---

[74]The Caribbean countries in parentheses refer to the countries of origin of these filmmakers and/or their parents.

[75]Denis Elmina Davis died in January 1995 after contracting malaria in Ghana.

doing It for the Children/Santa Claus (1982) deals with the racist assumptions that permeate Dutch culture and which gives expression to a character called Black Pete who is Saint Nicholas' servant. To celebrate, white men are "blacked up" and delicacies such as "nigger kisses" are an essential part of the festivities; the Dutch do not consider any of this to be racist unless, of course, they are Dutch *and* black.

Lowe works mainly in 16mm and video, and has a produced a number of documentaries, including *With Our Own Hands,* (1987), which looks at black women in the Netherlands, and *Finding Our Own Face* (1987), which profiles the works of three Surinamese women artists. Many of the black filmmakers in Europe produce work for television, while trying to raise funds for their own productions; they include Veronique Mucret and Harmel Sbraire (*Frayeur au 6ème Ciel*), both working in France.

Because so many of the filmmakers that are included under the category of Caribbean cinema live, at least for part of the year, outside the Caribbean, it might be true to say that Caribbean cinema is primarily a cinema of exile/its diaspora (Cham 1990).

Film Festivals

In 1985, two Martinican women, Suzy Landau and Viviane Duvigneau, founded the Association pour la promotion et le developpement du cinema caribeen / Association for the Promotion and Development of Caribbean Cinema (APDCC), in order to promote the development of a Caribbean cinema by Caribbean people. One of its primary aims was to organize film festivals that focus on the Caribbean. Emerging

out of this development is the most significant cinematic event in the Caribbean, the biennial Images Caraïbes film festival held in June. The first festival was held in Fort-de-France, Martinique, in 1988, and featured over 60 films and videos, including documentaries, from 17 different countries. By the second event, the program had expanded to over 90 films and videos from 27 countries. The APDCC has also organized several other events featuring the exhibition of Caribbean films/videos, including the Festival Marin-Village, which showcased the work of independent African-American filmmakers such as Larry Clark and Haile Gerima.

One of the promising outcomes of the 1990 Images Caraïbes film festival was the establishment of the Federation of Caribbean Audiovisual Professionals (FeCAViP), an organization of screenwriters, filmmakers, producers, actors and technicians whose manifesto states that the organization will, *inter alia*, produce and distribute the works of Caribbean artists, contribute to the training of artists and technicians, collect and archive cultural products, promote Caribbean cinema, video, and TV productions, develop channels of exchange between Caribbean media professionals, work towards reducing linguistic, legal and technical barriers among Caribbean media workers, establish relationships between the Caribbean and its diaspora, and create new contacts with countries facing similar problems (in Africa, South America, for example) (Cham 1992, 17).

The manifesto reflects a growing sense of Caribbeanness among filmmakers in the region/the Caribbean diaspora, as opposed to (in addition to?) a sense of identity linked to the respective metropoles. The 1990 Images Caraïbes Festival was dedicated

to the Trinidadian writer and political activist, C.L.R. James, who died the year before at age 89, and who was one of the first to promote the notion of pan-Caribbean unity in an effort to transcend the isolation of Caribbean nations from one another and the strong links to their European colonizers.

Prior to Images Caraïbes, there were two regular film festivals already in existence. One of these, Festival de la Francophonie, limits entries to those originating in the French-speaking countries/territories only. The other, Festival Antillais du Film Fantastique, is limited to the horror genre. The manifesto also reflects an awareness of the benefits of collective endeavor. Each filmmaker has to struggle against the same odds to get his/her work distributed in the region and frequently in their own countries.

Images Caraïbes also provided a forum for an ongoing debate regarding what exactly constitutes Caribbean cinema. Do the films have to be made by a Caribbean-born filmmaker? Does Mauritanian filmmaker, Med Hondo's adaptation of Martinican Daniel Boukman's play about Caribbean history, *West Indies: Les Nègres Marrons de la Liberté* (1979) not qualify? Does it have to be set in the Caribbean or deal with Caribbean issues? What about Hollywood production such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* ? The debate even questions the Caribbeanness of films made by white Caribbeans such as Perry Henzel who made what has long been one of the best-known and undeniably Caribbean of Jamaican films, *The Harder They Come* (1972), or Trinidadian Chris Laird's *Crossing Over*. On the other hand, the prolific Guadeloupean filmmaker, Christian Lara, has himself acknowledged that some of his work cannot be considered "Caribbean" films (Cham 1990, 10). I would contend that Caribbean

cinema needs to be defined more broadly than just the corpus of so-called Caribbean films. Euzhan Palcy's *A Dry White Season* is not a Caribbean film, but surely it cannot be excluded from any discussion on Caribbean cinema?

Images Caraïbes can be said to have help expand the notion of Caribbean cinema as being synonymous with Cuban cinema. Most importantly, it gave Caribbean-born filmmakers a forum to expose their work to Caribbean audiences (Martinicans attend the festival in large numbers) and have their work celebrated close to home.[76] In addition, for those born elsewhere of Caribbean parents, it provides a site where they can feel part of a larger pan-Caribbean identity, and overcome what George Lamming (1991, 6) refers to as "the most scandalous exposure of our sense of priorities, this lack of connection, this neglect of participation by the general populace in the social product of the intellectual classes" and to redress/challenge Glissant's (222) contention that,

> What is missing from the notion of Caribbeanness is the transition from the shared experience to conscious expression, the need to transcend the intellectual pretensions dominated by the learned elite and to be

---

[76] Unfortunately, Images Caraïbes is now defunct. However, in 1996, a young filmmaker from Guadeloupe, Lydia Rene-Corail, established a new festival in the region, the Festival of Cinema and Visual Arts.

grounded in collective affirmation, supported by the activism of the people.

CHAPTER 4: DAUGHTERS OF THE REVOLUTION - SARA GÓMEZ AND GLORIA ROLANDO

For us, film is the most important of the arts.[77]

Lenin

The history of Cuban cinema is of particular interest to anyone concerned with examining cinema from a global perspective, constituting as it does, a trajectory intended -- from the very beginning of the Revolutionary period -- to undertake a "decolonisation of the screens" (Chanan 1985, 275). The two filmmakers I discuss in this chapter, Sara Gómez and Gloria Rolando, represent what, perhaps, could be considered two “generations” of post-Revolution Afro-Cuban filmmaking in Cuba.[78] I will argue here that these two “generations” of black women filmmakers negotiate(d) substantially different political and social milieus in regard to the acceptability of acknowledgment of African ancestry in the post-Revolution Cuba.

---

[77]Quoted in Baxandall (1983, 77) who points out that this statement by Lenin "relates to communications - to information, propaganda and persuasion as such - rather than to film as an art."

[78]I am not referring here to differences in age (the age difference between the two women, had Gómez still been alive, would have been only 10 years); rather to a different set of concerns and different politico-economic and institutional context in which they worked/are working.

The late Sara Gómez joined ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos), during the early years of its existence, one of only two black filmmakers and the only woman director there for a considerable period. Gloria Rolando is a contemporary filmmaker determined to celebrate her African heritage and who has traveled to the United States where her documentary film, *Oggun* (1991), has appeared at several festival screenings.

In this chapter, as in the others, I will briefly discuss the geo/political, social, economic and cultural context from which these filmmakers emerge(d) and work(ed). A broad overview of Cuba's unique geopolitical history, and the challenges it faces in adapting to a post-Soviet global economy will be necessary to understand the path of filmmaking practices within a socialist milieu and their particular characteristics within the Cuban context. This will be accompanied by a review of the status of women in Cuban society and on race relations and Afro-Cuban practices and religions, in order to contextualize a closer reading of the texts produced by Sara Gómez and Gloria Rolando.

This chapter will also attempt to remedy what has been, with a few exceptions, the characteristic lack of analyses of depictions of race in Sara Gómez's *De cierta mañera/One Way or Another* (1974/1977). Within the North American context, such analyses have been conducted primarily by (white) feminist scholars.[79]

---

[79] Exceptions include Pick (1993) and Benamou (1994).

Cuba is the largest of the Caribbean islands and is located only 90 miles (150 km) south of Miami, Florida. Cuba is an archipelago consisting of two main islands and about 1600 tiny islets in the Caribbean Sea. It has a population of almost 11 million people (1994 estimate), making it the most populous of the Caribbean islands. Almost three-fourths of the population live in an urban area. The capital, La Habana (Havana) has a population of just over 2 million (*Cuba* 1995). As a socialist state, Cuba has long been a thorn in the flesh of its powerful neighbor and ideological antagonist, the United States. The US imposed a trade and financial embargo against Cuba in 1962, after the Cuban government expropriated American economic interests in Cuba.

In January 1959, the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista fled as Rebel Army troops led by Che Guevara entered Havana. Fidel Castro was the commander of the Rebel Army of the 26 of July Movement which came to power.[80] Castro became head of state a few weeks later and remains entrenched in power. Castro is also First Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), which is also the only legal party.[81] What was initially a nationalist Revolution against the US-supported

---

[80]On the 26th of July, 1953, 143 rebels, led by Fidel Castro, attacked the Moncada military barracks in Santiago, marking the beginning of the insurrection against Batista -- thus, the name of the movement. Most of the Moncada rebels were killed or captured. Fidel Castro was tried and jailed in 1953, but was released in a blanket amnesty in May 1955 (Bourne 1987).

[81]Other political parties, such as the Social Democratic Party, the Party for Human Rights, etc., do exist, but have not been permitted legal status.

dictatorship of Batista in 1959 was declared a Marxist one in 1961, after the failed US-backed invasion of the Bay of Pigs. The present Constitution was instituted on 24 February 1976. In December 1991, Marxism-Leninism was dropped from the Constitution as the official state ideology and it was decided that Cuba would return to the ideologies of its national hero, Jose Martí.

Economic conditions in Cuba

The 1990s have been a particularly challenging period for Cuba, a period generally referred to as "the special period", a term Castro has used to refer to the current economic and political crisis in Cuba resulting from the disintegration of the ideological and trade support of the former Soviet Union, intensification of US trade embargoes and internal political and economic instability. The widespread changes within Cuban society, much of which is a response to external developments in geopolitical alliances, has prompted a reevaluation of the entire Revolutionary paradigm among Cubans. Nevertheless, there appears to be a consensus that the country cannot regress to its pre-1959 past.

Even though Castro strongly criticized *perestroika* and *glasnost*, insisting Cuba would remain faithful to a communist path to development, Cuba has, since 1990, developed a more open policy towards foreign capitalist investment.[82] Years of steady

decline in living standards, particularly since the loss of trade with the former Communist Bloc, exacerbated by disastrous sugar harvests in 1993 and 1994 and stagnant or declining sugar prices, created an economic crisis on the island which exploded with riots in the streets of Havana in August 1994, and the subsequent exodus of large numbers of Cubans on rafts (known as *balseros*) to the United States.[83]

The 1990s have been a watershed period for Cuba as a number of changes in economic policy have been instituted. 1993/4 saw a significant number of concessions to a more mixed economy, although the economy is still primarily centrally-planned. The trend towards decreasing central control of the economy reached a new level when several sectors of the economy were opened up to foreign investment -- including real estate and even sugar production, the country's economic mainstay. The coexistence of market-based economic structures and state-controlled socialist ones has resulted in a series of contradictions in Cuban society, much of which is a source of concern among Cubans who welcome the freedoms brought by the market, but not the attendant increases in socioeconomic inequalities and crime, under- and unemployment, prostitution for the tourist industry and so on, as well as substantial

---

[82]Unless otherwise stated, the information about economic conditions in Cuba has been obtained primarily from the Walden Country Reports on Lexis/Nexis, updated January 30, 1995.

[83]For example, power cuts in Havana increased in 1992 from 2 to 10 hours per day, malnutrition appears to be on the increase, and the national airline's domestic flights had been cut, among other things.

erosion of the high standards of education and health care to which Cubans had become accustomed. Much of the younger generation of Cubans, born and raised in Revolutionary Cuba remain committed to a social system undergirded by an extensive safety net, but also favor a tilt towards the market and the loosening of political control (Pastor and Zimbalist 1995).

The consequences of the "special period" for Cuban cinema is that the scarcity of resources has resulted in drastic reductions in the resources the country can allocate to film production and distribution. This has led to a dramatic reduction in film production by ICAIC and a more concerted effort to develop coproductions with other countries. Whereas Cuba produced 13 feature films in 1985, this figure had dropped to two by 1993, including the taboo-breaking *Strawberry and Chocolate*, directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabio, which was made possible only as a coproduction with Spain and Mexico (Agosta and Keeton 1994; UNESCO 1993).[84] Cuban feature film production has now entered an era in which, after decades of state support, the highly respected Cuban film industry faces, once again, a future in which it will have to reproduce itself through revenues generated within a system of global commercial competition.

Perhaps, this combination of coproductions and a greater willingness to address long-suppressed issues in an increasingly open political climate will mark a new turning point in the development of Cuban cinema.

---

[84]Tomás Gutierrez Alea died of cancer in April 1996.

Race, gender and cinema in Cuba

The precise ethnic make-up of Cuba's population is uncertain, with sources varying considerably in their estimations. While one source on the electronic database Lexis/Nexis presents Cuba's population as being predominantly (51%) mixed race (black/white) , and 37% white (mainly of Spanish origin), 11% black (African descent) and 1% of Chinese descent (*Cuba*, 1995), another shows whites as making up 66% of the population, mixed race (mulattos and mestizos) 21.9%, Blacks 12% and "Asiatics" as 0.1% (Walden 1995,) i.e., according to one source whites make up two-thirds of the population, and in another, just over one-third.[85] A *Chicago Sun-Times* article (Rodriguez and Gonzales, 1995) quotes a Cuban-born Chicago professor as saying that "while Cubans come from a racially stratified society, it would be hard to find a ‘pure’white Cuban. Even so, light-skinned Cuban Americans tend to think of themselves as white."[86]

Whatever the precise demographics, there appears to be a consensus that Cuba is not a "white" society. Matibag (1994/5) maintains that Africanity is pervasive in

---

[85]The Walden figures, it turns out, reflect the official 1981 Cuban census figures, although this (the source and/or the fact that these figures are 14 years old), is not mentioned anywhere in the report. Most other sources refer to the population as being predominantly mulatto, i.e. racially mixed. Cuba no longer documents racial classification of its population.

[86] de la Fuenta (1995, 144) notes that in 1990, 84% of Cubans living in the US classified themselves as "white."

Cuban society and attributes this to Afro-Cuban religious influences, particularly the Yoruba-based ones. Barreda (1979, 1) argues that "there is no longer any doubt that Cuba is a mulatto nation, and the Cuban is, if not biologically, at least psychologically a mulatto." Sarduy and Stubbs (1993, 6) assert that "with isolation and defiance, the Afro-Cuban heritage appears to have asserted its central place in a new definition of national politics and culture." Even Castro, in a speech in April 1976, stated "We are a Latin African people", leading Casal (1989, 484) to note that "It was Fidel Castro's role to be the first Cuban white ruler to recognize openly the *mulatto* character of Cuban culture and nationhood."[87] Casal herself asserts that Cuban "culture is ...undoubtedly Afro-Hispanic", noting the influence of African and black cultural elements in Cuban music, proverbs and sayings, religion, poetry and the arts. Sergio Giral, long one of the few Afro-Cuban film directors at ICAIC and now living in exile in the United States, has stated that his actors required no instruction in the African religious dances performed by slaves depicted in his films, arguing that the African presence in Cuban culture is a part of the collective unconscious of Cuban society.[88]

---

[87]The degree of racism prevalent in pre-Revolution Cuba can be ascertained from the fact that Batista, even as Cuba's president, was barred from Cuba's exclusively white upper-class clubs and associations because he was what Cubans called a *mulatto avanzado*, a very light-skinned mulatto. Although Fidel is the illegitimate child of a married white (reportedly also virulently racist) Spanish immigrant and his mulatta servant, he is generally considered white (Brock and Cunningham 1991). Unless specifically referred to as Raúl Castro, references to Castro are to Fidel.

Open recognition of the African contributions to Cuban society were, for many years, contrary to Cuba's official color-blindness and silence on racial issues, although it had been invoked by Castro during Cuba's involvement in African conflicts. The rationale behind the Castro government's silence lies in a belief that there is no racial discrimination in Cuba, since the elimination of class privileges eliminated racial discrimination. The Castro government had removed the last vestiges of legal race discrimination when it came into power. As early as March 1959, Castro made an announcement that came to be known as the Proclamation against Discrimination, in which he declared racial discrimination and racial prejudice to be "anti-nation", arguing that "what the eternal enemies of Cuba and the enemies of this revolution want is for us to be divided into a thousand pieces, thereby to be able to destroy us" (quoted in Sarduy and Stubbs 1993, 6).” This concern may underlie the official silence on the issue of race in Cuba, i.e., preferring to ignore the problem as a way of avoiding divisiveness in Cuban society.

The dominant ideology of Revolutionary Cuba has been that there are no whites or blacks, just Cubans. Many black Cubans who supported the Revolution also believed that acknowledging ethnicity undermined their desire to be just Cubans, or that it distracted attention from the goals of the Revolution.[89] In an interview with

---

[88]Sergio Giral made the remarks on April 20, 1996, at the African Film Festival, Visions II, held at Columbia College in Chicago.

[89]This was also the prevalent ideology in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa among the different ethnic/racial groups constituting the political category of "black".

Julianne Burton and Gary Crowdus (1977, 269), Sergio Giral commented, in answer to a question about the existence of other black filmmakers in Cuba, that:

> I don't want you to think that I am taking a demagogical stance, or anything of that sort, but not even I, as a black man, can conceive of a 'black' film-maker or a 'black' film. It is because the practical activity of the Revolution makes it impossible for us to conceive of the question in those categories. We have to retain the concept of race as an historical, social category, as a kind of individual manifestation like any other. But for example when a population census is taken in Cuba, there are no racial designations.

However, in an interview with the author in April 1996, after five years of living in exile in the United States, Sergio Giral explained the above remarks as arising, at least to some extent, from the necessity of self-censorship when in Cuba, which results in a gap "between what you think and what you have to say", while acknowledging that *officially*, he did not have to call himself a black Cuban. Giral acknowledged, however, that it was his identity as a black Cuban that formed his desire to "rescue" the history of black Cubans.

de la Fuente (1995) notes that the Revolutionary government's approach to a racially unequal society was that it reflected a series of contradictions in the economic and social structure, which generated a number of inequalities typical of a class-based

society. As such, the issue of racial discrimination and its institutional elimination was achieved by eliminating class inequalities in general, by socializing the means of production and social services. Since blacks and mulattos were over-represented among the poor and working-class sectors, structural changes benefited these groups in a manner that eliminated, or greatly reduced, many racial inequalities.

In his analysis of how the Revolution has affected racial inequalities, de la Fuente (1995, 161) notes that "with regard to several important social indicators, racial inequality has disappeared in Cuba. This is true with regard to education -- measured not only in terms of literacy -- as well as to some important demographic indicators, such as fertility and mortality." Nevertheless, criticisms persist about the continued prevalence of cultural racism such as the pervasive use of white symbols in magazines and the low proportion of blacks and mulattos in government and party leadership positions.

There appears to be a general agreement, however, with the sentiments expressed by Sarduy and Stubbs (1993, 7):

> It is our contention that few countries can boast the advances made in Cuba since the Cuban Revolution in breaking down institutionalized racism. It would, however, be shortsighted to think that racism has been eliminated.

Sarduy and Stubbs (1993, 11) note that a number of questions regarding the status of blacks in Cuba need to be explored.

> The paradox is not that such questions should have to be asked after 30 years of revolution ... It is rather that they cannot be adequately answered, and largely because of Revolutionary policy.

Sarduy and Stubbs (12) conclude that whatever the implications of the shift in official ideology away from Marxism-Leninism, to that of Martí, "blacks are arguably one of the groupings in Cuban society with the fewest illusions about any switch to western-style market democracy or Eastern-style perestroika. The contemporary resurgence of racism in both of those camps has not gone unnoticed in Cuba. The problem, as seen by many, is to make functional an existing system that, for all its contradictions, has provided non-white Cuba with the basis for an alternative agenda."

It is within this context that I have chosen to focus on Sara Gómez and Gloria Rolando as Afro-Cuban filmmakers. In other words, I choose to make explicit boundaries that are implicit, while acknowledging that within Cuba, an emphasis on race in the manner of US categorizations of artists and writers does not function to exclude any group from inclusion in the term "Cuban", nor does it minimize the scope of their achievements or contributions. In present-day Cuba, the open acknowledgment of the extent of African influences on Cuban culture permits Afro-Cuban cultural expression to be fully accepted as *Cuban* cultural expression since

much of what is Cuban is actually African in origin. As Barnard (1993, 233) notes with regard to music in particular, this reflects a major shift in conceptions of Cuban identity. Prior to the Revolution in particular, but persisting even afterwards, "(white) cultural elitists periodically decried the black, foreign or popular contamination of their canon, blissfully unaware that the 'authentic' musical tradition they sought to preserve was itself almost invariably the product of such cross-fertilisation."

Despite the increasing acceptance of the African presence as a constitutive element of Cuban national culture, racial boundaries continue to exist, boundaries which function to contribute towards a Cuban's subjective positioning. I argue that in the case of both Gómez and Rolando, race has functioned to provide a perspective that is not mirrored in the work of non-black Cuban filmmakers. Significantly, both women self-identified themselves as *black* Cubans -- Sara Gómez has been quoted as saying she did not want to be just "a middle-class black woman who played the piano" (Chanan 1985, 282), while Rolando not only dedicates her documentary, *Oggun*, to her African ancestors, her proposals for future work reveal an explicit emphasis in not only Afro-Cuban cultural traditions, but the influences and lives of other Afro-Caribbean immigrants to Cuba such as Haitians and Jamaicans, as well as an interest in African-Diaspora connections.

I emphasize this self-identification for a reason. Some scholars have suggested that such an acknowledgment is unnecessary in the Cuban context, arguing that injecting race into analyses of the works of black Cubans simply transfers North American style emphases on race to a Cuban context in which it is inappropriate.

However, it is significant that it is rarely black Cubans who make such claims. A black Puerto Rican scholar noted similar tendencies towards denial of racism among non-black Puerto Ricans. Sergio Giral has argued that the absence of official racial classification has not eliminated racial discrimination in Revolutionary Cuba. In an interview, he confirmed that Sara Gómez was, in fact, proudly and consciously *black*.[90]

Pick (1993) notes that despite the antiracist positions of Martí and the prominent participation of blacks in the struggle for independence, the acceptance of an African heritage was limited to nonpolitical cultural practices such as carnival and music. Also, as I will discuss later, Gómez's own comment suggests that even in Revolutionary Cuba, filmmakers had to tread warily with regard to explicit acknowledgment of ethnicity in the context of a Marxist consciousness that privileged class dynamics as a site for exploration of social contradictions. Racial oppression could be acknowledged if explored as a historical occurrence, a problem of the past. In fact, (Pick 1993, 131) observes that feature films dealing with slavery in Cuba, including Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco*/*The Other Francisco* (1964), and Alea's *La ultima cena*/*The Last Supper* (1976), were considered "crucial to a project of historical rehabilitation."

---

[90] It is noted, also, that many people who would be considered/consider themselves "black" in the North American context may not self-identify/be perceived as "black" in the Cuban one. This is another reason why I have chosen to use self-identification as the criterion for inclusion.

One cannot recognize the Africanity of Cuban society without recognition of the pervasiveness, vitality and dynamism of Afro-Cuban religions. The Walden Reports state that in 1992, Cuba approved changes to its 1976 Constitution to permit freedom of religion for the first time in Revolutionary Cuba; in fact, despite thorny relationships between religious institutions and the Cuban government, reflected in waves of repression, several churches, both Catholic and Protestant, have existed in Cuba throughout the Revolutionary period.[91] Crahan (1989) and Greer (1989) have documented the improvement in Church-State relations in Cuba in recent years. In 1991, the Communist party opened itself to membership by religious believers "in tacit recognition that their numbers were on the increase, not least among Afrocubans" (Sarduy and Stubbs 1993, 10).

African-based religions have emerged more openly in Cuba, particularly Santería, or *regla de ocha*, which has its origins in West Africa and was brought to Cuba by enslaved Africans. Brandon (1989/90, 208-9) notes the defining characteristics of *regla de ocha*.

---

[91]It should be noted that attacks on the Cuban government because of its repressive stance towards many churches tends to overlook the engagement of those institutions in political activities; North American writers often characterize such attacks as being targeted towards religious activity. In pointing out this omission, I do not mean to contend that Churches should not participate in political activity, nor do I condone government repression of political activity by churches.

> As an ideological system it is intensely hierarchical, [hu]man-centered, and this-worldly. It does not draw a rigid line between either the living and the dead or between the human and the divine. Between the human and the divine there is not an opposition, but rather a series of grades which are articulated ritually. An encompassing energy, *ache*, envelopes and flows through the entire hierarchy of beings recognized in the system. This energy is manipulable and can be made to manifest itself in different forms.

This lack of separation between the sacred and the secular is contrary to socialist ideology and no doubt contributed to the Revolutionary state's disapproval of Afro-Cuban religious practices. Brandon argues that despite its seeming fusion with Catholicism, *regla de ocha* remains essentially African in its rituals and cosmology. He also notes that while gods have been merged together, or subordinated and merged conceptually with others, there has been only a limited amount of inter-African syncretism, and that several deities converge with popular stereotypes which are not specifically Catholic or African but Latin (such as Oshun as the flirtatious mulatta).[92]

Other African-based religious practices include that of the Abakuá, a secret brotherhood which excludes women but now has both white and black members, uses

---

[92]Santería has also integrated what are separate cults of the orishas in Yorubaland into one unified cult in which the orishas are ranked in a hierarchy of initiations (Brandon 1995, 210).

an African ritual language called Carbali, and a unique set of African drums. The Abakuá society was once the most politically influential of the Afro-Cuban religious groups. Originating in Congolese practices, Palo (*palo mayombe, palo monte* and *palo croise* are various forms) syncretized Congolese deities with both Yoruba and Catholic ones (Brandon 1989).

With regard to gender, despite some admirable achievements, Cuban women still face a number of obstacles to equality in Cuban society. Long-standing attitudes by both men and women in Cuban society regarding the gender division of labor have proved hard to eradicate, a theme of several Cuban films. Even legislation regulating shared responsibility in the home, to minimize the "double shift" that working women often have to bear, has failed to transform domestic divisions of labor. [93] The Family Code was designed to counter traditionally sexist attitudes rooted in cultural values held by both sexes. Other attitudes arising from the infamous Latin *machismo*, such as the necessity of "protecting" women, results in restricting their access to various kinds of work, while preferential treatment in assigning promotions in the workplace still persist.

Women's participation in the public arena, such as in political and labor organizations, is strongest at the grassroots level, but despite an increasing number of

---

[93]The Family Code went into effect on March 8, 1975 -- International Women's Day of the International Women's Year. The Code defines marriage as an institution of two equal partners and requires both partners to contribute to the care of children and the well-being of the family.

women rising to higher ranks within the Communist Party, women are still underrepresented at the municipal and national leadership levels. Reca (1992) reports that women in Cuba have achieved a fair measure of success in the workforce because of improved educational and job opportunities. Education has been considered a crucial tool in maximizing social equality in Cuba, and to that end the FMC (the Federation of Cuban Women) has been active in playing a complementary role to that of the governmental educational programs.[94] Today, almost half of all university students are female, representing 50% of students in medicine, 30% in engineering, 90% in education, 60% in biochemistry and biology, 22.7% in technology and 35% in agricultural studies.[95] Not only has this impressive achievement enabled a larger percentage of women to participate in the workforce, enabling them to have a fuller measure of economic independence, but whereas women were concentrated in jobs with low qualifications prior to 1959, they had, by 1981, made substantial inroads into the fields of engineering and technology (29.8% are women), teaching and scientific research (61.7%), medicine (72.8%) and planning and administration of the national economy (37.7%) (Reca 1992, 151).

Of course, women in Cuba worked outside their own homes prior to the Revolution, but the demographics of the female labor force show strong racial

---

[94]See Azicri (1989) for a discussion of the FMC and its activities.

[95]Prior to 1959, the overall rate of university education was very low; 1.6% of males and 0.8% of females received some university education.

overtones. At the turn of the century, almost 75% of working women were black and poor, and most worked as maids or laundresses.[96]

Filmmaking in Cuba

Prior to the 1959 Revolution, Cuba constituted a large market for foreign films but no established feature film industry. Between 1898 and 1959, Cuba had made a few intermittent overtures towards the development of a national cinema, but such attempts at competing with the strong film industries of the US and Mexico -- on their terms -- proved unsuccessful.

It was in March 1959, less than three months after it came to power, that the new Revolutionary government established the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), often referred to (in English) as the Cuban Film Institute. The Revolutionary government's conviction that film could play a critical role in social transformation may have been influenced by the friendship between Alfredo Guevara, ICAIC's first director, and Fidel Castro. In addition, Marxist ideology viewed the industrial technological base of film production as entirely compatible with its respect for science and technology as tools for progress (Agosta and Keeton 1994). Whatever the reasons, the support of the Castro government resulted in film becoming the premier form of cultural expression supported by the Revolution. ICAIC's

---

[96]The rates of economic activity for black men and white men, on the other hand, has been essentially the same since 1899 (de la Fuente 1995).

founding members included Guevara and filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa.[97]

Under ICAIC's supervision over the next 15 years, Cuban cinema developed an aesthetic identity very much attuned to and aligned with the political and ideological developments of the early Revolutionary period. This included the "Imperfect Cinema" aesthetic, as espoused by Julio García Espinosa in his provocative theoretical essay, "Por un cine imperfecto", written in 1969, which argued against the dangers of attempting to imitate the elaborate production values of the First World's mainstream cinemas. ICAIC's socialist mode of production permitted filmmakers a degree of financial security while still learning their craft. Filmmakers at ICAIC are paid a salary, both while working on a script as well as during production, and have full access to the resources of the Institute.[98]

In addition, Cuban cinema's willingness to explore different forms and genres resulted in support for production of both documentaries and shorts, forms frequently marginalized in other national cinemas. Both documentaries and shorts not only provided opportunities for filmmakers still learning their craft, but the lower costs of production (as opposed to feature films) provided opportunities for experimentation

---

[97] During the guerrilla war, García Espinosa headed the insurgents' film unit, Cine Rebelde (Burton 1986).

[98] ICAIC's resources include production services (such as wardrobe, set design and construction, translators, location scouting, etc.), rental of 16mm and 35 mm film equipment, postproduction facilities, a film archive, and distribution services.

and innovation. Unfortunately, the cutbacks introduced at ICAIC over the past few years have resulted in fewer documentaries being financed.

Vertical integration via the a state-controlled body enabled filmmakers a degree of creative autonomy since they did not have to be concerned about recouping the cost of production by tailoring their work to meet the demands of a distribution company or other outlet such as television. As such, ICAIC's distribution of shorts and documentaries is, perhaps, its greatest contribution to the promotion of these forms. Consequently, Cuban audiences are accustomed to viewing documentaries and shorts not only at festivals or occasionally on television, but in motion picture theaters. Many of the documentaries, exploring as many of them did, the changes in Cuba resulting from the Revolution, were also used in schools, workshops, etc. as a form of popular education. The Revolutionary fervor resulted not only in themes about Revolutionary issues, but was extended to attempts to establish more collective approaches to the labor process as well as to provide moral, rather than just material, incentives to work. ICAIC actively conducted discussions on methods by which film crews could be organized to avoid the alienation of the capitalist mode of production and ultimately came up with a process in which individual scripts and treatments were discussed collectively (Agosta and Keeton 1994).

ICAIC aimed not only to decolonize the screen but also to re-educate viewers. Rich (1994) quotes Guevara discussing this matter during a presentation in 1978, while Rich was on a visit to Cuba.

> He explained its [ICAIC'S] efforts to educate the Cuban audience to the tricks of cinema, to demystify the technology, to give the viewers the means with which to defend themselves against cinematic hypnosis, to challenge the dominant ideology of world cinema, to create a new liberated generation of film viewers. I will never forget his next words. 'We do not claim to have created this audience already, nor de we think it is a task only of cinema.'

The movement towards liberalization and decentralization that began to gain momentum in the economic and political spheres in late eighties and in the nineties in Cuba also reached the world of filmmaking. The centralized process of approving scripts for production has been decentralized, and ICAIC has been restructured to permit filmmakers greater autonomy and to remove many of the structural distinctions and power inequalities between older and younger generations of filmmakers. Thus, even the seasoned and acclaimed seniors of Cuban cinema, such as Cuba's most prominent filmmaker, Gutiérrez Alea, have had to submit their ideas at various stages of development and production to group criticism permitting, as Benamou (1994, 69) notes, "newer film workers at ICAIC ... an unprecedented input in creative decision making and in the setting of production agendas." It was just such a process that resulted, a few years ago, in the rejection of one of Gutiérrez Alea's scripts in the early stages of product development (Benamou 1994).

Several sources (Almendros 1988; Paranagua 1992) indicate the gradual development of an independent sector in film production, i.e., independent of ICAIC.

The development of an independent sector appears to have been a rocky one. Almendros (1988, 29) notes that "in the heady days of 1959-61, there briefly existed a marginally independent Cuban cinema, alongside the ICAIC." However, independents soon incurred the wrath of the Cuban authorities (Almendros 1988; Giral 1996). Almendros argues that the confiscation of the short film, *P.M.*, (1961) a documentary on the nightlife of Havana and Marianao, was based simply on the fact that it had not been produced within the structures of ICAIC.[99] But Paranagua (1992, 18-19) refers to the recent development of a generation of filmmakers who do not work within ICAIC.

> In addition to ICAIC's promotion of new directors in the eighties, a far younger generation has emerged, often in their twenties, who are much more in tune with the new audience. What is unprecedented is that the budding cineastes come from another milieu, outside the established film production institutions. The film societies and the so-called *amateur* movement has spawned these young cineastes. It would be more accurate to talk of an independent cinema because you can't buy film stock just on any Cuban street corner and this activity slips through the institutional nets, finding ad hoc support from one group or another.

---

[99] Chanan (1985) discusses the controversy surrounding this film at some length.

The only other source of film production in Cuba since the Revolution had been the Armed Forces and Cuban television. ICAIC's control of film stock has led to many filmmakers working in the medium of video, such as Gloria Rolando, whose work will be discussed later.

This independent sector is made up of two groups. The first draws from the ranks of the School of the Three Worlds and is highly international in character. As a result, Cuban film/video production appears to have re-entered a lively phase of experimentation and innovation as those outside of ICAIC find themselves at greater liberty to experiment not only formally, but to pose questions that have long been accepted as taboo and to bring international perspectives into their work.[100] The second group consists of filmmakers working in the medium of video under the loose affiliation of the National Video Movement.[101]

Cinema and television remain virtually separate spheres of cultural activity in Cuba (Paranagua 1988).[102] Benamou (1994) notes that by the 1980s, women's participation in television production had improved significantly with women

---

[100] See Paranagua (1992) for a discussion of some of the work emerging out of this independent/international sector.

[101] Gloria Rolando made these remarks at a discussion after the screening of *My Footsteps in Baragua* at the Union for Democratic Communications conference held at Loyola University, Chicago, October 12, 1996.

[102] Pineda-Barnet (1997) notes that occasionally, the two institutions may work together, but that the leadership of the two institutions have a long history of antagonism. Chanan (1985) situates this antagonism in ideological differences and rivalries originating in the early days of the Revolution.

occupying key technical and directorial positions, with an accompanying shift in the nature of women's representation from their objectification, especially in advertising, to that of women's initiatives being presented as a significant contribution to the construction of a new Cuban society. Benamou states that "in cinema, however, women's representations has followed a particularly uneven course of development (52)." Rolando confirms that while no other woman has made a feature film in Cuba since Sara Gómez, there are a number of women in television, especially in the production of telenovelas.[103]

For almost a decade after Gómez's death, women's filmmaking at ICAIC remained in hiatus. Benamou (1994, 62) notes that,

> It was not until the early eighties, nearly a decade after the initiation of this project [of addressing issues of gender] and Gómez's death, that women's filmmaking re-emerged at the ICAIC ... almost wholly in the form of short documentaries ... The time gap in women's production, as well as the form taken by the resurgence, can be attributed mainly to the hierarchical process of training and initiation within ICAIC, which remained in force throughout the eighties. After learning skills "hands

---

[103] Rolando also noted that she remains the sole *black* woman involved either in film/video or in television production. These remarks were made by Rolando in a discussion with the author at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, October 14, 1996.

> on" as apprentices under established directors, aspiring cineastes would go on to direct short films -- usually documentaries -- and, in a few select cases, would be admitted to the prized realm of feature-length fiction.

Benamou notes that women continue to cluster in positions considered traditionally female -- as screenwriters, editors and continuity supervisors and, except for Gómez, no Cuban woman has directed a feature-length fictional film, despite a number of qualified candidates at ICAIC.

Women have been the focus of several feature films by some of Cuba's best known filmmakers. D'Lugo (1993, 280) argues, however, that since the beginnings of Revolutionary cinema in the 1960s, Cuba has produced a series of films in which the hopes, ideals and even contradictions of Cuban society are articulated via female characters, investing them with a "transparency" so that viewers do not so much see women as see <u>through</u> them. This strategy, he argues, has persisted into the 1980s.

> While the allegorical condition of women as embodiments of a concept of nation has been sustained in the last decade, the female figure has emerged in Cuban films as the agency through which a new range of critical discourses about Cuban culture in general and the revolution in particular are enunciated.

Feature films focusing on women and gender inequalities include Humberto Solas's three-part *Lucía* (1969), Sara Gómez's *One Way or Another* (1974/1977), Pastor Vegas's *Portrait of Teres*a (1979), and Gutiérrez Alea's *Up To a Certain Point* (1984). While only one of these films has been directed by a woman, women have not been limited to the production of films about women, and have produced a number of short documentaries on a variety of subjects.

While gender inequities have not been eradicated within the Cuban context, the official stance permitted -- and resulted -- in active efforts to provide a more egalitarian social context for Cuban women. This has not been mirrored in the area of racial inequalities, a neglect mirrored in Cuban cinema generally. Except for a few instances, race has not been explored by filmmakers who are/were not themselves black; even among these films only a select few (such as Alea's *La ultima cena/The Last Supper*) have received critical attention. This does not mean that there were no films about Afro-Cubans. Pick (1993, 131) states that while "a great number of documentaries…dealt with the syncretic origins of popular music and drew biographical portraits of black performers, feature films took a historical perspective."

Unlike Cuban films exploring gender inequalities, it appears that race as a site of unequal power relations, had to be relegated to the past. Guevara's response to the question of why the short documentary, *P.M.* (1961) was confiscated by ICAIC, reveals the discomfort Cuban authorities felt about attempts to explore racial inequalities in post-Revolution Cuba. Chanan (1985, 101) quotes Guevara as stating that *P.M*. depicted "a world inhabited by the mainly black and mulatto

lumpenproletariat. Obviously it wasn't made out of any feeling of racial discrimination, but the presentation of these images at this time was nonetheless questionable."

Nestor Almendros, a Cuban cinematographer and vocal critic of the Revolution whose work in Hollywood earned him an Oscar, attributed the film's confiscation to the fact that it had been made outside the structures of ICAIC, but Guevara's comments suggest that ICAIC did not take kindly to explorations of race as a determining factor in economic marginalization in Revolutionary Cuba. [104] That it was the attempts to conduct analyses of racial inequalities in contemporary Cuba that aroused unease is borne out by the fact that neither Eduardo Manet's *El Negro* (1960), a history of racial discrimination in Cuba from the time of slavery up to the Revolution (and the Revolution's condemnation of racism), nor Almendros' *Ritmo de Cuba* (1960) which discusses Afro-Cuban folk music, ran afoul of the authorities, while Sara Gómez's *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia* (1966) did, as will be discussed later.

Scholarship of Cuban cinema rarely fails to at least mention -- and frequently focuses on -- gender, often after the usual cursory lip service has been given to the class/gender/race triad that has become a mantra in cultural studies. Sara Gómez's work displays a recurring concern with the issue of race, and with the significance of

---

[104] Almendros died in March 1992.

African contributions to popular Cuban culture, yet her work is mentioned mainly in the context of gender.[105]

The picture that emerges is that the Revolutionary Cuban social milieu has historically been reluctant to focus on issues specific to any one segment of the population, whether women or specific ethnic groups. This reluctance appears to be eroding as contemporary filmmakers highlight the concerns of groups previously oppressed or marginalized within Cuban society, such as black Cubans or homosexuals.

Sara Gómez

No study of Cuban cinema in general, nor specifically of women or Afro-Cubans in Cuban cinema, can ignore the contributions of Sara Gómez Yera, whose feature film, *De cierta mañera/One Way or Another* (1974/1977), drew the attention of feminist film critics in North America and Europe, who hailed it as a paradigmatic example of Third World cinefeminism.[106] Recognizing its innovative formal approach to the examination of machismo and "marginalism" (i.e. the culture of poverty), in post-Revolution Cuba, the film was lauded for its courage in examining the limits and

---

[105] See Kaplan (1983), Kuhn (1982), Lopez (1990). This is probably due to the emphasis given to the one feature film she directed, even though *One Way or Another* explores race, class *and* gender and their interconnections.

[106]See Lesage (1979), Kuhn (1982), Kaplan (1983).

contradictions of the Revolution in Cuba. One *Way or Another* will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

In her tragically short lifetime, Sara Gómez (affectionately known to her friends as Sarita), was Cuba's only black woman filmmaker.[107] By 1991, only three of ICAIC's feature film directors have been black -- Sara Gómez the only black woman. The other two are Sergio Giral and Nicolás Guillén Landrián (Giral, 1991). However, one cannot ignore the work of documentary filmmakers and with this category included, we can add the names of Rigoberto Lopez and Gloria Rolando. In addition to Sara Gómez, Sergio Giral, who made one of Cuba's most acclaimed films, *El otro Francisco/The Other Francisco* (1975), and who has been living in the United States since 1991, is the best known of Afro-Cuban filmmakers.

Sara Gómez was born in Havana in 1943. Raised in a middle-class black family, Gómez studied music (piano), literature and ethnography, and worked as a journalist on the youth publication *Mella* before joining ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, in 1961. She served as an assistant director to Cuban filmmakers like Tomás Gutiérrez Alea as well as the visiting French director, Agnes Varda.

---

[107]According to Paranagua (1990), despite the widely-held belief that Sara Gómez was the only woman filmmaker in Cuba during her lifetime, she was the only *black* woman filmmaker. Paranagua names Rosina Prado as a woman who had already begun to tackle issues relating to women in a film called *Palmas Cubanas* (1963). This was confirmed by Enrique Pineda-Barnet (1997), a Cuban filmmaker who joined ICAIC in 1963.

As is generally required by ICAIC, Gómez served a long period (13 years) of apprenticeship directing documentaries, and serving as assistant director to more established directors such as Alea (who claimed she was an awful AD), before directing her first (and only) feature film, *One Way or Another*.[108] Gómez made a number of documentaries on a variety of topics, before directing *One Way or Another* (originally titled *The Miraflores Housing Project*), which is a love story based loosely on one of her own relationships. Gómez never completed *One Way or Another*. In 1974, she died during postproduction as the result of an asthma attack. She was 31 years old. Her husband, Germinal, was the soundman on *The Miraflores Housing Project*. The film was finally released in 1977, retitled *One Way or Another*.

Iré a Santiago

Gómez's directorial debut was *Iré a Santiago/ I Shall Go to Santiago* (1964). A short documentary on that most Afro-Cuban of cities, Santiago de Cuba, it is titled after the poem by the Spanish poet and playwright, Frederico García Lorca. Informal in style, the film utilizes a roving camera to provide a sometimes lively, often lyrical, but always loving, portrait of the city and its people. Beginning with a languid gaze at Santiagans sitting in their porches or emerging from shadowy doorways, the film echoes the jolting changes in tone and perspective so characteristic of *One Way or*

---

[108] The comment, which appears to be a fond one, is made in a collection of memories of, and tributes paid to, Sara Gómez appearing in a special commemorative issue of *Cine Cubano*, published in 1990.

Another, as when the camera's more distanced stance is reinforced by a didactic tone in the voice-over accompanying the city's architectural sights.

This formal segment on Santiago's historical importance gives way to a lyrical interlude about the legend of the woman in a swimsuit, and is followed by a segment on the meeting of a man and woman. Another shift in tone uncovers yet another face of Santiago, when the camera moves to capture the beat of carnival, a Santiagan event which Brea and Millet (1994/5) describe as "a phenomenon which culturally defines the city." The significance of the carnival for Santiagans cannot be underestimated, and its African origins and influence reflect the city's populace and cultural leanings.

Moore (1988) condemned the official silence on racial issues in Cuba as itself being racist in nature, accusing the Castro government of "negrophobia" because it has been particularly repressive of Afro-Cuban religious/cultural practices.[109] Certainly, the Castro government's disapproval of such practices simply continued a long history of such repression. Brea and Millett (1994/5) have documented, for example, the

---

[109]Moore's contentions have been criticized for their anecdotal nature, lack of historical context, and combination of truths and untruths, and his race analysis has been characterized as overly narrow, but his insistence on spotlighting race-related issues in post-1959 Cuba has been commended by many scholars. According to Sarduy and Stubbs (1993, 23), Moore did an about-face within three months of the publication of his book, acknowledging to the US mainstream press that blacks have improved their material and social status in Cuba under Castro and that blacks "would rally around Mr. Castro, or a successor regime, if it appeared that the financially powerful, predominantly white Cubans of Miami were a serious threat to their social position" (quoted in Sarduy and Stubbs). Most other scholars do not ascribe any increase in racism to the Castro regime, but fault it for its reluctance to maintain its early efforts to eradicate racial inequalities.

official prohibition of African dancing, "large drums and indecent contortions" in parades and carnivals in the early twentieth century following Cuban “independence.” The notion that Afro-Cuban practices are socially backward persisted even in Revolutionary Cuba constituting, in fact, the official attitude. But Gómez's treatment of the Santiago carnival challenges the official disapproval of Afro-Cuban cultural practices by celebrating its texture and vitality.

Only 16 minutes long, *Iré a Santiago* is enriched by a soundtrack that includes some 11 tunes/songs which complement, or contribute to, the varying moods of the different sequences. Gómez presents a musical feast with samples of the major musical genres of Cuban popular music, starting with a well-known *son* -- one of the oldest Afro-Cuban musical forms -- familiar to most Cubans, entitled "Son de la Loma", to accompany the opening credits -- presented informally through hand-written nicknames scrawled on stairs and pillars. Other musical genres included are the rumba, the *danzón* (derived from European court and country dances) whose languid tempo accompanies the leisurely sweep of the camera across the bay, *guaracha* (peasant or country music which developed as a form of street music), which is heard as street performers come into view and *Mozambique* (a percussive style of Cuban carnival music derived from the conga) during the final sequence depicting the July carnival of Santiago.[110]

The Haitian presence in Santiago is acknowledged both through the accompanying rumba with its distinctive drumming, and call and response sung in Haitian Creole, as the camera follows a funeral in the French quarter before providing us with a documentary on the history of the Haitian presence in Cuba.

Y ... tenemos sabor

Gómez's training as a musician is also likely to have motivated her 1967 documentary, *Y ... tenemos sabor/And...We've Got Rhythm*, which examines Cuban popular music and provides a guide to various musical instruments and their origins.[111] Both her knowledge of Cuban music, as well as the African roots of most Cuban music -- while a prominent feature in all her work -- are foregrounded in this documentary.

An interesting departure from the "free cinema" style of the first film, *And...We've Got Rhythm* reflects a more conventional approach to the documentary form, in a manner that appears uncharacteristic of Gómez's penchant for being unconventional and provocative. Reflecting her interest in music and ethnology, the film echoes *Iré a Santiago's* focus on African contributions to Cuban culture and history. Its more conventional form may reflect a phase in the career of a filmmaker

---

[110] I am indebted to Carlos Flores, coordinator (1993-1997) of Project Kalinda at the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College in Chicago, for his help in identifying the musical genres in this documentary.

[111] Although "sabor" is generally translated as "taste", I have retained ICAIC's subtitle which translates "Y ... tenemos sabor" as "And... We've Got Rhythm".

when the desire to obtain mastery of the craft of documentary filmmaking results in a closer adherence to the conventions than either those of an untrained or more established filmmaker – i.e., masking the unbridled creativity of the former, or the more disciplined breaches of convention of the latter.

The official silence on the issue of race in Cuba, as discussed earlier, reflected the dominant ideology of Revolutionary Cuba that there are no whites or blacks -- just Cubans, preferring to ignore racism as a structural hindrance to a more egalitarian society as a way of avoiding divisiveness in Cuban society. The official stance that racism was a characteristic of pre-Revolutionary Cuba is reflected in Cuban cinema-- an attitude reflected, for example, in the Jesús Díaz's feature film *Lejanía/Parting of the Ways* (1985) in which a white Cuban exile returns to Havana to see the son she had abandoned 20 years previously. She asks her son if his wife "is 100%" asserting that her family has never had one of “them” (the wife is mulatta) before. Not only are such attitudes shown as being part of a counter-Revolutionary and/or regressive consciousness, it inevitably evokes a reminder of race relations in the US, reflecting as it does the views of a Cuban-American.

The official disapproval of racism in Cuba is mirrored in an official disapproval of patriarchy, but unlike racial discrimination, the Cuban Revolution has been much more active in addressing gender issues. This official stance is reflected in the attention given to the subjects of race and gender discrimination in Cuban cinema. Addressing the prevalence of machismo in Cuban culture from the beginning, neither the Revolution nor Cuban cinema have attempted to explore patriarchy as complicated by race.

Many black Cubans who supported the Revolution were reluctant to acknowledge their ethnicity out of fear it would undermine their desire to be "just Cubans", or feared it would distract attention from the goals of the Revolution. Sara Gómez was not one of them. In tributes paid to her -- many of these are by people who had known her personally -- in a special commemorative issue of *Cine Cubano* published in 1990, a recurring characterization is that of Gómez as outspoken, bold, caustic, provocative and controversial. Enrique Pineda-Barnet, a Cuban filmmaker and screenwriter, described Gómez as "Oshun"-- the Santería goddess of love whose sensuality is matched by her determination and strong will. Others reiterate Gómez's willingness to challenge received wisdom, and to bring to the surface many of the unspoken contradictions of Revolutionary Cuba, even as she supported and celebrated its achievements. Still, Gómez worked within the framework of a socialist mode of production which saw itself as being in the service of the Revolution. There is no reason to doubt that Gómez was an enthusiastic supporter of the Cuban Revolution and believed in its ideals and its methods

As I have already mentioned, in Cuban cinema, as produced under the auspices of ICAIC, the question of racial inequality tended to be presented as a historical issue rather than a contemporary one (Pick 1993). Sara Gómez had to negotiate a delicate balance between her own desire to not only acknowledge her blackness but to foreground the African cultural heritage in Cuba, including analyses of the complex (some have called it schizophrenic) attitudes to African-ness in Cuban society, and her support of Revolutionary ideals which discouraged such acknowledgments. However,

Sara Gómez's willingness to take on issues frowned upon the Revolution sometimes received official censure.

For example, Gómez tackled the subject of hidden racial secrets within her own family in *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia/ Chronicle of My Family*, which according to González (1993, 132-3), had Gómez literally digging into family coffers and trunks to unearth hidden remnants of an African cultural heritage:

> Nobody went untouched as she demystified the unholy and told the story of what had been pushed to the back of the closet through mulatto ideology and its petit-bourgeois pretensions. Her poetic **Crónica de mi familia (**Chronicle of My Family) came from digging into drawers, coffers, trunks and charcoal etchings. Sara bared all that the family had wanted to cast into deep oblivion... [including an] aunt with the religion of a *santera* and the culture of an ex-prostitute... The scandal it created was a preamble to her marvelous documentary **Mi aporte** (My part), a biting attack on class postures, especially those of the petit-bourgeois.

Curious that neither of these two documentaries mentioned by González is listed in the filmography published in the 1990 Special Commemorative issue of *Cine Cubano* dedicated to "Sarita", nor mentioned in the only English-language publication that provides a substantial analysis of her documentaries -- Michael Chanan's *The Cuban Image* -- I found a possible explanation in a newspaper review of the 1990

Creteil Festival of Women's Films which, in that year, presented a tribute to Latin American women filmmakers, foremost among them Sara Gómez. The Paris-based *Le Monde* noted that *Crónica de mi familia* (1966) had been prohibited distribution by Cuban censors upon its completion and remained prohibited until a recent retrospective on Cuban cinema in Beauborg, France. According to *Le Monde*, the personal nature of *Crónica de mi familia's* concerns upset Cuban censors, more accustomed at the time to political documentaries in the service of the Revolution than to introspection.

Even Chanan, whose sympathies with the Cuban Revolution are openly acknowledged, stated recently about the two "missing" documentaries that "they remain in the archives unseen. I suspect, from what people have said to me, that they deal with questions of racism in a way that made the Party establishment rather too uncomfortable."[112] Chanan goes on to note that Gómez again touches on the subject of racism in *Una isla para Miguel* (1968) which, significantly, was produced two years after *Crónica de mi familia*.

However, it is not clear why the documentary, *Mi aporte*, is not listed in the Cuban filmography. That it is currently available in Cuba is apparent from a comment made by her fellow filmmaker, Gloria Rolando, who commented on the documentary as an example of the innovative approach and Revolutionary spirit of Sara Gómez:

---

[112] The second documentry Chanan (1997) is referring to is *Mi aporte*.

> I appreciate very much, for example, *Mi aporte*, you know, where she talks about the participation of women in the Revolutionary process, in the new society that was created in Cuba after 1959, and she interviewed herself in this documentary in [a] discussion with other friends, women friends, to talk about the relationship between women [and] the Revolutionary process.

Between 1964 and 1973, Gómez directed a number of documentaries, on a variety of topics, and ranging in length from as little as nine minutes to forty-one minutes. These include the *En la otra isla/On the Other Island* (1967), *Un isla para Miguel/An Island for Miguel* (1968), *Isla del tesoro/Treasure Island* (1969), *Poder local, poder popular/Local Power, People's Power* (1970), *Un documental a proposito del transito/A Documentary about Mass Transit* (1971), *Atencion pre-natal/Prenatal Care* (1972), *Año uno/In the First Year* (1972) and *Sobre horas extra y trabajo voluntario/About Overtime and Voluntary Labor* (1973).

Because I have not been able to obtain access to these documentaries, and few English-language discussions of the work of Gómez discuss her documentaries, a reliance on Chanan (1985) would simply result in a reiteration of his discussion.[113] Suffice it to say that Chanan (1985, 283) lavishes high praise on two of her

---

[113] Nor have I been able to identify Spanish-language discussions of her documentaries.
Benamou (1994) provides a (very) brief discussion of *Iré a Santiago* before moving on to a fuller discussion of *One Way or Another*.

documentaries, *Una isla para Miguel* and *En la otra isla*, describing them as "her two most extraordinary documentaries, among the most extraordinary by any Cuban director." Chanan (1985, 284) notes that she was able to draw out a black tenor to talk about the racism he encounters as a black singer desiring leading operatic roles in *En la otra isla*.

González, who had worked with Sara Gómez on the fictional portion of the script of *One Way or Another*, notes that its central premise of exploring the relationship between a couple in which the male is part of the secret, exclusively male, Abakuá religion, was rooted in Gómez's personal experience in a past relationship. Gómez's interest in *el ambiente*, the world of the marginalized, probably also came from having attended a number of seminars at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore. Her "anthropological" sensibilities are discernible in a number of her documentaries which attempt to understand subcultural milieus, sometimes marginalized subcultures in Cuban society, whether it be the world of tobacco production (*A Trip to Vueltabajo*) or popular music and musical instruments (*And... We've Got Rhythm*) or the African quarter of Havana (*Guanabacoa: Chronicle of My Family*).

Whether these films are "ethnographic", however, is open to interpretation, and in the absence of the actual texts, difficult to discern. While some have argued that ethnography is in the eye of the beholder, I would contend that an ethnographic text is one which emphasizes the "cultural alienness" of the culture depicted from to those for whom the text is intended -- a text in which the filmmaker accentuates the unfamiliarity of the "spoken about" subjects of the text to the "spoken to" spectators in

the audience. This type of ethnographic positioning of a text *vis a vis* the audience is, perhaps, most apparent in texts that provide extended takes of rituals unfamiliar to the viewer. I contend that while Gómez's film may reveal her anthropological interest in subcultures and marginalized groups, they do not reveal an "ethnographic" gaze, with the exception of her depiction of Abakuá in *One Way or Another*, as will be discussed later.

That her specific positioning as a black Cuban woman working within a Revolutionary context is manifested in a pan-Africanist feminist sensibility, becomes apparent in her desire to explore various aspects of the human experience in general, but with a decided emphasis on blacks and women. In *A Trip to Vueltabajo*, for example, she explores the effects of the Revolution on the production of tobacco in a village in the province of Pinar de Río. Although he considers this second documentary more of an apprentice work than her first, Chanan (1985, 282-3) argues that,

> It is notable for including in the focus of its social observation aspects which are unusual for the emerging pattern of the Cuban documentary; for example, the way it foregrounds the image of women workers in the fields, at a time when the subject had not yet drawn the attention of historians. It is true of all of Sara Gómez's films that she gives a stronger presence to women and black people than you get with a number of less conscientious directors within ICAIC.

One Way or Another

Gomez's only feature, *De cierta mañera/One Way or Another*, is a 79-minute long film shot in 16mm film and in black and white to minimize cost. The film had the enthusiastic support of ICAIC's then director, Alfredo Guevara, who preferred it be shot on color, but Gómez insisted on keeping the cost down. Sara Gómez echoed García Espinosa's sentiments about not privileging technical perfection in filmmaking when she talked about her work as a documentary filmmaker in an interview the same year that García Espinosa's essay was published. González (1993, 132), who co-scripted *One Way or Another*, observes that she "sought the truth from behind the lens, almost always a polemical truth as if looking for trouble."[114]

One Way or Another is a combination of fictional sequences and documentary analysis of urban poverty and associated cultural traditions. Gomez utilizes professional and non-professional actors and real and fictitious characters/persons in a manner that Lesage (1979, 23) characterizes as an effective articulation of the goals of socialist art. "In the context of its goals as socialist art, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER refues [sic] to contribute to segmented knowledge and segmented existence." This is most apparent in the film's exploration of a personal relationship, posited as a determinant of, and determining of, larger social processes -- in this case, attitudinal

---

[114] Tomás González also wrote the script for Alea's *La última cena/ The Last Supper* (1976) and is the author of numerous plays as well as an actor, singer, painter and adviser to the National Folklore Group.

changes originating in socioeconomic, gender and racial stratifications are required at both the social and personal levels.

Some of the earliest analyses in North American scholarship of *One Way or Another* came from feminist film critics, who hailed the film as an exemplary illustration of Third World cinefeminism. Marxist feminists such as Lesage (1979, 22) commended the film for its dialectical Revolutionary structure. Lesage also observes that "the film's ‘feminism’ lies in the way that it attributes sincere emotional interactions to its *male* characters and considers a profound and sincere emotional life important for men's, especially Mario's, Revolutionary development."

The three protagonists of *One Way or Another* are associated with the entrenched social attitudes that the film depicts as hindering progressive Revolutionary development. Mario and Humberto represent the pervasive *machismo* of Cuban society while Yolanda's bourgeois perspectives are dramatized in the form of conflict and rigidity in a professional context. However, Mario and Yolanda are Revolutionary subjects-in-the-making, struggling against machismo and class-based biases as they try and make sense of their world, and the new demands made on them by the Revolution in terms of transformation of personal/social values.

While the fictional sequences engage the viewer in the dynamics of the characters' relationships, the documentary sequences permit an exploration of the historical and sociocultural context for the processes of personal and social development they undergo. As Benamou (1994, 58) points out, "aside from being the first feature film to be directed by a woman in Cuba, [*One Way or Another*] was also

one of the very few to locate the ideological roots of machismo in the Cuban colonial and patriarchal past." Not only does Gómez go beyond simply documenting the existence of machismo to exploring its roots, notes Benamou, she examines its manifestations, not only in men's attitudes to women, but also in men's attitudes to other men.

The class-based rigidity of the female protagonist, Yolanda, in relation to the parents of the children she teaches is, however, complemented by her efforts to negotiate a romantic relationship with a man who is "el ambiente" -- despite the disapproval of her friend, Midaglia, whose attitudes of class superiority are evidenced in her remarks about Mario's gold tooth. For his part, Mario's machismo is reflected in his relationship with both Yolanda as well as his friend, Humberto, an unrepentant slacker, whose behavior is soundly trashed by the real factory workers debating the actions of their fictional counterparts at the end of the film.

Acclaimed for its bold interrogation of entrenched attitudes of machismo in Cuban popular culture, *One Way or Another's* daring experimentation with cinematic techniques drew attention to Gómez's readiness to question conventional approaches and perspectives. Not only does *One Way or Another* question documentary and fictional techniques and schisms (unconventional at the time), and provide parallel interrogations of class, gender and race, the film avoids the conventional tendency towards narrative closure. The film ends with neither of the conflicts (between Mario and Yolando, and between Mario and Humberto) resolved.

Although *One Way or Another* is now considered a classic of both Latin American and feminist cinema, the "enthusiastic assessments" of western feminist critics have been decried by Julianne Burton (1985, 8) who characterizes *One Way or Another* as reflecting a "deep patriarchal bias." Burton does not support this claim, so it is difficult to assess its validity. Lopez (1990, 71) makes a similar criticism, basing her claim on the peculiar assumption that a clear differentiation between documentary and fictional modes of representation is a cinematic reinforcement of patriarchy:

> *One Way or Another* seems partly to assume the same patriarchal stance that it criticizes by approaching only the male characters of the film with a clearly established dialectical opposition between the documentary/real and the narrative fictive.

Even assuming an acceptance of such a reading, a close examination of the film does not bear out the accusation, especially when one considers that the film's combination of documentary and fictional segments is inextricable at times. Mario’s father, for example, is seen in both the fictional segments and in the documentary segments when the camera roves the housing project as people clean up their neighborhood, in a manner similar to the depiction of Yolanda.

Such feminist film discourse (both the film's celebration as well as Burton's criticism of such celebration) in relation to *One Way or Another* continues to be characterized by an effacement of the question of race. This effacement of race as a focus of analysis is the result

of Euro-American feminist privileging of gender over other axes of oppression such as race and class.[115] Added to this, the isolation of feature films (as the primary vehicles worthy of analysis) from the broader corpus of a filmmaker's work obscures concerns that may not be as apparent in the analysis of a single text, but which become more evident when examining a larger body of work. This is clearly the case in the work of Sara Gómez.

Admittedly, *One Way or Another* itself both articulates and effaces issues of race, sometimes in complex ways. While class and gender conflicts are explicitly addressed, race remains a subtext. The scenes depicting the tensions arising out of class differences between the middle-class teacher, Yolanda and the mothers of the children she teaches, also reflect Gómez's acknowledgment that the marginalized sector in Cuba comprises primarily black and mulatto Cubans. Gómez's articulation of the racial underpinnings of the socioeconomic hierarchy is reflected in the casting and narrative structures (such as the vignette on an ex-boxer/singer), rather than through explicit dialogue or themes.

The effacement of race in analyses of *One Way or Another* also betrays the lack of an understanding of Afro-Cuban culture, which may explain Lesage's (1979) characterization of Abakuá as "voodoo" and her confusion of the saints (of Santería), belonging to Mario's mother, with the practices of Abakuá. While the documentary section on Abakuá is clearly condemnatory, one cannot assume that Gómez

---

[115]However, in *One Way or Another*, the question of class is an explicit concern of the narrative, making it less easy to ignore.

disapproved of all Afro-Cuban religious practices as regressive. In this regard one has to agree with Martínez-Eschazabal (1994) that the depiction of Afro-Cuban religious practices in *One Way or Another* reflects a *gendered* perspective. However, this gendered perspective cannot be completely understood except *in addition to* a racial/cultural perspective on Afro-Cuban religious practices, one that allows Gómez to distinguish between two different religious traditions. Gómez's disapproval of Abakuá is reflected in a distinctly ethnographic mode of presentation, unlike Santería, which is integrated into the narrative without the supposition that it requires additional comment or analysis. In other words, Gómez does not present Santería in a manner that underscores its alienness from mainstream religious beliefs, but does so in the case of Abakuá. The element of race is underscored in the narrative by the fact that the relevance of Abakuá for Mario emerges from his identity as a black/mulatto man. The brotherhood, until recently, was not open to whites, and for many years it was presented by the news media in Cuba as a secret society out to kill whites.

Lesage's reduction of both Abakuá and Santería to some vague notion of seemingly atavistic Afro-Cuban religious practice -- part of a larger and equally unspecific notion of Afro-Caribbean religions classified as "voodoo" – may reflect Marxist-Leninist biases against religion in general, but it is difficult to argue that film does the same. *One Way or Another's* explicit disapproval of the exclusively male secret society of Abakuá, founded on the notion of woman-as-betrayer, is not apparent in the depiction of the more egalitarian Santería, the religion observed by Mario's mother. Lesage's use of the term "voodoo" in this context -- without additional

comment, considering voodoo is not depicted or referred to in the film -- is also likely to tap into existing negative connotations associated in the Western mind with that much maligned religion. Thus, ironically, a feminist analysis such as Lesage's fails to identify what is a gendered depiction of two Afro-Cuban religions due to the failure to understand the racial/cultural underpinnings of the phenomena being depicted.

With regard to Gómez's analysis of gender issues, Gómez does not have her female characters make explicit statements about their situations as women. Instead Gómez allows her women to offer the "sometimes contradictory levels of awareness of their sociosexual condition" (Brown 1978,116), arising out of the confluence of gender, *race and class*. [116] Whatever the degree of a female viewer's identification with the middle-class, almost-white protagonist, Yolanda, on the basis of gender, Gómez's careful construction of the teacher-parent and teacher-teacher scenes (some of which depict real people, not only fictional characters) accentuate the class-based differences in outlook manifested in Yolanda's bourgeois dismissal of the problems of the poor mothers whose children she teaches.

The casting of a light-skinned female protagonist is not by accident either. Benamou (1994, 57) notes that throughout the body of "men's films about women", (with a few exceptions, notably the work of Humberto Solas and Sergio Giral), this

---

[116]Brown is here referring to the poetry of Louise Bennett who writes in Jamaican Creole/patois, not to Gómez's film.

pattern of casting is prominent in Cuban film -- "the casting of prominent female protagonists echoes that of the male characters in that regardless of class or level of Revolutionary/feminist consciousness they are predominantly white, ranging at most to light mulattoes in phenotype. Since these are the men and women who have been chosen to ‘struggle’ on the screen, the issue of race as a co-determinant of women's self-perception and social treatment is significantly elided."

This, of course, raises a question: why would Gómez, herself a black woman, perpetuate this pattern of casting? Perhaps the answer lies in the somewhat ambiguous statements made by Tomás Gonzáles, who co-wrote the script of *One Way or Another*. Gonzáles' (1993, 133) comments suggest that having a black protagonist may have been considered ill-advised in the Cuba of the 1970s. Recalling his first conversation with Sara Gómez regarding *One Way or Another*, he states that she had suggested a couple in which the man is from el ambiente, with a gold tooth, etc., and the woman from a middle-class background, i.e., a "white woman with a *jabao* (high brown)" man. Gonzáles states that he responded by asking why not a black woman. "It'd be too much," she replied, " and we want this film to get shown, right?"

The comments do not make clear why casting a black woman would be “too much.” However, Gómez’s statements suggest that a film with a black woman protagonist in a contemporary setting would have failed to get the green light, although it is not clear on what basis. ICAIC has always been predominantly white, and Gómez had already encountered disapproval of her documentary *Crónica de mi familia* at this point. It is likely that she would have known of the objections to *P.M.*

(1961), or at least surmised that the open admission of race as a determinant of social status would be frowned upon.

Or, does “it would be too much” suggest that she had believed that audiences would not find a black woman protagonist appealing? Giral (1996) suggests that Gómez may have felt that a black protagonist would not have been popular with Cuban audiences, whose notion of beauty and desirability is generally invested in the iconic image of the mulatta. Kutzinski (1993, 21) observes that Cuban society encoded its national identity in the iconic figure of a mulatta, the copper-skinned Virgin of Charity, the Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre -- Cuba's patron saint -- and in numerous images of mulattas in the country's literature and popular culture. "Cuban novelists were particularly fascinated by women of ambiguous racial origin.” All of this "high symbolic or cultural visibility" notes Kutzinski (7), nevertheless, "contrasts sharply with social invisibility" of the mulatta. Thus, it may be that the casting of Yolanda simply reflects what is frequently a parallel, though not always congruent, relationship between class and race. After all, Gómez was herself black *and* middle-class.

Gómez died in 1974 of an asthma attack while *One Way or Another* was in post-production. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa completed the film which was eventually released in 1977.[117] Although Alea has said that the final

commentary was what Gómez had intended, (Chanan 1985, 285) Gonzalez's (1993, 136) account suggests a certain dissatisfaction with the manner in which the film was completed.

> Neither myself nor her closest collaborators were allowed into the editing room. The film that we had conceived for two hours, told in Sara's very particular way, was edited down to just over an hour. Even so, it was saved by the strength and veracity of the images, its solid arguments and its encompassing analysis of the marginal proletariat.

One Way or Another was given homage in Alea's 1988 film, *Hasta cierto punta /Up to a Certain Point*, a film whose conceptual similarity to *One Way or Another* is observable not only in the echoing of similar feminist themes, but also in its formal structure, viz., the combination of documentary footage and fictional segments. In fact, Alea even borrows Gómez's device of including a non-fictional on-screen audience within the film whose members comment on the developments within the fictional narrative.

Two years after Gómez died, another black woman joined ICAIC. Gloria Rolando never knew Gómez personally, but acknowledges that her work and her

---

[117] González states that Alea and Espinosa had to finish the film, and others (Chanan 1985) note the additional participation of the Afro-Cuban documentary filmmaker, Rigoberto Lopez.

reputation has been an inspiration to her own desire to use the cinematic medium to explore the African elements of Cuban society.

Gloria Rolando

Gloria Victoria Rolando Casamayor was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1953. She studied music at the Conservatrio Provincial de Musica Amadeo Roldan until the age of 18. In 1976, having completed a degree in art history at the University of Havana, she was recruited by ICAIC as a researcher. At ICAIC, Rolando became involved primarily in documentary production, working with highly respected documentary filmmaker, Santiago Villafuerte. During her years at ICAIC, Gloria worked as a researcher, script-writer, narrator and assistant director. Her education and training in music is reflected in the scripts she has written for documentaries produced by ICAIC. *Tumba francesa*, for example, explores the origins and role of the French/Haitian "tumba" (or drum societies) in Cuba, and *Tan solo con la guittara*, profiles the life of the Argentinean "Lady of the Guitar," Maria Luisa Anido.

In her graduate studies in Caribbean literature at the University of Havana, Rolando focused on migration in the Caribbean, a theme she later takes up in her script for the documentary *Haití en la memoria*, and again in her own documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá.* As an assistant director at ICAIC, she worked on both feature films and documentaries, and with well-known Cuban filmmakers including Santiago Alvarez, Sergio Giral and Pastor Vega.[118]

---

[118] Biographical information on Rolando was obtained from a copy of her curriculum vitae, dated 1992/3, and from an interview conducted with her by the author in October 14, 1996, as well as from the *Afrocuba* website, located at afrocubaweb.com.

Although she spent about 20 years at ICAIC, Rolando now heads her own independent video production group, Imágenes del Caribe, based in Havana.[119] The group consists of Cuban film and television professionals and artists, and has official status as part of the Movimiento Nacional de Video de Cuba (National Video Movement of Cuba). Rolando insists that her participation in Imágenes del Caribe does not preclude her continuing connection with ICAIC, arguing "it doesn't mean we are separate [from] the Institute of Cuban Film. We [still] belong…[but] we are trying to taste the world of video."

Rolando directed her first documentary, *Oggun: Un eterno presente/Oggun: Eternally Present* in 1991. Produced by VideoAmerica SA, a video company with representation in Cuba, and Artex SA. this popular documentary has made numerous appearances at festivals in the US. The 52 minute-long video documentary was written and directed by Rolando, and produced at a cost of $30,000 as the first of a proposed series on Afro-Cuban traditions. Her second documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá* (1996), is an English-language production which examines the presence of Anglophone Caribbean communities, principally Jamaican and Barbadian, in Cuba. In September 1997, Rolando issued a (very) limited release of a documentary entitled *Eyes of the Rainbow*, a documentary profiling Assata Shakur, a former member of the

---

[119]This information was obtained from Rolando herself during a discussion at the UDC Conference at Loyola University in Chicago, October 1996. Rolando stresses (telephone conversation with author, September 1997) that Imágenes del Caribe is a video group, not a company.

Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, who escaped from prison and currently lives in exile in Cuba.[120]

Although Gómez and Rolando were/are both black women filmmakers in Cuba, I do not wish to reduce the relationship between their texts to a simple lineal one of ideological and/or aesthetic influences. An analysis of their work based on textual readings alone certainly foregrounds their common interest in Afro-Cuban subjects and themes. However, despite only a 10-year age difference, and a common structural positioning as filmmakers who are both black and female in Cuba, Gómez and Rolando encounter(ed) and negotiate(d) vastly different racially- and gender-coded institutional configurations. The consequence of these differences can be seen in the degree to which Rolando is able to explicitly explore issues relevant to race and ethnicity, while Gómez could only do so more indirectly.

Gómez was, for a long time, the only woman director at ICAIC. Unlike Gómez, Rolando has worked at ICAIC during a period when there were a number of women filmmakers there (although she herself never achieved the status of director); nevertheless, she remained the only black woman. In addition, although Rolando has worked at ICAIC for two decades, she is part of a new Cuba that has permitted, in recent years, a more open exploration of issues of ethnicity/race as well as the

---

[120] As of March 1998, I have not been able to persuade Rolando to part with a copy of this documentary. Both Rolando and her US promoter, Chester King, would only say that the situation regarding distribution rights to *Eyes of the Rainbow* in the US was "very complicated," and they both expressed reluctance to make the documentary available even for scholarly research.

development of an independent film (or more frequently, video) production sphere. In this sense, Gómez and Rolando could be considered to represent two generations of Afro-Cuban filmmakers, and it is in this context that we have to consider their examination of issues relating to race, gender and religion in Cuba.

That Gómez served as an inspiration to Rolando cannot be denied. In discussing her plans to produce a documentary on Sara Gómez for whom she (and many other Cuban filmmakers) shows great admiration, Rolando commented to the author in an interview (Rolando 1996b):[121]

> It's really something I feel a commitment to do - something about her. Not only because she was the first woman [and] she was black, but also because she has a special space in Cuban cinematography. And in my opinion, when you see not only *One Way or Another*, her feature film, [but] also the documentaries, you find an excellent filmmaker and also the spirit of the woman making movies…When you see [her] old documentaries, everything [leads] to *One Way or Another*... Who knows what was possible for her to do right now if she [were] still alive? … And I think that [her] personality and the things that I hear about her was really very important for me. It's a tradition

---

[121] Interview with author at Northwestern University, October 14, 1996. According to the Afrocuba website's (http://www.afrocubaweb.com) reproduction of an interview conducted with Rolando in the Cuban journal *Mujeres*, Rolando has already written the script, but is still trying to get production funding, for this documentary which she plans as "a re-encounter with this singular woman."

> that she founded. She's like the foundation, and a special inspiration for me. It's a commitment for me. I have to do it.

Rolando has stated that despite the tributes paid to Sara Gómez (as in the special issue of *Cine Cubano* dedicated to her), she (Rolando) had been unable to obtain consent from ICAIC to produce a documentary on Gómez.[122] However, Rolando has remained undaunted and is currently attempting to raise funding for what will be her first fictional film, *Searching in my Dreams*, as a tribute to Gómez, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.[123]

Despite her long apprenticeship at ICAIC, Rolando appears to have been unable to get any of her own projects greenlighted, although it is unclear why. Thus, Rolando's option to leave a financially stable career at ICAIC must be seen as a choice that was made by a filmmaker whose commitment to making films about Afrocuban and African Diaspora experiences had not found a space within the structures of ICAIC, even as one who works in the documentary genre. I am, of course, here referring to the already documented observation by other scholars, such as Benamou (1994), of the significant presence of (non-black) women in documentary filmmaking at ICAIC, although none (other than Gómez) has been given the opportunity to direct a

---

[122] This particular conversation between Rolando and the author took place in Chicago, October 12, 1996.

[123] This is a working title.

fictional feature film. Whether Rolando's identity as both black and female played a role in her not being able to even direct a documentary can only be surmised. However, her own decision to work independently of ICAIC has provided her the freedom to direct, to date, three documentaries.

Rolando has conducted several tours of the United States in recent years, attending conferences and festivals. The limited access to resources within Cuba that independent filmmakers face has forced Rolando to look abroad for collaborative projects with institutions and organizations that can provide not only funding and equipment but access to research facilities, distribution, marketing and promotional support. The loosening of the restrictions on Cuban travel to the US thus positions Rolando in a very different political economic context than that faced by Gómez. Rolando has been working with a consortium of academics and a public television station in Tampa, Florida, as guest director on a project involving the history of the Tampa Cuban community during the period when Cuba's national hero, Jose Martí, obtained substantial backing from the Afro-Cuban Pedroso family.

Nevertheless, Rolando has argued that due to the antagonistic relationship between the US and Cuba, obtaining distribution for documentaries has proved difficult legally. According to Rolando (telephonic conversation, September 19, 1997), the Center for Cuban Studies in New York has been able to distribute *Oggun* only because they were able to go physically to Cuba to purchase copies of the documentary from the Cuban producer/distributor, VideoAmerica. During this conversation, Rolando was unable to explain the precise nature of the difficulties she

was encountering in obtaining distribution of her third documentary, *Eyes of the Rainbow*. According to a website on Afro-Cuban issues, under current US law, funding for projects based in Cuba must be obtained from outside the US although joint US-Cuba projects may be funded by sources based in the US (*AfroCubaWeb* 1997).

Rolando's stated purpose of examining aspects of the African diaspora experience has, to date, been manifested in all of her three documentaries. The first, *Oggun*, is "about the ancestral legacy" of Afro-Cubans. According to Rolando (1996b), "in Cuba this tradition is not something that you need to go to the archives to find. It is something that is part of the country, of my culture. When I say "my culture" it is because I am a black woman… [but] the African tradition is very spread [among] different people." The second documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá* , depicts the migration of Anglophone Afro-Caribbean peoples to Cuba and the third, *Eyes of the Rainbow* "incorporates the ancestral legacy with present-day political struggle."[124]

Oggun

In 1994, *Oggun* won the Premio de la Popularidad at the Festival de Video Mujer e Imagen in Ecuador. Dedicated to the tradition of Yoruba-Lucumí chanting, *Oggun* features Cuba's leading *akpwon* (*orisha* praise singer/chanter), Lázaro Rós,[125] a

---

[124] I am quoting Rolando's own description of her third project as stated to me during a telephone conversation on September 19, 1997.

devotee of Oggun, god of metals and war.[126] As a celebration of Afro-Cuban religious practices and mythology, it is both entertaining and informative about the rituals and mythology of Santería in Cuba. Rolando argues *Oggun's* primary value lies in its preservation of cultural forms that were the province of a generation that is now dying, and whose legacy is only now being captured in its original form. Arguing the oral tradition which Rós practices as an *akpwon* reflects a communal history, as it draws upon the words of many others before him, Rolando presents the legend of Oggun through the spoken and sung words of Rós, combined with striking visual reenactments drawn from the rich mythology of the Santería pantheon of deities known as *orisha*. "*Orisha* represent the primordial forces in nature, the various archetypal human personalities, and act as personal guardians or guides to initiates of the religion" (*Yoruba People* 1998).

The film's pan-African feminism is apparent from the beginning. The opening shot reveals both a gender and race-inflected sensibility in the dedication, "to my mother, to my grandmother, to my African ancestors", which appear in stark red letters against a black background. As the sound of drums begin to rise, this textual screen cuts to another. This time a quote by the Haitian writer, Jacques Stephen Alexis sets

---

[125] I use this shorter spelling of his name, which appears more frequently in various sources than the spelling "Róss" which appears in the opening credits for *Oggun*. Another well-known *akpwon*, not profiled, but who does appear in the documentary, is Felipe Alfonso.

[126]Lucumí is the Cuban version of the Yoruba language in which liturgical songs of the Santería religions are performed. See Castellanos (1996) for elaboration of the term "Lucumí" in relation to its African roots.

the premise of Rolando's approach: "Africa does not leave the Negro in peace, no matter from which country he is, the place from where he comes or goes."

The opening visual, a Santería altar, appears to the accompaniment of Ros' voice in song. It pays tribute, in accordance with Santería tradition, to Eleggua, the trickster deity, the owner of roads and opportunities, and lord of the crossroads. Eleggua must always be the first *orisha* honored during any ceremony, or at the beginning of any endeavor. The altar reveals among other things, a candle and what appears to be a bottle of rum – two of Eleggua's favorite gifts. Shots of the holy ceiba tree follow as the camera tilts down, to reveal Rós, a dedicated devotee of Oggun, seated at its foot. The ceiba tree is considered a holy tree because it reminded the early Yoruba slaves of the sacred baobab of their native West Africa (*AfroCubaWeb* 1997).

Structured around Rós' recounting of the *patakís*, i.e., the mythical legends of the Yoruba oral literature passed down over the ages by the *akpwon*s, the film combines dramatizations of these legends with Rós' participation in the *toque de tambors*. The *toque de tambors* are ritual drumming ceremonies intended to invoke an *orisha* (Lindsay 1996). The dramatic recreations of the *patakís* draw upon, and are presented using, the tools of the oral tradition. The dramatizations involve no dialogue, utilizing instead a combination of dance and other movement, accompanied by Rós' praise songs to the relevant *orishas*. *Oggun* is a powerful presentation of Santería "as a living tradition in rituals, dance, music, performance, storytelling, costume, spectacle and spirit possession (Lindsay 1996, xxi)."

Rolando supplements these tools of the oral tradition with those specific to the cinematic medium -- slow motion shots, shooting during the early light of dawn, curtains of mist created with the use of a fog machine, the use of fades and slow dissolves, use and careful manipulation of multiple sound effects to create a mythical forest setting as the world of the deities. The dramatizations also utilize music especially composed by the renowned Cuban singer and performer Pablo Milanés. The editing juxtaposes these dramatizations with Rós seated under the holy ceiba tree, and with scenes of Rós singing at the *toque de tambors*, accompanied by the ritual singing and dancing of other followers.

Oggun dramatizes the tale of Oggun, the god of metals, war, progress and civilization who, after becoming enamored of his mother, goes into self-exile into a forest hideout where he lives and works in solitude. [127] Such exile puts at risk the progress of civilization, and Rolando's visual metaphors of the metallic tools of civilization -- anvils, hammers, machetes -- falling apart are compellingly presented through slow motion photography which renders the scenes dramatic, lyrical and spiritual.

Oshún, who rules over the sweet waters of the world, the brooks, streams and rivers, embodying love and fertility, is dispatched to lure him back, after all other attempts have failed. She is first seen in a brilliant yellow dress (her colors are yellow

---

[127] The tale told here refers to Oggun Alaguede, the blacksmith, one of many manifestations of Oggun.

and gold).[128] Drawing on one of her many powers, that of her feminine sensuality, she gains his attention, through a seductive bathing ritual, and lures him out of the forest with some honey, a food with which she is associated -- and a symbol of the sweetness of life -- which she smears on his lips. This captivates Oggun, who follows Oshun as she retreats slowly in the direction of the town, spreading more honey on his lips to prevent its power wearing off.

In luring Oggun out of self-exile, Oshun saves the world from dissolution. In terms of a pan-African feminist aesthetic, the choice to enact this particular *pataki* permits Rolando to demonstrate an affirmative role for female sexuality. In this instance, Oshun's determination to achieve her goal, through the process of seduction, is not to indulge her individual desire, but in the interests of all civilization. The power of Oshun resides in her femininity, and her use of the honey is symbolic of the belief that sweetness too is a powerful weapon. A mainstream feminist analysis may condemn this depiction of Oshun's strategy as a perpetuation of stereotyped roles assigned to women, but cultural knowledge of the *orishas* contextualizes Oshun as a deity also characterized by strength and a possession of great military prowess. The *pataki* reflects not only the importance of female sexuality as part of a balanced set of attributes, but it also reflects a worldview that recognizes the power of female sexuality.

---

[128] Other versions of the *patakís* describe her as wearing five transparent scarves.

In addition to Rós' tale of Oggun's departure from, and return to the world outside of his forest exile, Rolando provides audiences with visual and aural introductions to some of the other major *orishas* of the Santería pantheon -- Oshun, the goddess of love, Yemaya, goddess of the seas and rivers. Oya, goddess of the wind, cemetery and rainbow (she appears wearing a vivid multi-colored dress), and Shango, god of thunder and lightning are afforded greater screen time, because of their connection to Oggun. The *patakís* tell of the sibling rivalry between Shango and his older brother Oggun, which results in Shango's (characterized as a womanizer and dancer par excellence) seduction of Oggun's wife, Oya, who then becomes a warrior and joins Shango in his war-like activities.

Each *orisha's* introduction is heralded by the colors, symbols and shrines of the relevant *orisha*, and are immediately recognizable to anyone acquainted with the basic attributes of the major *orishas*. Rolando (1996a) elaborates on the notion of a Santería aesthetic:

> In order to enrich the symbolism of [the] dances, they are often combined in the editing with different "representations" of the *orishas* (shrines, and lidded vessels, tureens, or bowls where stones and other properties of the *orishas* are kept). No artist who attempts to approach the aesthetic values of Santería can ignore these expressions. The believers show their affection for their *orishas* with fruits, flowers, sweets, and different adornments; they "dress" them or drape them with cloths that correspond to the attributes or colors that identify

them.

Oggun (portrayed by a non-professional actor), as the god of metals, is seen initially in his manifestation as a blacksmith. In a later sequence, he hacks down the vegetation around him with a machete as he searches for the mysterious presence he can sense nearby, i.e. Oshun. In the Cuban context this deity, whose tales refer to him as a clearer of forests and dense vegetation, is often portrayed with a machete in hand. Gleason (1993, 114) explains the reason for this:

> Having drawn new breath of life from an altered atmosphere, those segments of African invocation and praise-poetry to have been solidly retained in collective memory have gradually shifted to mesh with conditions of diaspora. For example, of Ogun's canonical 21 tools and weapons, it is primarily the machete that figures in this Cuban song from the cane fields.

The images of the swishing machete in *Oggun* is accompanied by the song referred to by Gleason, i.e., a rendering of the Lucumí song for Oggun, "Ikiri Ada" ("Restless Machete") led by Rós, and accompanied by a chorus of women in accordance with Santería's gendered conventions of call and response (Gleason 1993). Rolando was also able to capture the living tradition of Santería by ending the documentary with a follower of Oggun, appropriately with a machete in hand, being "mounted" (a state of spiritual possession by a deity) during a religious ceremony.

Rolando's otherwise excellent documentary would have benefited from a contextualization of the role of Santería in Cuban society. *Oggun's* beautiful visuals, compelling song and dance sequences, and fascinating mythology provoke a desire to understand the role and impact of this remarkable religious tradition in Cuban society, both historically and contemporarily, without satisfying it.

As previously noted, both Moore (1988) and Martínez-Echazabál (1994) maintain that African-derived religious practices in post-Revolutionary Cuba have received harsher forms of censorship and criticisms from the State than have Catholic practices. In the early post-Revolution years, Carbonell (1993, 200) questioned the silence of Revolutionary writers on the political and cultural role of African religious beliefs, arguing that the Marxist interpretation of religion as an opium of the masses may accurately reflect its use as an instrument in the service of the dominant class (as was the case with Catholicism), whereas African-derived religions in Cuba were the beliefs of the most exploited sector. He points out that "the religious organizations of the Africans in Cuba were not only the most effective instruments for preserving the cultural traditions of the blacks; they also functioned as political organizations against slavery. The clandestine, religious nature of these organizations concealed their real political role", that of providing their members a forum for resistance or subversive activity.

It could be argued that a film that explores or represents only the ritual aspects of a religion, and not its political and social dimensions, could be said to be folkloric. A greater tolerance of depictions and explorations of Afro-Cuban religious practices,

and Brandon's (1989/1990) argument that African-based religions in socialist Cuba are tolerated if they are presented as folklore, may explain the recent emergence of films about Santería from Cuba -- such as *Oggun* and Rigoberto Lopez Pego's *Mensajero de los dioses* (1989) -- that are openly celebratory. Brandon (1989/1990, 212) argues:

> Afro-Cuban religions receive some tolerance and solicitude when presented as folklore, as do the theatrical companies that travel throughout Cuba and to foreign countries. Dances and music which are part and parcel of an entire religious complex are presented as "people's folklore." In the context of contemporary Cuban society such performances serve not to publicize religious practices but rather to desacralize them. In a sense they have been tamed. The entire world which they create in the life and imagination is reduced to an entertainment.

Brandon’s somewhat pessimistic view of the threat posed to Afro-Cuban religions through their folklorization, by what Martínez-Echazabál (1994, 19) describes as "reducing viable and integrated social phenomena to exotic fragments for tourist and popular consumption", appears to have been reinforced by recent changes in Cuban official policy towards freedom of religious expression. Martínez-Echazabál (20) notes that in the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of Afro-Cuban activities and

artifacts in Cuba including conferences, documentaries, T-shirts bearing the names of *orishas* and an historical soap opera (*Passion and Prejudice*) in which the "central characters are 'good' ñáñigos," a phenomenon which she decries as "de-secularizing Afro-Cuban culture and relocating it in a ... space which the State ... had only seemed to acknowledge when relegated to the historical or to the aesthetic realms, and now to the commodified one." [129]

Manuel (1991, 295), however, denies the existence of state policy to folklorize Afro-Cuban religious practices.

> [Cuban] Scholars and spokesmen do not attempt to draw sharp dichotomies between folkloric and practical realms. Nor is it the policy of the state to coopt the cults by celebrating them as folklore while actively repressing cult practice itself. Accordingly, it is often difficult to separate the self-consciously "folkloric" recreations of Afro-Cuban culture from their grassroots, primary "folk" sources, just as the word *folklórico* is generally used in Spanish to denote both meanings.

---

[129]Ñáñigos are the "little devils" or deities that members of Abakua honor or impersonate. Drewal (1996) has noted that in Brazil too, Afro-Brazilian cultures were forced to operate “underground” until recent years when Brazilian authorities began exploiting them as a commodity to attract tourist dollars.

There is no doubt that the even though the "marginalized" populations referred to in Gómez's *One Way or Another* consisted primarily of mulattos and blacks, the newly Revolutionary Cuba's analysis of social relations permitted only a class-bound perspective that inhibited consciousness of the dialectical intersection of race, gender and class. Gómez's insistence in incorporating aspects of gender and race into her exploration of various aspects of Cuban society reflected a desire to buck the official/conventional tendency to subsume issues of race in particular.

Rolando's work, on the other hand, reflects a growing movement to integrate ethnicity, especially African heritage, into the politics of representation in Cuban cultural expression. In addition to her own work centering Afro-Cuban heritage, Rolando worked as assistant director on two short documentaries by a fellow Afro-Cuban, Rigoberto Lopez Pego, whose *Mensajero de los dioses* /*Messengers of the Gods* (1989) explores Afro-Cuban cultural identity through an examination of drumming rituals in Santería. Lopez's earlier *El viaje mas largo/The Longest Journey* (1988) explores the history and significance of the Chinese presence in Cuban society (and in recent years several documentaries have emerged about the Jewish presence n Cuba). Sergio Giral's feature film, *Maria Antonia* (1991), made prior to his leaving Cuba in 1991, similarly explores the cult of Oshun in the slums of Havana.

One Way or Another, however, places both Santería and Abakuá in a social context, as does Giral's *Maria Antonia*. While both films integrate Afro-Cuban religious practices into the narrative by presenting them as an important part of the lives of certain characters, neither is celebratory of the practices depicted. The recent

documentaries, *Oggun* and *Mensajero de los dioses*, however, clearly reflect a recent trend in Cuban cinema to celebrate Afro-Cuban religious practices -- but they do so without providing any type of social, historical or political contextualization. Nor do any of these films present an analysis of racial inequalities or racial discrimination in post-Revolution Cuba. This is perhaps understandable since the context of production within a state-controlled apparatus of ICAIC is unlikely to challenge an official policy that is unwilling to confront their history (and, therefore, also their potential) as sites of *political* subversion.[130]

However, Rolando also shares with many of her Afro-Caribbean sisters, a pan-African sensibility that is clearly reflected in her next video documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá / Los hijos de Baraguá*, and in her 1997 release *Eyes of the Rainbow*, as well as in a proposed project, *Afrocubans, African-Americans: Our Roots.*

My Footsteps in Baraguá

Rolando's second documentary, *My Footsteps in Baraguá* (1996) -- the title is derived from a Surinamese poem -- was the first production by Rolando's independent

---

[130] While he does not discuss the precise role of *ocha regla*, or Santería, as a site of political subversion, Matthew Hill (1995) outlines four stages in which the religion has passed in the 20th century – from being a marker of racial/cultural regression, to a signifier of Cuban nationalism, to an archive of power/knowledge in Revolutionary Cuba and finally, of all things, to a symbol of white middle-class status among Miami Cubans.

video production group, Imágenes del Caribe. It explores the origins and contemporary presence of English-speaking West Indians in Cuba and the customs they have retained as Anglophone West Indians, while simultaneously integrating into Cuban life. Having arrived in Cuba via Panama, these migrants from Jamaica and Barbados initially arrived in Cuba during the second and third decades of the twentieth century to work in the sugar industry, bringing with them a mix of African-derived cultural customs, as well as that of the English colonizers. Rolando uses the interlocked trunks of the cotton trees to provide a visual metaphor for this merging of various cultural influences.

Rolando has dedicated *My Footsteps in Baraguá* to three prominent Caribbean intellectuals, the (Afro)Cuban poet, Nicolas Guillen, Barbadian novelist and literary critic, George Lamming and Jamaican historian and dancer/choreographer, Rex Nettelford.

My Footsteps in Baraguá was shot in Hi8 in 9 days. Rolando's fledgling production company had little equipment, and worked with only one camera, no lights and two lavalier microphones, in order to capture the distinct sense of community shared by Cubans of Anglophone Caribbean descent.

Intended to show the connections among all the Caribbean islands, *My Footsteps in Baraguá* explores the migration of Caribbean peoples of African descent among the islands, and the presence of Caribbean immigrant communities in Cuba. Baraguá is a municipality in the province of Ciego de Avila, and its Anglophone Caribbean presence is maintained through the preservation of a number of cultural

practices, including use of the English language, traditional Jamaican, Trinidadian and Barbadian music and dance (including the Maypole!) as well as sporting activities such as cricket.

The documentary combines period photographs, archival footage, and scenes of the neighborhood, with interviews with a number of the "West Indian" residents of Baraguá, including some of the children.[131] These include interviews with several elderly residents who arrived, often as young children, during the first few decades of the 20th century. The documentary also integrates scenes of cultural activity that reflect the distinctiveness of this community, including festivals and the popularity of musical genres from their islands of origin, such as the calypso.

Rolando conducts interviews with both men and women in order to elicit the oral histories of their migrations within the Caribbean. It becomes apparent that many of the people now living in Baraguá are descendants of other Caribbean populations who migrated to Cuba primarily via Panama, where many of them labored on the Panama Canal project. They intermarried among themselves, Barbadians and Jamaicans, Trinidadians and Montserattians, etc. As descendants of Anglophone Caribbean populations, many still speak English in addition to Spanish, and some speak of having been raised in homes fiercely loyal to their status as British subjects, as evidenced in the English cultural practices they have retained.

---

[131] The term is used by the residents themselves to refer to those who came from the English-speaking parts of the Caribbean.

The interviews reveal that the construction of the Panama Canal was a significant catalyst for the migration of Anglophone Caribbean populations to Cuba, having acted as a transitional stop in their migratory path. Several of the residents of Baraguá were born in Panama of Barbadian and/or Jamaican parents. Rolando presents an expository sequence on the life and conditions of the workers at the Panama Canal, utilizing archival footage and the voice-over commentary of a man whose father had worked there as a schoolteacher and trade unionist. Having led a failed strike to demand improved working conditions, including housing and medical benefits, he lost his teaching position and moved to Cuba. Many others were recruited by North American sugar companies who sought cheap labor as the Panama Canal project was coming to completion. That for many of them, Cuba itself was intended as little more than another temporary place of labor, is clear from the interviews with their descendants, who note that their parents and grandparents often talked of returning to their homes on other islands.

The documentary remarks upon, but does not dwell on or attempt to analyze, the history of discrimination that English-speaking black West Indians have faced in Cuba. However, it it pays greater attention to the discriminatory practices of the US-owned sugar company, the Baraguá Sugar Company, which had recruited many of the workers to Cuba. The company maintained segregated housing for the white American management, where West Indians only worked as cooks and gardeners. In addition to racially discriminatory practices in hiring, the company also discharged its

manufacturing waste into the residential area occupied by its workers, mainly black but also including some poor whites.

Although Rolando interviews both children and adults, as well as elderly men and women, it is the images of two elderly women, in particular, that are most memorable. One of these women, an 89-year old Barbadian, talks of having lived a long life of hard work, after having arrived on island as a young girl. The other, born in Jamaica, is not as old, and is both of cheerful disposition and of surprising physical vitality as she dances with a group of young revelers. From time to time, Rolando's camera returns to these two women, and lingers upon their faces in almost loving visual caress, an uncommon practice for older women in general, much less older black women.

According to Rolando's US promoter, Chester King, neither *Oggun* nor *My Footsteps in Baraguá* have received much distribution within Cuba.[132] He explained that the Cuban distributors have refused to have either documentary shown on Cuban television, citing concerns that they may be copied off the air (in a country where relatively few households own VCRs), the promoter argued that "they look on these things as commodities in the tourist trade, not living parts of the Afro-Cuban culture and heritage (King 1997)." However, in March 1998, both King and Rolando herself announced that *My Footsteps in Baraguá* would be screened on Cuban television on

---

[132] King is also a co-producer of *My Footsteps in Baraguá*.

March 28, 1998. *Oggun* remains untelevised.[133] This second documentary is a more conventional one than the first or the third, *Eyes of the Rainbow*, which continues the Santería aesthetic characterizing *Oggun*, applying it to a secular subject in this case.

Eyes of the Rainbow

Eyes of the Rainbow profiles the life of Assata Shakur, an African American political activist now living in exile in Cuba. A former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army activist, Shakur was convicted and imprisoned for life on charges of accessory to murder after a shootout with New Jersey State Troopers. She escaped from prison in 1979, and was granted political asylum in Cuba (*AfroCubaWeb: The Eyes* 1997).

Eyes of the Rainbow links Shakur with the Yoruba deity, the *orisha* Oya, goddess of the rainbow, the winds and of the ancestors. "She is a fierce warrior who rides to war with Shangó (sharing lightning and fire with him) and was once the wife of Ogún (*The orishas* 1998)." Perceived as strong, assertive, courageous, independent, and always willing to take risks (*Seven orishas* 1997), the connection to Shakur is obvious. The dances are performed by Danza Nacional de Cuba. *Eyes of the Rainbow* also features music by the Cuban Grupo Vocal Baobab, and the all-woman African-American *a capella* group, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

---

[133] Rolando, at the African Visions Film Festival in Chicago, March 27, 1998.

Beginning with a dedication to "all the women who are struggling for a better world", the film first introduces us to Shakur sitting in a tunnel. The closed space of the tunnel evokes a sense of imprisonment, as Shakur pays tribute to her grandmother. She also describes her imprisonment at the Yardville prison where she was the only female prisoner, and in which she spent two and a half years in solitary confinement, during her six- and half year confinement there. Shakur is interviewed in three separate locations as she talks of her imprisonment, her arrival in Cuba and her impressions of the Cuban people, and of personal matters. Shakur was surprised to discover "how African Cuba is." She speaks herself as coming out of a tradition of Maroon women such as Nanny, of historical resistance fighters such as Harriet Tubman, and of strong, black women like her own grandmother.

The interviews with Shakur are interspersed with archival footage of Black Panther figures from the 1970s, of dramatizations from the patakis of the Yoruba pantheon of orish *orishas* as, especially of the warrior *orishas*, Oya and Ochosi, and dances honoring the deities, including a sensual dance of Oshun as we learn of Shakur's decision to become a mother while still in prison.[134]

---

[134] The documentary makes an abrupt transition to Shakur speaking of this decision in a manner that appears to have been intended to prevent disclosure of the identity of her child's father. Shakur's daughter was present at the screening at the African Visions Film Festival in Chicago when it was screened there on March 27, 1998, where she saw the documentary for the first time.

CHAPTER 5

The documentary also includes other prominent black American Civil Rights leaders and revolutionary figures of the 1960s and 1970s, including Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X (who appears on the tee-shirt worn by an *akpwon*). Particularly striking is Rolando's use of music, as she combines the blues, and the *a capella* sound of the African-American women's group, Sweet Honey in the Rock with Afro-Cuban song and dance, in order to show the links between Afro-Cuban and Afro-American culture. In one sequence, an Afro-Cuban traditional dance with young men raising clenched fists to the sky is juxtaposed with young, African-American revolutionaries whose Black Power salutes involve the same gesture.

The film utilizes many of the cinematographic and editing devices seen earlier in *Oggun*, including the abundant use of dissolves and superimpositions, fog machines and dramatizations in forest settings. Rolando notes that in Santería, followers dialogue not just with their deities but with all elements of nature. The film ends with Shakur explaining her re-naming/self-naming as Assata Shakur, noting that the name "Assata" means "she who struggles." Shakur was adopted as a mark of respect to the family of her fellow Panther, Zayd Shakur, who was killed at the time that Assata and another Panther member were shot and arrested on the New Jersey Turnpike by state troopers.

Assata Shakur could thus be said to embody Africana womanism's emphasis on self-naming and self-definition for women of African descent, as well as the pan-African feminist belief in self-reliance and autonomy, the struggle for social and

political transformation, and a refusal to see black men as enemies. Her sense of sisterhood too, is brought home in one memorable scene of Shakur relaxing among a group of women sitting in someone's living room, as one of the women plays a guitar, and in her frequent invocation of personal and cultural "motherlines", whether of her own mother and grandmother, or of legendary black women.

Both *Oggun* and *Eyes of the Rainbow* serve as vehicles for an elaboration of the importance of Santería in contemporary Cuban life. *Eyes of the Rainbow*, in particular, reflects Rolando's integration of the Afro- Cuban cosmology -- as inscribed in the mythology of Santería -- in her stylistic approach to the documentary treatment of a secular figure such as Shakur. It is, perhaps, too early to tell, but this "Santería aesthetic" may become a characteristic style associated with Rolando's approach to Afro-Cuban themes, and reflects the pan-African feminist aesthetic of drawing upon legendary figures and African/Diaspora deities as paradigms of feminist consciousness.

Rolando is currently working on a short fictional film, tentatively entitled *Searching in my Dreams*, as a tribute to the late Sara Gómez. Inspired by Gómez's *Chronicles of my Family*, which uses old photographs, and other family memorabilia to explore her own family's history, *Searching in my Dream* will chronicle the tale of an Afro-Cuban woman who attempts a similar search for her family's roots and history. Through the discovery of a collection of old photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, etc., jealously guarded by her grandmother, and the tales told her by her own mother, the woman learns not only of the personal history of her great-

grandparents, but also of a tragic event in Afro-Cuban history -- the 1912 massacre of thousands of Afro-Cubans. Despite the prominent role played by Afro-Cubans in the struggles for independence from Spain -- including the leadership of black generals such as Antonio Maceo and Quintin Banderas – Afro-Cubans continued to suffer racial discrimination. The ensuing frustration led to an organized protest by Afro-Cubans which was violently crushed by Cuban authorities in the eastern province of Oriente.

In another proposed project, *Afrocubans, African-Americans: Our Roots*, Rolando plans to examine the dialogue between African-Americans and Afrocubans in such diverse forms of cultural and social expressions as music (such as "the interchange that spontaneously rose up between musicians Chano Pozo and Dizzie Gillespie"), or in religious and spiritual expression.

While *Searching in my Dreams* aims to re-discover an important event in Cuban history, what emerges as a pattern in Cuban filmmaking, even within the newly ethnicity-friendly environment within which Rolando and Rigoberto Lopez are able to explore, interrogate and/or celebrate their own and other cultural and ethnic legacies, is a reluctance to present an analysis of racial inequalities in Revolutionary Cuba. Whether the context of production is within the state-controlled apparatus of ICAIC, or whether through a relatively young, and therefore fragile, independent video movement, it will probably require an official policy willing to confront the analysis of racial inequities in contemporary Cuba, for filmmakers of all races to address this subject.

Despite this gap in Cuban cinema, the achievements of the Revolution cannot be denied -- both in terms of improving the access of ordinary Cubans to medical care, education and literacy, etc., as well as its prominent role in the development of a cinematic tradition that has earned Cuban cinema a high degree of respect for its cinematic innovation and revolutionary consciousness. ICAIC's role in transforming Cuba from a country of cinematic consumption to one of cinematic production cannot be underestimated. Despite some of the problems associated with ICAIC's control of cinematic production, Gómez, a black woman, was able to emerge as a highly respected filmmaker within its institutional context. The reasons why no other woman has followed in her footsteps to direct a feature-length fictional film is unclear. The recent emergence of an independent video movement, however, and ICAIC's own increasing willingness to confront taboos relating to homosexuality and ethnicity, and to produce critiques of excessive bureaucracy, provoke an optimistic outlook for the future of Cuban cinema.

In conclusion, it is clear that despite the changing social context in Cuba regarding the acceptability of addressing racial issues (beyond a homogeneous assumption of *mestizaje* and racial harmony), and acknowledging the presence of Africanity within Cuban culture, both Gómez and Rolando have persisted in utilizing their access to the media of film and video to explore social experiences of ethnic/cultural heritage that have been masked within the more conspicuous trends in Cuban cinema of exploring class and gender relations in Revolutionary Cuba.

In the next chapter, I will discuss another Afro-Caribbean woman filmmaker for whom her African heritage, and her identity as a black woman, serves as a motivating force in her determination to make films relating to the black experience -- whether on her own island or in other parts of the world. Chapter 5 will explore the work of Martinican filmmaker, Euzhan Palcy.

CHAPTER 5: MARTINIQUE'S *FEMME-MATADOR* - EUZHAN PALCY

The small island of Martinique in the French West Indies is the birthplace of an important figure in the history of black women filmmakers, Euzhan Palcy. Palcy earned the distinction of becoming the first black woman to direct a Hollywood production, when she made the 1989 anti-apartheid feature, *A Dry White Season*, based on a novel of the same name by the South African writer, André Brink for MGM.[135] However, it was an earlier film, her first feature, entitled *Rue Cases Nègres* (1983), released in the United States as *Sugar Cane Alley* (1984) that earned Palcy a number of awards and substantial recognition.[136] This notable first feature has become a classic of Caribbean cinema, providing an insider's perspective of a period in Martinican history.

Martinique is located in the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, between the islands of Dominica and St. Lucia.[137] Officially designated a part of the French

---

[135]The information relating to Ms Palcy's views on filmmaking, goals and biographical information is culled from newspaper interviews and articles, as well as from an interview conducted by the author on April 24, 1997. Because I conducted my interview with her in English, I have edited the French-speaking Palcy's remarks to make her sometimes halting English flow more smoothly.

[136] Warner (1985) is probably correct in suggesting that this title may have been considered "catchier" for marketing purposes. The film was released in France in 1983 and in the US in 1984.

[137]Much of the information on the economic, geopolitical and demographic aspects of Martinican society is derived from the following sources: The US Central Intelligence Agency's *The World Factbook*, October 20, 1994, on Lexis/Nexis, and *The Caribbean Handbook: 1994/5*.

Overseas Department in 1946, and a fully-fledged "région" of metropolitan France in 1974, the Department of Martinique (as it is officially called) was first occupied by France in 1635. Control of the island alternated between the French and the British until 1814, when the French gained permanent control. Europeans generally know Martinique best for being the birthplace of Napoleon's wife, Josephine, but it is also the birthplace of such luminaries as Aimé Césaire, co-founder of Négritude, and a central figure in political thought, Frantz Fanon.

The Head of State is the President of France. Martinique is administered by a Paris-appointed Prefect, and local government is via a 45-member General Council elected every four years, and a 42-member Regional Council. As an "overseas department of France", Martinique is a French province and residents of Martinique are French citizens. Departmentalization represented, for many Martinicans, a hope that such an incorporation, especially access to French education, would result in greater equality between Martinicans and metropolitan French citizens. "La rue cases-nègres", by the Martinican novelist Joseph Zobel, which was first published in 1950, and on which Euzhan Palcy's first feature film, *Rue cases-nègres/Sugar Cane Alley*, is based, reflects this hope in the early years following departmentalization.

Today, Martinique's relationship with France is an ambivalent one. While a small independence movement does exist in Martinique, most Martinicans have voted to reject all political arrangements that would end their ties with France, refusing independence while demanding autonomy. Europeanization of Martinique through its political integration with France, however, has resulted in a level of economic

dependence that has left Martinique unable to achieve any level of self-sufficiency. Martinique's economy, based on agriculture and tourism, is heavily dependent on subsidies and capital transfers from mainland France. Despite exports of its bananas, mostly to mainland France, the reliance on imports of meat, vegetables and grain results in a chronic trade deficit, which even the generation of foreign exchange by the tourism industry has been unable to service. Sugar is grown primarily for rum production, and export figures, which began to decline in the mid-1960s had, by 1975, reached zero.

Although French spending in the form of social welfare schemes and public services amounts to about 70% of GDP, the standard of living is high, and the island has a well-developed infrastructure. The service sector employs about one-third of the population and the rest are primarily employed in the public services, agriculture, construction, industry and fisheries; however, the "island is increasingly impoverished, but the level and style of life it accepts disguise its economic collapse" (Anselin 1995, 113). Burton (1995, 3-4) comments on this paradoxical situation:

> Almost immediately after departmentalization, French manufactured goods - clothes, shoes, furniture, household implements - began to flood into the fledgling overseas departments, displacing locally made goods and undermining the very real degree of economic self-sufficiency that had obtained under the former dispensation ... By the mid-1970s, the French West Indian departments were, so to speak, all superstructure

> and no base, rich by virtue of the funds which, for scarcely disinterested reasons, France continued to pour into them, totally impoverished when measured by the standards of what they actually produced.

Similar loss of control occurred at the political level and contradictory urges to identify with France while retaining local control has resulted in a kind of political impotence which finally led to the riots of 1959, supposedly racial, but notably targeting metropolitan French whites only, not the local *békés*.[138] Resentment against the metropolitan French results from their continued marginalization of French West Indians politically as well as socially and economically. The nationalism that does exist in Martinique (in the form of a small independence movement; neighboring Guadeloupe has a stronger independence movement) is compromised by its economic dependence on France.

As a result of high unemployment on the island, many Martinicans have emigrated to France (Burton 1995). Such émigré French West Indians, concentrated around Paris, form what Anselin (1995, 117) calls a "third island" implanted in the heart of Europe. Many return regularly to the Caribbean, giving rise to the figure known as *Négropolitain* (the returning or visiting immigrant who brings back Parisian attitudes and lifestyle that are looked upon by the locals with a mixture of envy, amusement and contempt). A related figure is the *femme-matador*, the "new woman"

---

[138]The term *békés* refers to Martinican-born whites.

of the French West Indies, “highly educated, often French-born or a returning migrant from France, self-assertive and autonomous, occupying positions of responsibility in both private and public sectors” (Burton 1995, 11).

Martinique has a population of 392, 362 (1994 estimate), 90% of whom are either of African descent or mixed African-White-Indian, 5% White and the rest "East Indian", Lebanese and Chinese. Officially 95% are Roman Catholic and the rest acknowledge Hindu or African beliefs. Languages spoken are French and Creole. Martinique's capital is Fort-de-France, which has a population of about 100,000.

Martinique is also the birthplace of two major figures in black nationalism. Aimé Césaire, one of the co-founders of the Négritude movement (with Léon Damas and Léopold Senghor). A former student of Césaire’s, the anti-colonial activist and revolutionary psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth*, has become a seminal figure in postcolonial studies. In addition, Martinique is also home to the renowned scholar and writer, Edouard Glissant, whose *Le discours antillais*, together with the work of his "disciples" -- Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant who wrote *Éloge à la Créolité* -- constitutes one of the major developments in the exploration of Caribbean identity. Their work constitutes a pioneering exploration of the notion of diversity and syncretism in the Caribbean context, advocating the adoption of Créolité/creolization, as the basis of a new pan-Caribbean identity, rather than as a source of shame.

Martinique's population has historically consisted of three principal strata: the white/béké upper class, the mulatto middle class and a predominantly black lower

class. According to Burton (1995, 11) "to be light-skinned still confers definite social and sexual advantages in Martinique (especially) and Guadeloupe, and, despite the rise of a substantial middle class since 1946, a high degree of correlation still obtains between class and colour."

According to Burac (1995, 104)), direct cultural exchange among the French Caribbean islands and other Caribbean nations remain limited because of their "Europeanization", including a "systematic application of school programmes ... without any particular adaptation or reference to the Caribbean environment." Within the context of Martinique, Frenchness has always been considered a path to upward social mobility, with French schooling and fluency in -- and use of -- the French language being crucial to self-advancement (Burton 1995). This, as already mentioned, is the major theme of Zobel's "La rue cases-nègres", which reflects an optimism that is, I will argue, somewhat more qualified in Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley*. The difference between novel and film will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. Burton (1995, 3) also notes:

> Between 1848 and 1946, the vast majority of coloured French West Indians were more than prepared to sacrifice West Indian-ness for the sake of Frenchness. When legal and institutional Frenchness was achieved through departmentalization in 1946, a century-long process of self-advancement by self-negation was brought to a close, though it left

unresolved ... the question of French West Indians' ‘double identity’ as both French *and* West Indian.

Mass media in Martinique

According to Lent (1990, 183), few Caribbean countries "have the wealth of the media operations in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Except for Cuba and the Dominican Republic, no country has as many radio stations as do the French Antilles, and very few have as many television channels." Martinique, for example, has 10 TV stations, two of which are privately owned.(*Caribbean handbook 1994/5*). However, Martinican and Guadeloupean television consist primarily of French programming with very little local programming -- a key mechanism by which the center denies its periphery any voice. In fact, Palcy’s first film, a short entitled *La messagère* /*The Messenger* (1974) was to become the first Martinican filmmaking venture in Martinique, and the first locally produced film to be shown on Martinican television (Acker 1991).

There is no film industry in Martinique, nor a drama school for aspiring actors, although television commercials are now produced on the island, as well as short dramas and mini-series, which are shot on video (Palcy 1997). As with many other areas of training or academic study, Martinicans generally have to travel to France to study filmmaking. Nevertheless, the relationship between France and its overseas departments is, unaccountably, less supportive than that between France and its former African colonies. According to Blackwood and Givanni (1988, 115), "France ... has

contributed a significant level of funding to projects based in Africa, yet its Caribbean territories -- such as Martinique -- receive substantially lower funds, forcing many film-makers to earn their living in other areas of cultural productions." They argue that despite the substantial expenditure on film and cinema in France, a paternalistic attitude towards Caribbean territories still annexed to it, and to black filmmakers within France itself, expresses a sense of their "being too close for comfort." O'Grady (1992, 23) has stated , "it's the samo samo: other people's blacks are acceptable - if you're in Italy, don't be Ethiopian, if you're in France, don't be French West Indian; and if you're in the United States, don't be African-American." In cases where French government funding is provided, there is a proviso that the money be spent in France.

Nevertheless, despite the limited support received by French Antillean filmmakers in France, Cham (1992, 6) notes that although relatively "small in terms of quantity but technically well accomplished in many instances, the major portion of this corpus of indigenous Caribbean films comes from rather unlikely quarters of the Caribbean. [These include] Guadeloupe and Martinique, two of the smallest islands that are still overseas colonial possessions of France...Haiti, economically the poorest nation in the western hemisphere...and Jamaica."

In the case of Martinique, the contribution of SERMAC (Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle), a cultural institution established by Aimé Césaire, is regarded as illustrative of the kind of local public intervention required to promote filmmaking in the Caribbean. In addition to its emphasis on, and promotion of, aspects of Black

cultural expression in general, SERMAC has provided some training in filmmaking, and provided the resources to help several Martinican filmmakers produce feature films. These include Jean-Paul Césaire's *Dérive ou la Femme Jardin* (1977) and *Hors des Jours Étrangers* (1978). SERMAC also enabled the production of several short films. In addition, another cultural institution in Martinique, CMAC (Centre Martiniquais d'Action Culturelle), established as early as 1952, has conducted screening sessions and underwrote the production of several medium- and feature-length films between 1974 and 1982 (Cham 1992).

While Palcy is the only woman filmmaker to emerge out of Martinique, some of her male counterparts include Guy Deslauriers' (who worked as an intern on Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley*) whose *L'exil de Behanzin* (*The Exile of Behanzin*) won the Paul Robeson award for Best Feature Film from the African Diaspora at the 1995 FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Others include Benjamin Jules-Rosette and José Egouy, a Martinican living in Guadeloupe. A number of filmmakers born in Martinique now live in Europe or are European-born filmmakers of Martinican descent. These include Harmel Sbraire, the only other woman filmmaker. Sbraire lives in France and works for French television.

Martinicans, especially Martinican women, have also been active in the arena of promotion of Caribbean cinema. In October 1985, it was a Martinican woman, Viviane Duvigneau, who founded the Association for the Promotion and Development of Caribbean Cinema (APDCC) and it was a fellow Martinican, Suzy Landau, who in 1988, put together what the now defunct biennial film festival, Images Caraïbes. In

1996, a young filmmaker from Guadeloupe, Lydia Rene-Corail, established a new festival in the region, the Festival of Cinema and Visual Arts.

Euzhan Palcy

Born in 1955, Palcy's early years were spent in Gros Morne in northern Martinique. The third of six children born to a pineapple factory manager and his wife, Palcy has said that she was an avid moviegoer from an early age (in a town that had only one cinema). The family moved to Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital (which had three cinemas), so that Palcy and her siblings could attend high school (a move echoed by the lead character, José, in *Sugar Cane Alley*).

Palcy has said that by the time she was 14, she had become obsessed by the idea of making a career in cinema -- motivated by anger and frustration at the portrayal of blacks in the films she was seeing. Palcy's sense of exasperation and anger at seeing black people persistently depicted in demeaning situations are echoed in a passage in the novel, *La rue cases-nègres*, by Joseph Zobel (1980, 168), on which *Sugar Cane Alley* is based :

> For example, who was it who created for the cinema and the theater that type of black man, houseboy, driver, footman, truant, a pretext for words from simple minds, always rolling their white eyes in amazement, always with a silly irrepressible smile plastered on their faces, provoker of mockery? That black man with his grotesque behavior under the kick in his backside proudly administered by the

> white man, or when the latter had him hoodwinked with an ease that is explained by the theory of the 'black man being a big child?' Who was it who invented for the blacks portrayed in the cinema and in the theater that language the blacks never could speak and in which, I am sure, no black man will manage to express himself?

After graduating from high school, Palcy hosted the first Martinican children's show on radio and then on television. By the age of 20, Palcy had made the television drama, *La messagère* /*The Messenger*. A 52 minute long film shot in black and white, *The Messenger* was, according to Palcy, the first dramatic script for television emerging from a French Overseas Department to be produced for French television and included dialogue in Creole (Givanni 1992). The film's depiction of the life of a young girl living with her grandmother on a banana plantation was a precursor to her first feature film, *Sugar Cane Alley*.

In 1975 she moved to Paris. She obtained a degree in literature and a diploma in theater at the Sorbonne and a doctorate in cinema from the Louis Lumière School at Vaugirard. During this period, Palcy also acted as an assistant editor on films made by several young African directors. It was also at this time that she met the acclaimed French director, François Truffaut, after his daughter had passed on an early draft of the script she had written for *Rue cases nègres*. Palcy credits Truffaut for helping her to re-work the script and for encouraging her to make the film (Acker 1991).

In 1982, Palcy made her second short film, *L'Atelier du Diable*/*The Devil's Workshop*, a 30-minute short fictional film shot in 16mm, which features a bad-tempered old man feared by children -- who believe the old man is possessed by the devil until they befriend him and discover a good-natured, if eccentric, artist inside. The short film was screened by FR3, the French station which, at the time, held the television monopoly in Martinique. According to Palcy, this film was made as a result of efforts by FR3 to delay production of *Sugar Cane Alley*. The station demanded that she make this short film in order to prove that she could direct a film -- even though Palcy had already directed *La messagère* (Givanni 1992).

Children reappear as central characters in *Sugar Cane Alley* and her 1992 feature film, *Siméon,* features a 10-year old girl as narrator. Although not the central characters in *A Dry White Season,* children appear in strong supporting roles. Palcy's concern for children's welfare and rights is foregrounded again in her short film, *Hassane,* originally made for French television and one of a six-part collection of short films by seven different filmmakers, including Jean-Luc Godard. Collectively titled *How are the Kids?* the collection was partly funded by UNICEF and the International Red Cross. *Hassane* portrays the plight of a woman in Niger who attempts to save her 2-year old child from certain death from malnutrition, by undertaking a journey on foot across a desert in order to reach a hospital. As she staggers to her destination, the story of her journey is chanted by local singers.

Palcy maintains that her priority as a filmmaker is to give "the black man back his dignity on the screen" (Dessout 1992, 92). This commitment translates into a desire

to not only capture the lives, struggles and hopes of black people on the screen, but shares with other black women filmmakers a desire to honor those black men and women whose prominent roles as leaders and thinkers have not received their due recognition. In 1994, Sarah Maldoror's documentary on Guyanese poet, Léon Damas, was released as part of a personal project in which Maldoror aims to remedy the omissions of the names of black thinkers and artists from the encyclopedias of the Western world. Also in 1994, Palcy released a three-part documentary TV series (made, like Maldoror's, for French television) on Aimé Césaire. Both men were founding figures of the 1930s cultural movement known as Négritude. Palcy's *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l'histoire/Aimé Césaire, A Voice for History*, can be seen as a complement to Maldoror's half-hour documentary, *Léon G. Damas.*

Palcy also plans to make a feature on the life of the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint L'Ouverture.[139] In the same vein, and evidence that Palcy's pan-African sensibilities are not just pan-Caribbean, her current project is a feature film on the African-American aviatrix, Bessie Coleman, scheduled for release in 1998 under the title *Wings Against the Wind*. *Wings Against the Wind* is being directed and produced by Palcy and stars Angela Basset and Danny Glover as well as Aidan Quinn and

---

[139] I use this spelling of the name following Palcy, who views the form of his name as a site of contestation. She argues that the French have re-cast it as "Louverture", thereby suggesting it is simply a family name, in order to mask the fact that "L'Ouverture" was not a surname, but a name assigned to Toussaint by his followers as a mark of respect for his remarkable strategical skills in finding an opening (*l'ouverture*) in the enemy's ranks (Palcy, in conversation with author, April 22, 1997).

Gerard Depardieu. Palcy quotes Césaire in explaining her motivations. Palcy is also planning to produce a screen version of African-American novelist, Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*, to be directed by Parisian-born fellow Martinican filmmaker, Willy Rameau. Palcy has also released two albums of songs for children, and she wrote the lyrics of a song used in Willy Rameau's feature film, *Lien de Parenté/Next of Kin* (Reid 1992).

How does Palcy's commitment to give "the black man back his dignity on the screen" and her perspectives as a black woman who grew up in post-departmentalization Martinique influence her films? In addition, Sheila Johnston (1990, 12) of the British newspaper, *The Independent*, interviewed Palcy upon the release of *A Dry White Season*. Johnston notes:

> In interview, many American women working in Hollywood are keen to play down their gender; Palcy uses it to establish common ground. 'We have many faults, but also one very strong quality: when we really want to do something, nothing can stop us. You know that - you are a woman. I try to use all those things about me which could be negative points and turn them into *atouts* - trump cards.'

This chapter will utilize a pan-African feminist analysis to explore Palcy's best known films, *Sugar Cane Alley* and *A Dry White Season*, both adaptations of novels written by men in order to argue that the changes made in the screenplay illustrate a

pan-African feminist critique of the novels. I will also discuss Palcy's third feature, *Siméon* and her TV documentary series on Césaire.

Sugar Cane Alley

Palcy's first feature film, *Sugar Cane Alley*, won the César Award (the French Oscar) for Best First Feature, the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival, and the Palme d'Or from the French League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism. It is a poignant adaptation of the novel *La rue cases-nègres* by Martinican writer, Joseph Zobel (who appears briefly in the film), which was banned on the island for 20 years after its publication in 1950 (Andréws 1984, Bakari 1997).

Despite the support of an eminent filmmaker like Truffaut, it took Palcy three years to raise funding for the production of *Sugar Cane Alley*. It was funded initially by private donations in Martinique, later supplemented with funds from various public sources, including the French Ministry of Culture, the Regional Council of Martinique, by the poet and mayor of Fort-de-France, Aimé Césaire, as well as distributor Claude Nedjar (Blackwood and Givanni, 1988). It was completed with the help of two young French producers (Linfield 1984, 43). It was shot on a budget of only $800,000.

The film has only two professional actors, Darling Légitimus in the role of M'man Tine and the Senegalese actor, Douta Seck, who plays Médouze. Both deliver superb performances and Ms. Légitimus won the "Best Actress" Award at the Venice Film Festival for her role. [140] Palcy was to say later that "Black in France was

uncommercial until *Sugar Cane Alley* came along and proved the contrary" (Acker 1991, 120).

Sugar Cane Alley depicts a short period in the life of José Hassam, the grandson of a brusque but loving sugarcane worker on a Martinican plantation. The old woman, M'man Tine, refuses to allow her grandson to follow in her footsteps by joining the *petites bandes* -- groups of children put to work on the sugar plantations. She is determined to give him the formal education necessary to pull him out of the harsh world of material deprivation and physical labor that is her own lot in life. As a result, she makes a number of sacrifices to ensure José is successful at school, including moving to the capital, Fort-de-France, a world of urban sophistication in which she herself is uncomfortable. Here she has to take in washing to make enough money to supplement the meager scholarship José has received to attend the *lycée*, which would prepare him to enter the civil service or further his education in France.

It is after José -- a dedicated and bright student -- has been accused by a schoolteacher of cheating in an essay, that their fortunes take a turn for the better. Regretting his unfounded accusation, the teacher successfully petitions for José to receive a full scholarship as well as living expenses. M'man Tine returns to Black Shack Alley to arrange for a new suit to be sewn for her grandson and while there, she takes ill. The film ends with a return to Black Shack Alley by José where, together with

---

[140] Palcy noted in an interview that Marlon Brando, upon seeing *Sugar Cane Alley*, was very moved to see Darling Legitimus in what he called "a real part." Legitimus had played "the usual black role as the concierge" in *Last Tango in Paris* (Johnston 1990).

one of his childhood friends, he attends to M'man Tine before she dies. Subplots include the story of Léopold, a mulatto classmate and friend of José's, and the deep bond between José and his spiritual father, the old man, Médouze.

While *Sugar Cane Alley* documents a particular period in the Martinique's history (the 1930s), the film transcends the simple documentation of "reality." Natural lighting, sepia colors and the natural sounds of animals and children reflects a skilful use of the cinematic medium to capture the concrete density of everyday experience -- from the dark, spare interiors of the shacks to the muddy river and the dry, brown sugarcane fields.

Palcy’s willingness to spend a great deal of time with non-professional actors is not merely for aesthetic purposes, but was also a practical necessity, due to the small pool of professional actors in Martinique (Palcy 1997). Despite some of the extra difficulties resulting from working with non-professional actors the film, "dedicated to the world's Black Shack Alleys" is enriched by the use of Martinican locals, who bring to it an interpretation enhanced by an intimate knowledge of the social and cultural context.

Sugar Cane Alley opens with a montage of postcards and an upbeat ragtime musical accompaniment that anticipates the ultimately optimistic tale of José's quest for an education that would provide the key to freedom from the harshness of plantation life. The film's opening sequence immerses us into the world of the children, as they take sides in the deathly struggle between a snake and mongoose, perhaps a metaphoric

representation of political and social struggles to come.[141] Not only does this sequence introduce us to the children, but it anchors the film in a specific physical environment through a set of richly textured shots of the cane fields and the river, as well as the alley of black shacks in which the children live -- a physical landscape dense with the details of a Martinique that is rural and poor for most of its black population, but which is also rich in the folklore and beliefs repeated by the children -- all suddenly muted, at least temporarily, by the arrival of the overseer, an ever-present repressive force.

Vincent Canby (1984, 17) of the *New York Times* noted, in what is generally a favorable review, that "the movie begins in a manner that seems peculiarly diffident, as if it didn't know yet what it was to be about. You can't even be sure in these introductory sequences that José is the center of the film, which takes its time to describe the quality of life on the huge sugar plantation where the workers live in shacks and are always in debt." This is indeed the case, and from a pan-African feminist perspective, it is to the film's credit that it situates José as one of many children whose circumstances are similar. The opening scene showing the children at play lessens, to some extent, the notion that José is exceptional. The viewer is better prepared to accept that José's success is the result of the concerted efforts of his grandmother, whose active resistance to her grandson continuing a life of drudgery on

---

[141]The mongoose is not native to the Caribbean and was imported to the island to get rid of the snakes in the canefields.

the plantation makes José's outcome different from that of the other children. If the film had been made under a studio mode of production, Palcy would have been pressured to fall in line with Canby's expectations that a protagonist be singled out early, through cinematic techniques that center on him and his point of view, to ensure identification by the viewer. Instead, Palcy contextualizes the socioeconomic context early in the film.

The following sequence, in which the children's playful exuberance ends with José's grandmother's hidden bowl of sugar crashing to the ground, and the immediate shift in mood the incident engenders, forcefully reinscribes the political economy of the plantation economy. Ironically, the parents of the children, whose livelihoods revolve around sugar, and who are physically surrounded by sugar plantations, are forced to hide the commodity they produce from the careless hands of children -- those whose lives are consumed by sugar, cannot afford to consume it.

Palcy's depiction of the oppressive conditions of the lives of the sugarcane workers and their exploitation is skillfully depicted in scenes such as the one of payday. The frustration of the workers at the unending cycle of poverty -- payday never brings enough to clear their debts -- one worker’s despair leads him to welcome death as a merciful escape from the canefields, while another’s frustration escalates when his wages are reduced because he had taken a moment to urinate.

As in most adaptations of novels, Palcy’s film version of *Sugar Cane Alley* bears her own distinctive "voice", most apparent in the treatment of issues of sociohistorical significance. This voice, I argue, is a pan-African feminist voice, one

that is concerned with multiple manifestations of oppression, whether relating to gender, race, class and/or colonialism. This pan-African feminist discourse is, of course, most discernible when one considers the *changes* made by the screenwriter/director -- in this case, Palcy is both -- in the transformation from novel to screenplay to film.[142]

In the case of the adaptations of the novels, *La rue cases-nègres* and *A Dry White Season*, to the films *Sugar Cane Alley* and *A Dry White Season*, Palcy's changes, while primarily changes in emphases, bring to the films a pan-African feminist discourse that draws upon contemporary "discourses circulating in society and in other cultural forms (Gledhill 1994, 118)." These changes reflect the perspectives of a director who shares with neither author of the original texts, either her gender or her age -- although with one she shares her race and nationality. These differences result in a transformation of the original novels grounded in a literate and male milieu, to one which is primarily oral and visual and influenced by the nuances of a female (and

---

[142] Some of these changes can be ascribed simply to the changes necessary to accommodate a different medium (such as the shorter span of time covered by the film compared to the novel). Other changes may be due to financial considerations, in both independent and mainstream modes of production. In the former, a lack of funds may require the casting of non-professionals even when the director may prefer a well-known actor, or the elimination of major characters. In the latter, the producer (usually a film studio or television station) may insist on use of certain actors who are amenable to mass marketing or the soft-pedaling of controversial themes or the inclusion/elevation of a romantic subplot in a film dealing with a serious sociopolitical subject. Similarly, changing the ending of adapted novels to satisfy American viewers' appetite for happy endings is a common practice in Hollywood.

younger) perspective. Palcy's changes function to accentuate certain sensibilities to gender and racial issues that, if they do exist in the novels, do so to a lesser extent..

Let us consider these changes in *Sugar Cane Alley*. In her analysis of Créolité in three French Caribbean novels, Scarboro (1992, 16) argues that in *La rue cases-nègres*, "Zobel's fictional world is based on assimilation -- José works within the colonizer's system to proclaim his own identity by becoming a writer." Palcy's version, however, minimizes this acceptance of cultural assimilation as the path to liberation from the canefields by enhancing the role of Médouze as the guardian of popular memory as well as the significance of his relationship with young José. Palcy amplifies the role of Médouze, whose counternarratives of history draw on both his own experiences, and that of a popular collective memory, in order to challenge the emphasis on French history that the children of Martinique are inundated with at their local schools. Palcy herself learned little of her African heritage or her own history despite, not because of, her access to French education. In Martinican schools, the focus is on French history and culture. Palcy learned of the African aspects of her heritage from her paternal grandmother, whose character is extended to Palcy's view of Médouze. Palcy noted "we have two schools, the home school and school of the outside world."[143]

---

[143] Stated to students at a class on pan-African cinema at Northwestern University in April 1997.

There are two, seemingly minor, changes that Palcy makes to the role of Médouze. In the first, the novel has Médouze recounting to the young Jose his father's tales of how he (Médouze's father), as a young man had, together with all the other blacks, fled from the plantations upon hearing that slavery was over. However, they soon found themselves back in the position of having to work for the whites -- and for less than was their due -- because the whites still owned the land (Zobel 32-33).

In the film version, during one of their regular conversations, the camera lingers on Jose's enraptured expression at the passion in old Médouze's voice as he talks of a slave rebellion. Médouze explains how slaves armed with machetes and sticks descended upon St.Pierre, and burned down plantations and houses. He talks of how blacks saw, for the first time, their white owners shake with fear. However, the victory was limited. Médouze explains:

> After slavery, the master had become the boss... Nothing has changed, son. The whites own all the land. The law forbids their beating us, but it doesn't force them to pay us a decent wage.

Both stories end by emphasizing how the basic economic relationship in which black labor produced profits for white owners remained the same after emancipation. The primary function of Médouze's storytelling in the film's version, however, is to develop a consciousness that challenges the immutability of official versions of history, versions that do not acknowledge the role of black resistance to slavery. Médouze's invocation of an anti-slavery rebellion attempts to develop a culture of questioning and of resistance. Palcy presents

the act of storytelling, and this invocation of the anti-slavery rebellion of May 1848 (Herndon 1996; Desalles 1996), as an intervention in the colonial logic described by her countryman, Fanon (210) who noted that “colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future... By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.” The history of slave rebellions and “marooning” or “marronage” has, in recent years, become an important paradigm in many Caribbean and Latin American nations in the effort to reexamine the history of Africans in the Americas, and Palcy assigns this task to the village elder, Médouze (Kubayanda 1990).

A celebration of the African-derived elements of black Martinican society is certainly present in the novel, but its value in the development of a unique Antillean identity is strengthened by the changes made by Palcy. Médouze's stories provide the foundation for a strong sense of identity to counter the inroads made on the self-esteem of a young black child by the French educational system and the Martinican social structure, both of which denigrate African heritage. The early years of departmentalization, when the novel was written saw a hope that assimilation into French society would bring escape from racial discrimination. The politics of this assimilationist approach, and resistances to it, would come later.

Palcy's narrative strategy draws heavily on orality, storytelling and the elided historical consciousness, to reveal that Jose's identity -- and Caribbean identity -- requires negotiating a path between two cultures, an imperial one and an ancestral one. Cultural elements drawn from the African oral tradition, such as the *laghia* and the storytelling at wakes, compete with the elite’s elevation of French language, customs

and practices. The fabrication of charms, the singing of chants (to ward off evil and work songs that ridicule "whitey"), and the riddles and tales told by Médouze, constitute a discursive space representing what Maryse Condé defines as "a pedagogy of survival in a hostile environment" (Shelton 1993, 718). In addition, the tradition of oral literature positions context and performer as crucial elements with the storytelling performance requiring an intimate connection between teller and audience, often through the kind of ritualized performance of call and response as seen in encounters between José and Médouze. Abrahams (1983) has noted that both the tale, and the telling of it, are important in Caribbean storytelling performance. Noting that all performances draw upon a learned repertoire of conventional devices, Abrahams (158) notes:

> As an aesthetic transaction, the telling of the tale is judged in terms of the performer's success in factoring in the physical setting and the audience's size, character and disposition...and the vigor, focus, eloquence, inventiveness, authenticity, and authoritativeness of the rendering.

African origins of cultural practices are also apparent in the events that occur upon the discovery of Médouze's body. During the wake that follows, Monsieur Assionis' (Tortilla's father) words may seem baffling to Western viewers. Instead of a recognizable eulogy venerating the dead, he engages in behavior similar to the

Vincentian (i.e., of St. Vincent) practice of *nonsense*, as described by Abrahams (157-161):

> *Nonsense*, which is Vincentian for loud, boisterous, rude, argumentative behavior, may seem inappropriate as a way of marking death, but not so in the West Indies...examining the meaning system articulated in the Vincentian wake as an event is difficult because it is an inversive encounter.

Abrahams (1983, 186) suggests that the purpose of this practice is to "consign the dead to their appropriate place, by revealing death as nothing more than fear embodied", and that the practice does not attempt to present a dramatic resolution; rather, "in a more typical African and Afro-American pattern, life is seen to be most fully celebrated through the contrarietous presentation of oppositions...this, in combination with the joyous overlap and interlock of voices and movements characteristic of public aesthetic activity throughout the black world, is the deepest manner in which the celebration may be carried out in these parts of the world."

Secondly, while the novel portrays Médouze in a similar manner to that in the film, he dies before José even begins attending school. Palcy chooses, instead, to present Médouze as a countervailing force to that of the school and French colonial culture, so that José is able to move from one geographical/cultural space to the other with the fluidity of a hybridized identity. In doing so, Palcy engages in what Lionnet

(1995, 6) has referred to as “the deconstruction of hierarchies, not their reversal.” Both Médouze -- representing ancestral knowledge and memory-- and Monsieur Stephen Roc -- representing the world of colonial literacy and French culture -- are presented as characters much admired by the young José.

Palcy’s depiction of the continuing presence of the oral tradition in the New World echoes the childhood reminiscences of Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986, 10):

> Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transposition of syllables…So we learned the music of our language on top of the content…The home and the field were then our preprimary school but what is important… is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

The novel, however, does present the influence of Médouze as persisting beyond his death. José lacks interest in the texts he has to read at school. He opts, instead, to read about the history of blacks in the West Indies and in the Americas. More significantly, the novel draws a clearer connection than the film of the correlation between literacy and the ability to recognize one's oppression. In the novel, José’s schoolmate, Jojo, discovers that the manager's account books at the sugar factory have been doctored. He recognizes that his ability to do so results from having retained some

of his learning (despite his painful schooldays), permitting him to draw the workers' attention to their exploitation. As Kandé (1994, 40) notes, "orality in Black Shack Alley, imposed as a mode of *exclusive* knowledge by the peonage system, also perpetuates the segregation of béké landowners, who possess writing skills, and workers of African origin, who are illiterate and therefore subject to merciless pressures." M'man Tine clearly recognizes the role of literacy in the social stratification of Martinican society, and in the mechanics of oppression, when she openly proclaims her contempt for those blacks who condemn their children to a life of hardship in the canefields by pulling them out of school.

Menil (1992, 168-9) observes that "one cannot help but be surprised by the fact that M'man Tine's discourse is received differently than in 1950. Emancipation through schooling was perhaps the only solution for the sons of slaves rejecting their disguised slave condition, but we also know the price that was paid, maybe the price of our country." This difference in reception to the value placed on French schooling could, perhaps, be ascribed to the fact that the novel was written at a time when literacy could not be taken for granted by black Martinicans, whereas Palcy's generation does not have to question their right to an education. It is a generation which is, instead, more conscious of the need to acknowledge the importance of orality in Martinican culture. Certainly, for us today, the hopes pinned on the French-imposed formal education as a means of empowerment may seem a little over-optimistic, even naive, with the hindsight that neo-colonialism has brought, but the significance of illiteracy as a tool in the maintenance of exploitation and oppression cannot be underestimated.

In addition, the racialized nature of Martinican social stratification is decidedly more pronounced in the film. While racial and class issues are certainly addressed in the novel, the film chooses to confront the subject much more directly. In the novel, the liminal political and social position occupied by the mulatto in Martinican society is reflected in the experiences of José's childhood friend, Georges Roc (a.k.a Jojo), who is the mistreated child of a mulatto father and a black mother, as well as in a story being related by a friend of José's, together with statements such as the one in which José describes his grandmother's anger against Mr. Gabriel, the overseer.[144] "I heard her utter words of anger against mulattoes (Mr. Gabriel was one) who, as she would repeat at the slightest opportunity, were always quick to flatter the *békés* and betray the blacks" (Zobel, 45).

Palcy creates an entirely new character, Léopold, the child of a white man and his black mistress. Léopold is deeply hurt when he overhears his father refusing, even on his deathbed, to give his son his name, arguing that it had always been held by whites. According to Léopold's French father, it was not a name for mulattoes.[145] The character of Léopold, who is arrested after he attempts to steal the ledger at his father's sugar factory in order to expose the doctored books that deny the sugarcane workers their rightful pay, also departs from the archetypal mulatto-as-betrayer of blacks, as he

---

[144]His mother does not appear in the film. We learn early in the film that she has died and that José is being raised by his grandmother. However, the mother, Delia, is a prominent character in the latter part of the novel.

[145]The name de Toraille is an aristocratic one, as evidenced by the prefix "de".

himself becomes the one betrayed through the rejection of the white father he loves. However, it is only after his father's betrayal that Léopold begins to identify with the oppressed segments of Martinican society, having up to this point steadfastly defended the reputation of whites against his little black friends' beliefs about their evil nature.

Léopold's story combines -- with some changes -- what appears in the novel as scattered references to issues of racial and social stratification, as noted above. By consolidating these elements into a coherent character and subplot, Palcy is able to develop a story which merely takes up a few paragraphs in the novel into an exploration of the contradictions of the mulatto experience, privileged in Martinican society as compared to blacks, but also -- in the words of a worksong heard in the film -- "whitey's nigger." The introduction of this subplot permits Palcy to portray the development of a color-based stratification through little vignettes in which both his black mother and his white father scold Léopold for playing with the black children. His parents' chastisements, for playing with "that little barefoot boy who can't speak French," or "with those black kids again" denigrate both blackness and the use of Créole, the language spoken by most blacks in 1930s Martinique. Menil (1992, 170) notes that "Leopold challenges racial taboo, while Georges Roc [the character in the novel] expresses only the rejection of social hierarchy."

The character of Léopold exemplifies the hybrid but troubled nature of Caribbean identity. The film draws a direct connection between Léopold's coming to political consciousness and his white father's rejection. While Zobel's novel was

written at a time when Négritude was at its height in the black Francophone world, Palcy's film was made over 30 years later when cultural attitudes tended to emphasize Créolité as the synthesis of the various cultures that make up the Caribbean. While much of the celebratory discourse of Créolité tends to mask inequalities of power, it remains a concern of Palcy's. While acknowledging the hybridity of Caribbean identity and culture, Palcy is also careful to expose the underlying biases against African cultural heritage concealed by the discourses of hybridity.

César (1994) has noted that the representation of the social and racial environments in novel and film are further supported by the linguistic changes made by Palcy. Shelton (1993, 717) argues that the Caribbean has now entered an era that could be considered post-Négritude , one in which the Caribbean is increasingly being viewed as "neither a detached piece of Africa nor a remote province of France nor the backyard of the USA." This view constitutes the foundation for the notion of *antillanité*, which reformulates historical agency in terms of *métissage*, one which emphasizes mixture and diversity, with its linguistic parallel in the concepts of *créolité* or *oralité*.[146]

While the language of the novel is French, with a few Créole expressions translated at the bottom of the pages, the film uses both French and Créole,

---

[146]The French term "metissage" connotes forced racial mixing; it has been translated by Michael Dash as "creolization", a term which some scholars find less satisfactory on the grounds that it suggests greater freedom of choice than the original French. The term "metissage" is used by Edouard Glissant in *Les discours antillais*. See Herndon (1993).

acknowledging its prevalence in use among the non-elite of Martinique.[147] This choice is clearly a political stance, one that is possibly influenced by the writings of fellow Martinicans, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant (*Éloge à la Créolité*) and their mentor, Edouard Glissant. However, Palcy's use of Créole vs. French is not always consistent with expectations, such as the use of French by Médouze during his storytelling sessions with José, a milieu in which one would expect the use of Créole. It is plausible that the use of the Senegalese actor, Douta Seck, in the role of Médouze may have necessitated the unlikely use of French in this context.

In addition, Palcy does not follow the linear trajectory of the novel in which José moves from the shantytown of Black Shack Alley in Petit Bourg to the village of Cour Fusil and then to Fort-de-France, as is the case with the novel. Scarboro (1992, 19) notes that in the novel, "Zobel tells M'man Tine's story as well as José's, but both are told by José's linear, factual voice in a setting where action takes precedence over feeling." In the novel, the rupture between the plantation and the city is quite pronounced. José does not return to Black Shack Alley, and his grandmother dies with him having seen her only rarely after he leaves for Fort-de-France. He is not present at her funeral. But Palcy's film version departs from the novel's implication that José's social mobility necessitates a gradual distancing from those he leaves behind in Black Shack Alley. Instead, Palcy introduces a circularity of trajectory as José returns to

---

[147] In the original version of the film, the Creole dialogue is subtitled to make it comprehensible to French-speaking audiences (César 1994).

Black Shack Alley to find his grandmother (both reflect his roots) with José still in Black Shack Alley after his grandmother's death, comforted and helped by his childhood friend, Tortilla. The last images of the film, in which the camera sweeps over the sugarcane fields, and the film's concluding voice-over, leave no doubt that José's connection with his roots have not broken: "Tomorrow, I'll return to Fort-de-France and I'll take my Black Shack Alley with me."

The importance of this strategy can be evaluated in relation to the cultural norms of individualism vs. collectivism and to oral literary traditions. Firstly, it departs from the notion of individual success so beloved of Hollywood by rooting José's success unquestioningly in the collective support of those around him, as well as his own perpetuation of a collective sensibility through his efforts to help his friend, Carmen, attain literacy. This film was produced at a time when Hollywood was releasing youth-culture films (*Flashdance* 1983, *Fame* 1980) in which talented young people dance/sing their way out of the "ghetto."

While Médouze and M'man Tine are clearly most obviously representative of the collective support, other depictions of mutual help (as, for example, when the community immediately rallies together when alerted to Médouze's absence, or when other women help take care of José when his grandmother becomes ill), are testament to the rootedness of José's success in being part of an impoverished, but supportive, community.

Palcy has said, in comparing José's character with that of Léopold: "I felt that José, the poor black boy, is luckier than Léopold, the mulatto, because José has his

people, black people, with him, to love him, to help him. He has M'man Tine, Carmen, all of them. But Léopold is alone" (Linfield 1984, 44). In fact, much of the warmth of the film resides in the depiction of relationships -- among the children, between José and his grandmother, between José and Médouze, José and Carmen -- and in the sense of collective solidarity that is apparent in M'man Tine's insistence on patronizing the village tailor, even though she lives in Fort-de-France.

Secondly, according to Diawara (1988), the educational quest constitutes the structural cell of oral literature, one which is defined as a movement from the village to the city and back to the village. But while in the oral tradition such return to the village symbolizes return to the status quo and is, therefore, ultimately conservative, José's return to Black Shack Alley is clearly not a final return but designates instead, a spatial, intellectual and emotional fluidity of movement between the two worlds into which he has been initiated.

Palcy expands Zobel's exploration of racial and class stratification in Martinican society to include gender. In the novel, José is the only child chosen to sit for the scholarship exam, but Palcy includes the young girl, Tortilla, as one of two children invited by the teacher to do so. This allows Palcy to address directly how Tortilla's experiences and opportunities differ from those afforded José. Gendered expectations with regard to education allow Tortilla to simply accept her father's decision not to let her continue with her education.

Generally, women play a prominent role in José's life -- Madame Léonce, Mam'zelle Delice, Madame Fusil, etc., who take care of him from time to time. Except

for Madame Léonce, the love of the women for José as well as for each other is reflected in the care that other women, including Tortilla, take of M'man Tine and of José when the former is ill. Palcy has remarked that "Women in Martinique are lovers, they are very kind, very lovely. But they are proud, very strong, very hard. They don't let you *see* their tenderness" (Linfield 1984, 44). The remark obviously describes the characterization of M'man Tine. The depiction of women generally reflects the pan-African feminist celebration of female autonomy and self-reliance through female networks and collectivity over individualism. Nevertheless, Palcy undermines, to a degree, her own arguments and that of the sense of collective support in José's life by dispensing with the character of Delia, José's mother, and concentrating all the positive qualities of a firm but loving maternal presence in a child's life in the matriarchal figure of M'man Tine.

In the film, Madame Léonce's role provides the opportunity to depict José as a resilient and even rebellious child when pushed. In the novel, he appears as a somewhat passive child, things happen *to* him. M'man Tine's chastisement of José for staring at her, in which she states that children should not stare at adults, exemplifies bell hooks' (1992, 116) idea of the "oppositional gaze" from the looks of children at adults, and of slaves at slave owners, which hooks sees as constituting a form of resistance. Palcy draws the protagonist in what one suspects is her own image rather than Zobel's. In the film, in an incident with Madame Léonce, for example, José rebels against his exploitation by throwing stones at the dishes drying out in the sun. In the novel, however, he flees in fear when a pitcher accidentally breaks in his hand.

These changes represent what César (1994, 108) argues is a reality of the 1980s implicitly contained in the film discourse. Perhaps this reality is not so much implicit. It is quite conceivable that it constitutes a conscious change in perspective, perhaps even inevitably so, considering that the feisty Palcy is a product of a later generation than the novelist, of post-departmentalization Martinique, and of a generation of highly educated women who have been exposed to feminist and nationalist ideologies, as well as the paradigm of “marooning” in which the rebel figure becomes the icon of black Caribbean identity.

An additional innovation in the film that reflects a pan-African feminist consciousness occurs when Tortilla's mother's stillborn child is met with the sentiment that another black child has been saved from the white man's canefields. However, Palcy obviously shares with Zobel and her best known countryman, Frantz Fanon, a concern for the self-hatred or identity confusion of black Martinicans whose internalization of white racist ideologies lead them to aspire to marriage with whites and a desire to "lighten the race." The scene in the novel when José confronts a young woman employed at the local movie theater who declares that she may have a black skin, but that she is white inside, is reproduced in the film -- clearly an invocation of Fanon's analysis of questions of racial identity in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Stuart Hall (1991, 231-2) comments that “the error is not to conceptualize this [white] ‘presence’ in terms of power, but to locate the power as wholly external to us – as extrinsic forces, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin, what Frantz Fanon

reminds us in, in *Black Skin, White Masks* is how its power is inside as well as outside…"

However, Palcy's pan-African feminist sensibilities appear somewhat ambivalent at times. Perhaps the most interesting departure from the novel is one that is least explicable, except as a possible consequence of budgetary constraints. In the novel, two women, his mother (Delia) and grandmother (M'man Tine) feature prominently as pillars of strength and support in young José's life -- the latter in the earlier years, and the former during the phase of city life. Both women are resolute in their determination to ensure social mobility for José through education. M'man Tine had ensured her daughter's life would not be as harsh as her own, by placing her to be trained in domestic duties in order to be employed in the homes of her employers instead of in their fields. But Palcy combines their characters into one and focuses on the matriarchal figure of M'man Tine as the primary female source of the grit and determination crucial to José's success.

In addition, the novel depicts Carmen, an older friend of José's, as facing sexual harassment when he is forced to deal with the unwelcome sexual advances of the white mistress of the household in which he is employed.[148] The film, however, depicts Carmen as a flighty young man who has no problem satisfying his white mistress's sexual needs -- and who even revels in the affair -- in a scene in which he displays great insensitivity to José's distress at being accused of cheating at school. The film's

---

[148] Despite the name, Carmen is male.

transformation of what is clearly a painful problem for Carmen in the novel ("It's bothering me a lot" Carmen says to José) into a frivolous interracial sexual dalliance, masks the racialized nature of sexual harassment, which makes both men and women its targets, in what is clearly a display of racial and class power. In the novel, Carmen reflects on the politeness that he must maintain in the face of his employer's sexual advances, politeness "due to a boss, politeness imposed by the whiteness of her skin" (Zobel 1980, 176). A pan-African feminist framework necessitates addressing the issues facing black men *and* women, not just women. Race and class privileges permit Carmen's mistress to circumvent the usual restraints imposed on white women by gender inequalities, in a clear illustration of both the potential, and historical reality, of the participation of white middle-and upper- class women in the oppression of blacks.

One of the most striking aspects of *Sugar Cane Alley* is its cinematography, specifically the use of color. *Sugar Cane Alley* does not reproduce the familiar vivid colors of (blue) sea, (white) sand and (green) palms one associates with the Caribbean. Menil (1992, 162) has noted that "exoticism is not so much the 'negation' of the other as its reduction to a pure surface of lines and colors with no significance and direction." *Sugar Cane Alley* departs from the tendency to indulge in such exoticism. Palcy has stated that the sepia tones of the film were a deliberate choice on her part to ensure that the film did not look like a "tourist postcard, no coconut trees." [149]

---

[149] Stated to students at a class on pan-African cinema at Northwestern University in April 1997.

The sepia tones of the *Sugar Cane Alley* not only evoke a sense of the past, they also subvert the hegemonic myth of the Caribbean as tropical paradise. Palcy resists the temptation to exult in the glorious and vivid colors of tropical vegetation, and avoids evoking in audiences the familiar “island in the sun” images depicted in commercials and mainstream films. The “tourist postcard” images bring with them the concurrent danger of situating a discourse of racial and class domination in a setting that exoticizes poverty and oppression, undermining their representation through what Menil (1992, 162) calls the “the journalistic synthesis of the three ‘S’s (*sea, sex and sun*).”

In fact, in *Sugar Cane Alley*, the sea is conspicuous by its absence. The only bodies of water that we see are the muddy river, and the bay bridging the world of the plantation/village and the urban sophistication of Fort-de-France -- a bay that is crossed in a ferry that is simply functional, no luxury yacht cruising the bay. The sun, too, is no sun-worshipper's dream. It beats down on the workers forced to spend the day in the fields, week after week, with little reprieve. Palcy’s mise-en-scenes do not allow the viewer to be distracted by the physical beauty of the island. In *Sugar Cane Alley*, Palcy refuses to reproduce the "Caribbean" as the familiar mythology produced by Hollywood for First World viewers, i.e., as little more than a decorative, generically "tropical" location for the intrigues of Euro-American characters, or the "maddening" effects of the tropical location on the European pysche.[150]

The reception of *Sugar Cane Alley* in Martinique itself reveals that Palcy's efforts to re-vision the role of blacks on the silver screen was welcomed by her fellow Martinicans. César (1994, 13) describes the screening of the film on the island as "a success without precedent in Martinique." She goes on to say:

> The movie theater in Fort-de-France did not empty itself for months. The film itself was received with enthusiasm by the public of Martinique which recognized itself for the first time on the screen. In "Rue cases-Negres", it is no longer the Negro-clown, the servant or the boxer of the early North American cinema, whose only function is to entertain the whites that is presented, but black men and women with whom the Martinican people can identify themselves.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that simply seeing themselves on screen would be sufficient for Martinicans to support a film as enthusiastically as they did *Sugar Cane Alley*. Palcy is clearly aware that the reception of her film may have been radically different at another time, perhaps when the psychosocial structures of Martinican society, as identified by writers like Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, or as described by Zobel, left many Martinicans unwilling to acknowledge their true racial

---

[150]For example, the film, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, based on the novel of the same name and written by the white Jamaican writer, Jean Rhys, (and which is a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*), depicts lush locations and mysterious "natives" who, together with the sun, somehow lead inevitably to the psychological breakdown of whites, even those locally born. This follows the in the tradition of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

and cultural identity. Palcy (Givanni 1992, 294-5) ascribes the success of the film's reception in Martinique to the inroads made by people like Aimé Césaire, whose establishment of the cultural institution, SERMAC (Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle), with its emphasis on, and promotion of, aspects of Black culture, paved the way for her:

> It [SERMAC] worked well and did a lot to help people gain a new sense of their cultural and racial identity. It helped break down many complexes, such as being Black, that many people suffered from. Césaire uses culture as a weapon to make people aware of themselves and their potential... I have to say very strongly that it is thanks to this kind of cultural work that Césaire was able to instill in Martinique an affirmation of a new sense of culture and race identity. I believe this prepared the way for people in Martinique to receive my film, *Rue Cases-Nègres* [Sugar Cane Alley], with the enthusiasm and pride they did. Without this kind of cultural work to make people aware and to accept and be proud of themselves and their culture, they would never have been able to accept this film. They would be ashamed of it; they would likely be saying, ‘Look how she is showing the misery and the negative aspects of our country!’

The significance of such racial/cultural affirmation was certainly not underestimated by FR3 which, according to Palcy (Givanni 1992) delayed production of the film. FR3, the French television monopoly in the French Caribbean at the time, had agreed to coproduce the film after Palcy had won a script competition in France and received a grant to make the film and also because it was set in Martinique. She told June Givanni (1992, 292):

> Even though they had shown interest in the film since it was the first one about Martinique, they really did not want to go through with the project because of political reasons. They were worried that it would be the kind that would reaffirm the cultural identity of Martinique, and don't forget at that very moment there was a lot of popular agitation in Guadeloupe and Martinique, with bombs being planted all over the place. So they did not want to encourage a movie like *Rue Cases-Nègres*, but they did not tell me that. I found out a little later after they kept stalling and made me wait and wait...

César (1994, 13-14) argues that the adaptation of Zobel's novel gave the majority of Martinicans an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the literature of their country. She argues that in Martinique, people are not keen readers of literature and that most Martinicans do not go on to read Zobel's work outside of what is assigned at school. César suggests that the film revived a tradition of orality,

widespread in the West Indies, by taking over the role of storyteller through a technological medium which can be considered a modern form of orality.

Palcy's second feature film took her beyond the Caribbean -- to Africa.

A Dry White Season

The film which brought Palcy international acclaim and recognition is also a story of oppression. *A Dry White Season* (1989) stars international celebrities like Donald Sutherland, Susan Sarandon and Marlon Brando, and well-known black South African actors, Winston Ntshona and Zakes Mokae, and the white South African-born British actress Janet Suzman. The film is based on the novel of the same name by the South African Afrikaner writer, André Brink.[151] The novel was first published in Afrikaans in 1979.

Shot on location in neighboring Zimbabwe, *A Dry White Season* is a powerful indictment against apartheid in South Africa. Palcy wrote the screenplay, which revolves around the political awakening of an Afrikaner schoolteacher, Ben du Toit, after the murder of his black gardener, Gordon Ngubene. Ngubene had been goaded into confronting the police after the death of his young son, Jonathan, while in police custody.

---

[151]The term "Afrikaner" refers to Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans, primarily of Dutch, but also of French and other European immigrant stock, who imposed a system of legalized racism on the black population in South Africa, and in neighboring Namibia. Afrikaners constitute about 60% of the white population in South Africa; the rest are primarily of British descent.

Testament to Palcy's determination and persuasiveness is the screen appearance of Marlon Brando for the first time since 1980. His performance in *A Dry White Season* earned him nominations for both an Oscar and the Golden Globe award in the Best Supporting Actor category. Brando's interest in the project led him to work for remuneration at union scales instead of the enormous salary he could have commanded.[152] Nevertheless, the film cost $9 million to make. Palcy's anti-apartheid project took five years to complete, so it emerged in the wake of a spate of anti-apartheid feature films that were released in the late 1980s. These include Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* (1987), Chris Menges' *A World Apart* (1988) and Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogatlane's *Mapantsula* (1988).

For Palcy to have obtained the backing of a Hollywood studio was no mean feat, considering that no black woman had previously been given the chance to direct a Hollywood film. As Jeff Hayward (1991, 1), a British freelance journalist noted, "if ever there was a Hollywood award for bucking the odds, film director Euzhan Palcy surely would win it. Female, inexperienced, young, black and Francophone, she managed to persuade a major Hollywood studio to bankroll a controversial feature film." Actually, Palcy had already won international success with *Sugar Cane Alley* and had made several shorter films for French and Martinican television, so she was

---

[152]Brando's last screen appearance was in *The Formula* (1980). Subsequent to the release of *A Dry White Season*, Brando complained about the fact that MGM's cuts resulted in his role in the film being reduced to a cameo appearance; Brando is on the screen for about 20 minutes of the film.

not as inexperienced as Hayward asserts. Palcy has suggested that being French may have helped, rather than hindered, her acceptance as a black woman director in Hollywood, arguing that she is unlikely to have been given the opportunity had she been African-American. That she was not, became an important tool in the hands of MGM's marketing executives, who stressed the Frenchness of the director in the promotion of *A Dry White Season*. Few newspaper articles failed to describe Palcy's beauty and her French chic and accent, often in glowing terms. [153]

Nevertheless, despite her success with *Sugar Cane Alley*, Palcy was unable to obtain financial backing to do an anti-apartheid film in Europe. Surprisingly, this did not deter Palcy from considering Hollywood, usually far more conservative -- and far less likely to greenlight an anti-apartheid film with a black woman as director -- than the French who, at the time, had taken an openly anti-apartheid stance (while Reagan pushed ahead with his agenda of "constructive engagement"). Palcy was deeply committed to bringing the injustices of apartheid to the world's attention in the way she knew best -- the silver screen.

Soon after *Sugar Cane Alley* won the Silver Lion award at the Venice Film Festival in 1983, Palcy had approached Hollywood producers with a script dealing with apartheid as seen through the eyes of a young, black girl. She had no luck. Easton (1989, 20) notes that “it was not surprising, given the major studio’s track record on racial themes, that no one even nibbled.” However, Palcy was approached by Warner

---

[153]See, for example, Britt (1989), Mckenna (1989), Weis (1990) and Southgate (1989).

Brothers who, impressed by *Sugar Cane Alley*, asked her to direct an adaptation of Andre Brink's novel, *A Dry White Season*. Warner assigned British producer, David Puttnam, to the project in 1985.

According to Sephocle (1990-1), this choice of Andre Brink's novel was the first of the compromises Palcy had to make to bring her desire to make an anti-apartheid film to reality. She quotes Palcy as saying that "Hollywood would not have endorsed a completely Black story." The compromises had begun. In an interview Palcy told Sheila Johnston (1990) of the British newspaper, *The Independent* :

> Warner Brothers invited me to come and see them: they liked Rue Cases-Negres and it did well in the States. And A Dry White Season is a typical Hollywood story - the white man fighting the whole system, to die a hero for the black people. I knew in my heart this wasn't what I wanted to do, but I decided to try and bring them round to my idea.[154]

Palcy's "idea" was to give the black characters greater prominence while Warner wanted "a good and heroic Ben du Toit flanked by a self-righteous white seductress in a twirling love story" (Sephocle 1990-1, 15). Collin Welland -- whose previous credits include *Chariots of Fire* (1981) -- was commissioned to write the

---

[154] Nevertheless, it should be noted that *A Dry White Season* is the first anti-apartheid feature to make the white protagonist an Afrikaner.

screenplay for *A Dry White Season*. Palcy, however, rejected the screenplay as too dry and too white! During a visit to Northwestern University in April 1997, Palcy told students in a class on pan-African cinema that she found the script racist. She went on to note that both Welland and a studio executive told her that blacks must be portrayed as amusing, because a script without blacks being funny is simply not commercial. Palcy argues that black filmmakers must learn to strategize when dealing with Hollywood in order to be able to bring their own visions to the screen rather than the demeaning ones preferred by Hollywood executives.

Palcy's version of the script attempts to expand the story beyond the experiences of one [white] man, and to downplay the very aspect of the novel Warner wanted highlighted -- the romance between Ben and a female journalist (played by Susan Sarandon). She could do this because of developments at Warner. Puttnam and Palcy had worked together for a year before Puttnam moved to Columbia Pictures in 1986. Paula Weinstein, who had served as an executive at several Hollywood studios, was assigned to the replace Putnam as producer of the project, much to Palcy's dismay. Palcy remembers her response: "of course, I didn't trust her. David [Puttnam] wasn't a Hollywood producer, but she was. I was very scared she wouldn't understand me, wouldn't share my view about the project." But Weinstein turned out to be an ally. She "was already working on a script about South Africa but she put it aside because she was enthusiastic about making a film on the subject with a woman director, and even more [with] a black woman" (Hayward 1991, 1). Weinstein, like Palcy, wanted the film to give greater attention to black perspectives than Welland was able or willing to do.

Even though Welland's name remains in the credits, his script was not retained. Palcy re-wrote the script for *A Dry White Season*.

The project encountered a major setback in 1987 when Warner, disappointed at the lack of commercial success of another anti-apartheid film, Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom*, was now reluctant to go ahead with *A Dry White Season*. Weinstein took the project to MGM's chief executive, Alan Ladd, who agreed to produce the project. The film was finally released in 1989.

According to Palcy, she and Weinstein had traveled to southern Africa to conduct research. Palcy has stated in several interviews that the making of the film took a heavy emotional toll on her. However, her travels in Johannesburg, Soweto and Lenasia, enabled her to make an anti-apartheid film that (except for *Mapantsula*, which approaches the subject less directly), is more powerful and gut-wrenching than either *Cry Freedom* or *A World Apart*.[155]

Brink's novel is framed by the commentary of a romance writer, a former college roommate of Ben's, who receives a package of documents sent to him by Ben, prior to the latter's death. The novel follows the political awakening of Ben du Toit, an Afrikaner schoolteacher who is content to live his comfortable life in a Johannesburg suburb without much concern for the plight of the millions of black South Africans whose lives touch his only marginally. Brink, however draws him as a decent man

---

[155] Lenasia is a township for South Africans of Indian descent, and is located near Johannesburg and Soweto.

whose patronage pays for the education of Jonathan, son of the school's gardener, Gordon Ngubene, as long as the boy does well at school. Ben "generously" passes on the old clothes of his own son when the latter has outgrown them. In return, Gordon works on Ben's garden on the weekend.

When Gordon's son, Jonathan, is killed by the police during the aftermath of the Soweto uprising in June 1976, the grief-stricken Gordon is determined to find out where his son was buried, but his "cheekiness" results in his own arrest, torture and murder at the hands of the police. An entire state apparatus of police administrators, lawyers, doctors and judges move into gear to classify the murder as a suicide. However, Ben's personal relationship with Gordon and his knowledge that Gordon had not constituted a threat to the state, becomes the motivating force for Ben's persistence in trying to uncover the truth about Gordon's death. Of course, it is left unclear as to whether Ben would have been as concerned to uncover the truth had Gordon been a political activist.[156]

Ben's basic sense of decency is so strong that he is willing to jeopardize his marriage and his relationships with his colleagues at school, his daughters and his community. His search for the truth leads to a friendship with a family friend of the

---

[156] Although it may appear that the Ben's concern for an "innocent" man provides greater credibility regarding the extent of his own radicalization, it should be noted that in the South African context, this not necessarily the case. Many white South Africans, even those who considered themselves "liberal" often believed that blacks who engaged in anti-apartheid political activity were "terrorists", and that their imprisonment and punishment must have been deserved. Those who did not rock the boat were, therefore, "good" blacks and worthy of defense.

Ngubenes, Stanley Makhaya, who becomes his guide to apartheid. In addition, a strange sort of intimacy develops between Ben and Gordon's torturer, Captain Stolz, as the latter monitors Ben's activities. The novel also includes a short-lived romance with a liberal journalist whose own anti-apartheid activities earn her exile, and the romance is used by the security police to blackmail Ben.

The backing of a Hollywood studio, and its attendant access to internationally recognized stars, brought with it a degree of legitimation that, one could argue, was bought at the price of reinforcing white racist ideologies that perpetuate the notion that apartheid and racism are individual character flaws. In the case of apartheid, an entire system of brutal and racist structures, institutionalized and legalized are, in the film, embodied primarily in the characters of Colonel Viljoen and later, Captain Stolz, while the resistance to apartheid is similarly embodied in the characters of the protagonist Ben and the black activist, Stanley Makaya, and their awkward interracial friendship. The novel, to its credit, captures the sense of ever-present and often seemingly anonymous threat that any person who has had the misfortune of attracting the attention of the South African security police knows too well.

The figure of Captain Stolz is, as any South African anti-apartheid activist would recognize, eminently replaceable by a dozen others exactly like him, so that killing one individual does not further the cause of ending apartheid or replacing an illegitimate government. The anti-apartheid movement's philosophy, both within and outside the country, never gave credence to the notion of eliminating individuals -- an approach that would have posited such individuals as "rogues" -- favoring instead a

systematic challenge to the structures of apartheid, as well as a collective approach to its own organizations and structures.[157]

Since the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa had never targeted individual whites in the effort to eradicate apartheid, the cinematically familiar and predictable climax in which Stanley kills Captain Stolz is only cathartic (as the reactions of audiences will testify) in the context of a film which presents the evil of a pervasive system of brutal oppression as the character flaws of a few members of the South African government. The inherent conservatism of the Hollywood mode of production requires the presentation of the obscenity of apartheid as the individual flaws of a few racists determined to preserve their status. The narrative formulas of a large-budget, economically conservative, ideologically liberal,[158] and ultimately cautious production structure, undermines the very sincere and dedicated efforts of the

---

[157] According to a *New York Times*, August 22 1996, article, *De Klerk blames rogue security units for apartheid terror*, the former President of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk, apologized for the atrocities of apartheid, at the same time claiming that many of these atrocities were the work of rogue officers and officials in his regime, and were never officially sanctioned by him.

[158]Here I am referring to "liberal" in the sense of pro-capitalist ideologies that promote a respect for the *forms* of democracy -- a free press, electoral politics and legal equality for all. All violations of these forms of democracy are approached from a reformist rather than a radical perspective. In South Africa, as Nixon (1991) has pointed out, liberals (the best known proponent is probably the late Alan Paton, author of *Cry the beloved country*), have been willing to extend access to such forms of democracy to blacks, but with a great deal of qualifying rhetoric (such as a qualified franchise in which blacks having a certain minimum level of education would be allowed to vote). Ultimately, all of these qualifiers aimed to ensure that white control would never be threatened. Nixon also points out that in the South African context, the term "liberal" connotes a right of center perspective, while in the US it connotes a left of center one.

filmmaker to make a film intended to act as an intervention in the anti-apartheid struggle by spreading a consciousness about the South African situation. The flip side, of course, is that such liberal perspectives, which are undergirded by a desire to reform apartheid rather than to eliminate it, are accompanied by what Nixon (1991, 503) calls "an emphasis on individual altruism as a force for social change - most notably, it might be added, by *white* altruism." *Cry Freedom* has Donald Woods, *A World Apart* has Ruth First and a recent release featuring three women protagonists (*Friends* 1991) depicts an angst-ridden young white woman as an undercover member of the ANC who plants a bomb in an airport.

Brink's novel does not go as far as the film in its individualist stance, although its psychological approach reflects a white perspective in its emphasis on Ben's personal moral and spiritual development. This liberal white perspective is also reflected in Brink's characterization of the struggle as being, ultimately, one between two white (Afrikaner) characters, namely Stolz and Du Toit, with blacks performing the obligatory supporting roles. [159] This device, both in the novel and in the film, functions not just as a racial substitution (since the struggle was conducted primarily -- though not exclusively -- by blacks, but also as an ideological substitution that undermines the very substance of the anti-apartheid struggle -- collective, a mass movement -- in the same way that David Attenborough's so-called tale of the life and

---

[159]The term "the struggle" was commonly used in South Africa to refer to anti-apartheid activities.

death of Steve Biko was displaced by the "heroism" of Donald Woods in a manner profoundly contradictory to the philosophies of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) that Biko headed. Ironically, the BCM's struggle was focused precisely on the need for blacks to fight their own battles, a philosophy for which Biko gave his life and which his white journalist-friend used as the basis of his self-written ode to Donald Woods.

Although to a lesser extent, *A Dry White Season* shares with another commercially released anti-apartheid film, Chris Menges' *A World Apart*, a reliance on the familial and interpersonal dramas so beloved of Hollywood dramas, depicting a closed social circle which is impacted on by one member's interaction with the larger struggle. *A World Apart* is written from the perspective of Shawn Slovo, the daughter of Ruth First, a white anti-apartheid activist and writer and a member of the South African Communist Party, who was exiled and eventually killed (by a letter-bomb) by the apartheid state. This privileging of the daughter's psychological conflicts, rooted in feelings that she had been abandoned in the interests of the struggle echoes, as Nixon (1991) has pointed out, a similar story by the (white) South African writer, Nadine Gordimer, whose tale was based on the daughter-father relationship of another white South African activist, Bram Fischer. One cannot imagine such importance being given to the perspective of the child of an activist if that activist was black. Such a self-indulgent perspective in the face of much larger issues of survival are, of course, the prerogative of being white, resulting from the fact of participation in the struggle being a matter of *choice*.

And so we have the stolid Ben of *A Dry White Season*, whose slow awakening to the hidden (to *white* South Africans) mechanisms of the structures of apartheid is convincingly portrayed in Brink's novel, marred as that novel is by unconscious racism. The novel reflects a white male's perspective on black bodies in particular, referring to Gordon's wife, Emily, as shapeless or bloated, to Stanley as a huge mass of flesh, to Gordon's hands as "grey claws", etc. The white female characters, however, are described as beautiful and/or desirable (including Du Toit's own perception of Suzette, the daughter who betrays him), while white males appear to be undeserving of physical description, presumably since they are the norm against which both the "corporeality" of blacks (both male and female), and the "desirability" of white females are evaluated. Palcy does not retain Brink's perspectives on black bodies as shapeless or corpulent in the casting of Emily and Stanley. In addition, she provides a critique of Brink's perspective in the novel by adding a scene in the film in which a police chief makes a comment on the phone that "die vrou is soos 'n olifant gebou. En vyfteen kinders! (the wife is built like an elephant. And fifteen children!)." As a comment on how South African whites perceive and denigrate black bodies, however, the effect of this remark is somewhat muted by the fact that the line is delivered in Afrikaans and, therefore, intelligible only to South African audiences.

The film departs from the novel in a conscious attempt by Palcy to redress the balance of black-white perspectives. Although the film's protagonist remains a white man (a feature reinforced by the casting of a well-known actor such as Sutherland in that role), Palcy's script allows considerable screen time to be allocated to the black

characters. The viewer is permitted to experience directly, for example, the intergenerational disparities in outlook within the black community, or the pretense of subservience the usually cynical and aggressive Stanley is forced to adopt when trying to obtain information from the police on Jonathan's whereabouts. The bewilderment, rage, anguish, etc., of black South Africans are not mediated through a white lens, which would have distanced us from the grim experience of parents who, in search of their son, are forced to walk through mortuaries filled with the corpses of schoolchildren shot by the police. Palcy's editing juxtaposes this scene with that of Ben horsing around with his young son, Johan, in the garden of their comfortable suburban home.

Also contextualized through an effective use of the cinematic medium is the militancy of black youth as the camera lingers on Gordon's younger son, Robert, as he witnesses the anguish of his parents when his father relays the news of her son's death to Emily. The camera remains centered on Robert even as the parents move off-screen, wordlessly communicating through a slow pan as Robert hesitantly follows his parents, that the seeds of political activism are planted early in life for many black South Africans. In addition, the creative use of sound can have a powerful impact, as when Palcy persuades her producer to re-allocate funds intended for dramatic helicopter shots in the scenes of the Soweto uprising to employ additional extras. She replaced the expensive helicopter shot with the off-screen sound of helicopters to "create images with sound", noting that in conversations with her, several people have referred to the helicopters in the scene as if they had actually seen them.

Palcy set out to make *A Dry White Season* the story of two South African families, one black, one white. Brink, the novelist, was apparently pleased with the changes, feeling that they were justified, and stating that he wished he had made some of those changes himself. Despite some reservations about the Hollywoodian ending, he acknowledged that "after *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart* there couldn't be another film seen only from a white point of view" (Guttridge 1990,17).

But Palcy's changes are quite wide-ranging. In the novel, Stanley carries the burden of providing the black perspective (or, at least, *one* black perspective) in a narrative that privileges those of whites in all their varying political affiliations. Kolocotroni and Taxidou (1992, 40) have observed that the inclusion of a narrator (a former college roommate of Ben's) in the novel "simply adds to the pervasiveness of the white mediation of the story. The issue here is not the exclusion of the black perspective but its ultimate subjugation and reduction to the white personal experience." Palcy not only eliminates the narrator, she reverses the novel's emphasis on the white personal to the black political. This becomes apparent from the outset when, within minutes of the opening of the film, violence explodes onto the screen. By the time we meet Ben, the political and social context has been established.

Another change that Palcy makes is to the nature of the relationship between Ben and Stanley. In the novel, Brink seals the bond of interracial friendship between Ben and Stanley through the establishment of a sense of personal commonality, arising out of experience based on their common humanity. Kolocotroni and Taxidou (1992, 45) note that this friendship is depicted as "one that transcends race and history";

through an "almost 'aracial' discourse, the text unproblematically elides historical and political difference." Compare the dialogue in the novel (Brink 1979, 85) with Palcy's version in the film.

> " We fought with clay sticks."
>
> "And made clay oxen. And roasted tortoises."
>
> "And robbed birds' nests and caught snakes."
>
> They both burst out laughing, without really knowing why. Something had changed, in a manner inconceivable only a few minutes earlier.

Palcy's version of this encounter takes place in the taxicab as Stanley drives Ben out of Soweto township:

> "Who are you, Stanley?"
>
> "A mean black cat in the night, lanie." (laughs)
>
> "You are. And Emily?"
>
> "She's like a sister. We grew up together."
>
> "Then you're Zulu."
>
> "Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, whatever. I'm African, that's all."
>
> "Me too. My father had a farm. I grew up like any African boy in the bush. Ate African porridge, no shoes except..."
>
> (Stanley interrupts).

"Barefoot? no vote? carry pass-book? Robben Island jail?"

(Stanley turns his head slightly towards Ben sitting in the back seat of the taxi).

"Careful, lanie."

The film, as can be seen, depicts Ben as eager to transcend racial and political differences by establishing his own "Africanness." But he is interrupted by Stanley, who cautions him against drawing simple parallels in their experiences. Brink's perspective, that of a white liberal, suggests that individuals can simply overcome decades of inequalities of power maintained through brutal oppression through their personal commonalities, but the film presents a black perspective that is acutely conscious that their antagonistic history dictates careful negotiation.

Palcy made changes too, to the character of the only substantial role played by a black woman in the film. In the novel, Emily commits suicide after hearing of the death of her second child, Robert, who had joined a guerrilla movement and was killed when he encountered a South African army patrol on the Mozambican border. Emily throws herself in front of a train on Christmas day. Palcy discovered that this characterization of Emily was a highly problematic one in the South African context where many black women have lost husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, cousins, as well as daughters, mothers, sisters, etc., to the struggle.

Palcy's research in Soweto brought her into contact with black women who found the notion of committing suicide in the face of apartheid's assault on their families incomprehensible. Suicide has not been the recourse of such women and to depict Emily in this manner reflects the imposition of a white male's perception of a (white?) woman's likely response onto black women. Instead, Palcy changed the circumstances of Emily's death to integrate into the narrative the plight of black women in the townships who are widowed -- i.e., they are evicted from their homes because the state will only allow a black male head of household to rent a house. The loss of a husband also means the loss of one's home in a country where a black woman never attains legal majority (Black women were, under apartheid, always legal minors). Instead, Palcy presents Emily's death as resulting from a beating by policemen who forcibly take away her children in an attempt to force her to leave her home. Emily is portrayed throughout the film as a woman who resists the encroachment of the state on her rights. She is the one who insists on an inquest into her husband's death and fights off the policemen trying to remove her children.

The inclusion of Emily's forced eviction -- and her resistance to it – illustrates once again the pan-African feminist perspective that the sources of oppression for black women/women of color are multiple. Emily's circumstances are not the result of her gender alone (white widows are not forced out of their homes) nor of her race alone (the law does not require the eviction of black men who have been widowed) but because she is both black *and* female. Emily's steely determination thus embodies the

notions of rebelliousness, self-reliance and struggle for social transformation characteristic of a pan-African feminism.

White women are portrayed in the novel and in the film as having a range of perspectives. Ben's wife, Susan, is opposed to his involvement in any activity that interferes with her domestic comfort and, once aware of the brutal nature of the apartheid regime's activities, chooses to side with it on the basis of racial affinity. Nevertheless, despite the sexual and political betrayal of her husband, Susan does not exact revenge by betraying him to the authorities. Instead, she leaves him. It is Ben's daughter, Suzette, who finds herself unable to remain silent or inactive in the face of the threat to Afrikaner supremacy that her father now constitutes, and who is willing to go a step further than her mother in her opposition to Ben's "betrayal."

Both Afrikaner women are portrayed as unable to develop a political consciousness beyond the narrow constraints of Afrikaner unity and their own personal comfort. Mother and daughter are aligned with the forces of oppression and injustice, while father and son reflect the potential of Afrikaner enlightenment. Among the major white characters, it is the Afrikaner males -- Ben and his son, Johan – and the English-speaking white journalist, Melanie Bruwer, who represent the potential of a new, democratic South Africa. [160]

Palcy attempts to integrate into the film a number of issues that would provide a broader sociohistorical context for events that, in the novel, are simply ignored. "I

---

[160] In the novel, Melanie is the child of a Jewish mother and an Afrikaner father.

discreetly interviewed blacks and Indians who witnessed the events of '76. I also talked to children and adults who were tortured. It gave the plot substance and pieces of real life that I tried to dramatize as realistically as possible" (Hayward 1991, 7).

Many analyses of films, particularly those conducted by scholars whose training is in literature, fall into the trap of ignoring the cinematic medium's unique formal characteristics that distinguish it from the literary medium. In drawing on literary models of analysis, such scholars provide thematic analyses, or examinations of characterization and ideology, but fail to examine how these are influenced by the grammar of cinematic language. Elements such as editing, or mise-en-scene, composition and camera position/movement and use of sound may enhance, undermine or subvert what appears to be dominant meanings or themes. For example, despite the fact that Palcy maintained a white character as the protagonist in the film, there is substantial screen time given to black perspectives, and music used in the film draws upon black South African genres.

The opening scene of the film proper (i.e. after the opening credits, which run over a non-diegetic scene of the two boys who portray Jonathan and Johan playing soccer and horsing around, accompanied by the *a capella* sound of Ladysmith Black Mambazo) begins with a scene at a government-sponsored beerhall in Soweto. The first line of the film is uttered by a young black activist who chides his elders with the accusation, "O baba [our fathers], how can we fight for freedom when our fathers sit in the government halls and get drunk? Boycott these places! The beer that you drink

buys the bullets that kill your children." Such intergenerational differences in black perspectives are not included in the novel.

The opening scenes of the film are clearly edited to make a comparative statement about the conditions of life for blacks and whites. Two bare-footed black boys play soccer in a dusty vacant lot when the police arrive and beat the children with batons, dragging one into the police van. His cries blend into the sound of white (Afrikaner) youths playing rugby on a neatly trimmed grassy field, cheered on by their teachers and parents. The Afrikaner national pastime of rugby is a game known for its violence, contextualizing the early inculcation of violent behavior in Afrikaner youths. The circumstances of play between black and white youth is contrasted as Palcy establishes that one group lives in poverty and are subjected to violence, and the other lives in affluence and trains its youth at an early age to perpetrate it.

The Hollywood mode of production's demands combined with Palcy's desire to make a film that captures a sense of the black experience make the film a strange amalgam of a family drama and a political thriller. While the first half of the film presents the black family's suffering, the second half of the film concentrates on the deterioration in the Du Toit family's hitherto cohesive comfort -- foundered on an indifference to the larger issues of the society in which they live -- and soon develops into a thriller in which the aim is to obtain a set of affidavits for publication by the media -- somewhat reminiscent of *Cry Freedom's* depiction of the attempt to get Woods out of the South Africa.

Nor does Brink's novel provide the cathartic release of the film's climax in which the black taxi-driver/activist, Stanley, kills the torturer Captain Stolz. Stanley simply disappears -- the novel suggesting possible exile to neighboring Swaziland. Ironically, the very act of agency that Palcy gives to a black character in the film, and which Brink could not give to any of his black characters without consequent punishment by death, also reinforces the individualist characterization of the both sides of the struggle, that of anti-apartheid forces in the form of Stanley and the embodiment of the apartheid system in the characters of a few individuals, primarily Stolz. Still, the act permits Palcy to allow a black man to have the last word (or act of agency) while the novel presents blacks as hapless victims or backdrop/support.

Perhaps what is most conspicuous in a comparison of *Sugar Cane Alley* and *A Dry White Season*, both adaptations of novels, is that in the former, the film's point of view is that of a character who is *of* his community, while that of the latter is that of a character pitted *against* his community -- depending, of course, on how broadly one defines that community. In this sense, the former emerges from a worldview that is reflected in the form of a Third Cinema narrative, that of the autobiographical narrative, which Gabriel (1991b, 58) describes as not "autobiography in its usual Western sense of a narrative by and about a single subject", but rather "a multi-generational and trans-individual autobiography, i.e., a symbolic autobiography where the *collective* subject is focus."

A Dry White Season's biography of a man coming to political consciousness is, on the other hand, consistent with the Western concept of the individual hero

characterized by his/her alienation from the social collective -- which forms the basis of the type of dramatic narrative standardized by the industrial mode of production. As such, it is an anti-apartheid film, but not a testimony to the people of South Africa who were most severely victimized by it and who waged decades of struggle against a series of oppressive regimes (even prior to the National Party's institution of apartheid as official policy). Palcy attempts to counter this narrative orientation by the inclusion, at the end of the film, of a frame of text that notes that as of 1989, the South African government continues to violate the human rights of its citizens opposed to apartheid. It ends with a dedication to “the thousands who have given their lives, and to those who carry on the fight for a free and democratic South Africa.”

The context within which Palcy was working, i.e., the Hollywood mode of production, required her to negotiate between the potential to reach a worldwide audience with an anti-apartheid message and the limitations imposed by an ideological/economic logic that refuses to see any value in themes that portray blacks as agents of their own history.

Perhaps, it is for this reason that Palcy said in an interview (Johnston 1990, 12):

> I have many propositions from the studios, but I didn't want to make two American films back to back. I won't do like many of these European film-makers who are called there because of their signature, their style, and when they arrive, America makes them change and do

> films their way. Hollywood didn't give me my first chance to be a film-maker; why should I sell it my soul? What I'm interested in is black subjects and if Hollywood doesn't want to produce them, I won't make my films there.

Acker (1991, 120) argues that the marketing of the film made the film less successful commercially than it should have been, noting that "MGM did not have a clear vision on how to market the film. In the public's mind it rode in on the tails of the much less focused CRY FREEDOM. As a result, this skillful, moving film did not do well at the box office.[161] But box-office results are not always an accurate barometer of a movie's worth." No doubt, the film's release at the tail end of a spate of anti-apartheid films may have simply encountered a public weary of films on the subject of racial oppression.

Despite its shortcomings, the changes Palcy brought to the film reflect an ideological perspective that is rooted in Palcy's own identity as a black woman. *A Dry White Season* remains the only anti-apartheid feature film made outside of South Africa that permits a substantial degree of screen time to be given to black South African perspectives.

---

[161] Box-office receipts in the US grossed only $3.766 million (*Internet Movie Database* 1998**)**

Kraft (1989) reports that *A Dry White Season* was banned in South Africa upon initial release on the grounds that it was "a biased and highly emotional threat to public order." However, it was allowed to be screened in an uncut version to "discerning" festival audiences only (Kraft 1989; Baneshik 1989), where the film attracted standing-room only audiences. According to Baneshik, the film received positive reviews in the English-language press in South Africa.

Siméon

After the release of *Sugar Cane Alley*, Palcy set up her own production company called Saligna Productions, "because I was fed up with the fact that we had nothing to do with the production end... We have to stop complaining, always waiting for others to help us. We have to take charge ourselves or at least try to. I let Saligna Production lie for a while waiting for the right break. When I returned from the USA I launched *Siméon*, our first big production" (Dessout 1992, 94). In addition, Palcy believed that establishing her own production company would enable her to give a larger number of young, aspiring black filmmakers an opportunity to obtain hands-on training as crew members on Saligna productions. The name of her company, Saligna, had been recommended by the late Douta Seck -- who played Médouze in *Sugar Cane Alley* – and refers to the Dioula goddess of love and prosperity (Palcy 1997).

Palcy's third feature film brought her back to the Caribbean. *Siméon*, released in 1992, was made with financial assistance from the local authorities of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as several French television stations. Palcy noted in an

interview that because she had, by this time, established herself as a filmmaker, there were a number of financiers interested in the project, but they wanted her to produce it as a low-budget film. Palcy argues that many financiers have a racially-based set of standards when deciding to what extent they will finance a production, stating that "they are willing to give money to black people but [act as if] it is really too much, considering there are only black actors on the screen. No white actors at all. 'Since it is you, we are willing to go as high as 28 million.' On the other hand, if I had made the film with a white movie star, they would have given me as much as I wanted" (Dessout 1992, 94).

Co-scripted by Palcy and Jean-Pierre Rumeau from an original story by Palcy, *Siméon* is a film about an Afro-Caribbean genre of music known as zouk, which has emerged in Martinique and its sister island, Guadeloupe, also an "overseas department" of France. A young girl, named Orelie, is the daughter of an aspiring zouk musician named Isidore Barthelemy, who is a mechanic and a protege of Siméon, a music teacher and lover of rum and women. Siméon meets an untimely death from a fall while serenading the moon after a night of drinking and partying.

Young Orelie steals a braid of hair from Siméon's corpse before he is buried, unaware that his spirit cannot move on if a part of him is left behind. The talented musician comes back literally as a spiritual adviser to Orelie's widowed father, Isidore. Isidore is helped by the local townspeople who raise the money to send him to Paris so he can cut a record in the genre of music "that is our music." In Paris, he forms a new band. He and Siméon also meet a beautiful young lounge singer, Roselyne, who falls in

love with the spirit of Siméon, and who eventually joins Isidore's new band, Jacaranda. In the meantime, Orelie, who adores Siméon, has been attempting to fight off a vengeful little lady of flame from the land of the deceased who is trying to reclaim Siméon.

Once again, Palcy found herself working with non-professional actors due to the lack of a drama school in the French West Indies (Palcy 1997). The characters of Isidore and Roselyne are played by Jacob Desvarieux and Jocelyne Beroard, both of whom are members of the real-life zouk band, Kassav'.[162] *Siméon* may have been intended as a vehicle for zouk in the manner of the reggae success, *The Harder They Come*, which also stars a well-known performer in the genre -- Jimmy Cliff. Like reggae, zouk is an Afro-Caribbean musical form, and is characterized by polyrhythmic drumming and Creole lyrics.[163] It is influenced by other African and African Diaspora musical genres such as the makossa rhythms of Cameroonian Manu Dibango, and the melodic riffs of Zairean soukous (Berrian 1997). The music of Dibango and the band Malavoi are also featured in the film.

---

[162] Several other members of this band play lesser roles in the film. Berrian (1997) notes that the band's name refers to a mix of crushed cassava, coconut and sugar, popular in the French West Indies. However, there is some kind of poison in the cassava that must be extracted prior to eating it. Berrian quotes the group's sole female member (who plays Roselyne in the film) as saying that Kassav' chose its name "because they had to extract what was poisoning Martinican and Guadeloupean music."

[163] Berrian (1997) notes that the form of Creole used in Kassav's lyrics combines Martinican and Guadeloupean Creole.

Siméon departs from Palcy's earlier two films -- despite the seemingly familiar use of a young child as narrator and the (partially) Caribbean setting -- in terms of both its aesthetic characteristics and the less explicitly political nature of its thematic concerns. *Siméon* is a lighthearted fantasy/musical which required special effects and shooting on location in France and the Caribbean. The first and third acts are set in the Caribbean (it is not clear on which island specifically) while Act II shifts between Paris and the Caribbean. The scenes in Paris are mostly at night, and are shot through blue filters which give the city an air of cold sterility, perhaps depicting a Caribbean perspective of Paris. Although many of the Caribbean night scenes are also shot with a blue filter, many others depict feasting and/or singing and dancing in sunny, cheerful locales. In Paris, even the parties at the House of Flowers and the Sugarcane Club fail to achieve any real sense of joy, and the sequences in which Siméon interacts with other *sucugnans* sometimes appear contrived and unconvincing.

Thematically, Palcy appears to depart from the more serious socio-political concerns of her earlier features, but her decision to make this particular genre of music does, in fact, have political implications. The primary issue of social import in *Siméon* lies in the Creole roots of zouk. Emerging as it does out of the working-class culture of the French West Indies, the lyrics of zouk are in Creole. The narrative depicts the tension between the perceived commodity value of Creole and its low cultural prestige in a scene that occurs in Paris. The recording agent, Philemon, reacts to the use of Creole lyrics with a mixture of contempt and glee at its potential marketing value (which, he argues, resides in the unintelligibility of the lyrics to French audiences in

the same way as English-language lyrics are unintelligible). However, the use of a Creole-based musical genre is also the reason that Philemon refuses to allow Rosalyne (who has already signed a contract with him as a solo performer) to sing with Jacaranda, arguing that she has "French class" and suggesting that singing in Creole would be beneath her.

However, the genre of zouk itself emerged as an attempt to resist the devaluation of African elements in Martinique and Guadeloupe, which had led to the valorization of European musical instruments such as the piano. According to Berrian (1997, 204), "until recently, the piano and the drum symbolized a dichotomy of life styles and values. The French Caribbeans associate the drum with poverty, backwardness, and creole language of the black working class while the piano represents modernity, the French language, and an assimilated life style that apes the French. Both French colonials and the assimilated mulatto middle class tend to regard the drum with contempt."

Berrian (1997, 204) goes on to note that the band featured in the film, Kassav' made a conscious attempt to return the drum to the foreground:

> When Kassav' searched for a way to reclaim the Caribbean heritage and music, the *gwo ka* and *bel air* drums became the symbols of resistance for black islanders, through a rejection of assimilation and a return to the ancestral roots. Assimilation for Martinicans and Guadeloupeans meant a denial of a collective, regional identity, and this is why Kassav' reclaimed the very instrument that

> came with the African slave. The playing of the *gwo ka* and *bel air* drums became a symbolic cry and flight from the enclosed world of French domination.

Thus, *Siméon* begins with a non-diegetic drum dialogue between two young boys over the opening credits. Other African elements in the film include Orelie's voice-over narration drawing upon the crick /crack conventions of African-based storytelling performance. The use of a *sucugnan*, or spirit, as a central character -- who, in this instance as an elder musician, plays the role of a guiding ancestor -- also draws on African cosmologies. Siméon's funeral procession is accompanied by drumming and the singing of the mourners at his funeral is very reminiscent of the *laghia* in *Sugar Cane Alley*.

In *Siméon*, Palcy chose to make the child narrator a girl, who is depicted as having a close relationship not only to her father, but also to some of the other men, specifically the title character, Siméon. Gender dynamics are alluded to only occasionally, as in the brief reference to Isidore's machismo, which emerges during an argument between Isidore and the spirit of Siméon, when the latter argues for Rosalyne's inclusion in the group. Generally, however, women are relegated to the role of minor characters, except for Rosalyne who appears in the latter part of the film and whose character, despite her ability to fall in love with a spirit (and therefore, the essence of a person) is surprisingly bland. As in *Sugar Cane Alley*, the child narrator's biological mother has been dispensed with (also having died) and in *Siméon*, it is a

doting aunt, Lucia, who takes care of Orelie and her siblings. Neither Lucia nor Mrs. Violetta, Siméon's amour, are privileged enough to hear Siméon's spirit -- the only woman who can do so (aside from the little girl, Orelie) is Rosalyne, presumably since she is destined to join the band.

The "cooks' party" in the first act of the film, however, suggests the existence of a separate women's space – which is also a public space -- one in which the women show off their baking and cooking skills to the entire community. The event is a big one with a talent competition for musicians. In addition, although it is only in passing reference, there is an indication that Lucia provides support and comfort to the bereaved Mrs Violetta, who had been led to believe that she was to marry Siméon. One can assume that Lucia and Mrs Violetta constitute part of a female network that rallies to each other's support.

The film's only direct reference to issues relating to racial identity appears in a little vignette in which Orelie's younger sister, Magali, is upset at having received a black doll as a gift from her father in Paris and who is later consoled by Orelie who points out the doll's likeness to Magali.

Siméon appears to be a radical departure from the more realist style of Palcy's previous two features.[164] In *Siméon*, Palcy's experimentation with a different genre and approach is a worthy, if not totally effective, effort. Palcy indulges in special effects

---

[164] I use the phrase "*more* realist" because, as I will argue later, I believe that *Sugar Cane Alley* is a hybrid style.

that sometimes appear superfluous. Some sequences seem rather contrived, such as the party at the House of Flowers, and her use of filters create some heavily saturated blue and red images, but it is not clear to what purpose. The charm of *Sugar Cane Alley*, despite its more serious thematic concerns, is unmatched by *Siméon* -- flawed, perhaps, by its more self-conscious efforts at being light-hearted and witty through the use of a chirpy little Rimbaud-quoting girl as narrator, whose opening voice-over promises us a tale of "things [that] never die, music, memories, loved ones."

Siméon was released in France in 1992. Jean-Michel Frodon of the French newspaper *Le Monde* gave it an unfavorable review, and its critical reception in the US has been mixed. The film has only been shown at festivals in the US. Its mixed reviews may explain why Palcy was not initially able to obtain what she considered a sufficiently profitable distribution deal for the US. However, Palcy has indicated that she expects *Siméon* to be available on the US home-video market in 1997/8.

Palcy's next venture led her into the world of documentary production, and the opportunity to pay tribute to her famous countryman, Aimé Césaire.

Aimé Césaire, A Voice for History

In 1994, Palcy made a three-part documentary series for French television on Aimé Césaire. As one of the founders of the Négritude movement, Aimé Césaire and his supporters had, by 1946, developed a powerful nationalist movement. Despite what Maingot (1992) describes as a "racially and socially bitter campaign" and Césaire's "expressed hatred of the white world", Césaire was elected mayor of Martinique's

capital city, Fort-de-France, and deputy to the French Assembly on a Communist Party ticket (Maingot, 238). When he left the Communist Party in 1956, it was as a rejection of the "fleshless universalism" of Communism because, he believed, it is only through the richness of ethnic particularities that Caribbean people can avoid alienation. "What I wish," wrote Césaire in his letter of resignation from the French Communist Party, "is that Marxism and Communism be utilized to benefit the man of color, not the man of color to benefit Marxism and Communism" (Maingot 1992, 238). Césaire -- now retired from active politics -- had up until 1992, won every election as mayor of Fort-de-France. According to Palcy, Césaire has played a significant role in enabling her to develop her skills as a filmmaker, and his work had a profound impact on her self-identity.

In *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l'histoire/Aimé Césaire, A Voice for History*, Palcy makes her first foray into the world of documentary filmmaking. It is a co-production of her own Saligna Productions with French and Senegalese television stations, including France 3, Radio France Outremer and Radio-Télévision Sénégalaise, and the French audiovisual archive, L'Institut National de Audiovisuel.

Ironically, Palcy herself had had little exposure to Césaire's writings until she moved to Paris. Césaire's work not only came to have a substantial influence on Palcy herself, but she felt motivated to make a three-part television documentary series on his life, work and philosophies (Palcy 1997). When asked why she had chosen to make another documentary on Césaire since one had already been produced by Sarah Maldoror, Palcy said that she considered Césaire her spiritual father, arguing that she

sees her documentary as a complement to any others that have been made about him. At any rate, observes Palcy, Césaire's achievements make even a three-hour series insufficient to cover all aspects of his life and philosophy.

The documentary comprises three 1-hour long episodes. In the first, entitled *L'Ile Veilleuse/ The Vigilant Island*, begins with Césaire talking about his *pays natal*, the island of Martinique, in images of volcanoes spewing lava, maintaining that Martinicans have to be worthy of the creative anger that gave birth to their island -- and which, as we learn later, gave rise to the movement known as Négritude. Césaire's words are accompanied by dramatic footage of volcanic activity and an urgent drumbeat, before a woman's voice begins to relate biographical information -- in the typical authoritative (and rather grating) "voice of God" style of many documentaries -- over a still photograph of a young Césaire.

In this first episode, interviews with Césaire himself as well as other Caribbean literary figures such as Joseph Zobel (the author of *La rue cases nègres*), and Guadelopean novelist, Maryse Condé discuss the role of Césaire and his wife, Suzanne who, together with philosopher René Menil, founded the seminal literary review, *Tropiques*. The publication influenced many of the Caribbean's most prominent black intellectuals, including Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam, a friend of the Césaires, the Martinican psychiatrist and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (a former student of Césaire's), and Haitian writer, René Depestre. After World War 2, Césaire returned to Martinique where he was elected Mayor of Fort-de-France and became Martinique's

representative to the French National Assembly, and began the difficult challenge of balancing poetry and politics.

The second episode, entitled *Au rendez-vous de la conquête/ Where the Edges of Conquest Meet* opens with a black and white still photograph of Paris, establishing Césaire's early period in Paris where, as a young student, he met Leopold Senghor, the man who would later go on to become the first President of Senegal. Senghor's tales of Africa and his characterization of West Indians as belonging to a dismembered Africa was to have a profound effect on Césaire. Joining their tête-à-têtes about blackness was a young, passionate Guyanese poet called Leon Damas. These three men are now considered the founders of Négritude and all three poets would later meet again in the French National Assembly as political representatives of their respective countries. During this period of intense artistic dynamism in black culture, 1930s Paris was the setting where the Negritudinists met a number of black American artists (writers, singers, actors) such as Duke Wellington and Josephine Baker, and a number of literary figures who would become associated with the Harlem Renaissance -- Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Wright and Alain Locke. At the same time, related movements in the development of black pride occurred in Cuba and Brazil with the beginnings of Negrismo and the rise of pan-Africanism. An "insolent Europe" and its arrogant destructiveness is what, according to Césaire, gave rise to Négritude -- a Négritude born of rebellion.

The success of Palcy's documentary lies in bringing us not only the eloquence of the poet Césaire, but of establishing both a historical context for Césaire's decisions

as a politician, as well as a sense of the period of the 1930s and 1940s as a period of great artistic flowering. It was a period characterized by a flow of ideas and influences among black artists from Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. Also raised are thornier issues such as, for example, the question of how a revolutionary like Fanon would react to his former teacher's seemingly conservative act of accepting departmentalization, and how does one reconcile being a Negritudinist with being a Communist?

Palcy attempts to provide a clearer understanding of Négritude and its contradictions, such as Sartre's characterization of Négritude as anti-racist racism, or the criticism of essentialism the concept would later elicit. It becomes apparent, in listening to Césaire describe the difference between himself and Senghor as co-founders of Négritude, that the common ascription of essentialism to the concept may result from a tendency to ascribe to Négritude a certain homogeneity. Césaire himself insists that "it was all the same Négritude" while, at the same time, arguing that the Négritude of an Antillean in search of his identity cannot be the same as that of an African who has never doubted his. Acknowledging that Senghor was somewhat essentialist in his concept of Négritude and of blackness Césaire, nevertheless, defends Senghor's statement that "emotion is Negro as reason is Hellenic", arguing Senghor had never meant that statement to be taken literally. Césaire describes his own Négritude as being founded on history. Part 2 also discusses the friendship between Picasso and Césaire, which resulted in Picasso's illustration of some of Césaire's poetry.

The third and last episode, *La force de regarder demain/The Strength to Face Tomorrow* attempts to situate Césaire in the present in relation to his role as both politician and poet/playwright. It begins with Césaire's contemplations on the release of Nelson Mandela, and on issues of postcoloniality/necoloniality. Discussing his shift from poetry to theater, Césaire comments on his desire to reach a wider audience on the subject of decolonization (and some of the problems and disappointments he foresaw). Douta Seck -- the Senegalese actor who plays Médouze in *Sugar Cane Alley* -- reappears in a clip from Césaire's *La tragedie du Roi Christophe/The Tragedy of King Christophe* as the Haitian leader, Henri Christophe. Other plays by Césaire include *Une saison au Congo/A Season in the Congo* about Patrice Lumumba and *Une tempête/A Tempest*. This episode also considers the role of women in Africa and includes commentary by several authors -- Guadeloupean Maryse Condé, American Maya Angelou, Brazilian Jorge Amado -- on Césaire's role as a literary "ancestor" in African diaspora literature.

The documentary weaves together archival footage and stills, interviews with Césaire's peers, colleagues and friends as well as with Césaire himself, and Césaire's poetry. What is most notable about this documentary effort is the mise-en-scene, and visual compositions which suggest that Palcy may have been attempting to depart from the compositional conventions of documentary filmmaking by drawing upon the aesthetics of fictional film production, creating what appear to be carefully constructed (and beautiful) sets against which to interview Césaire. Palcy's statements suggest that her stylistic approach is one that blurs the distinction between fictional and

documentary conventions. Arguing that she considers her feature films to be docu-dramas because they explore subjects that are grounded in historical reality, she confirms that in making this documentary on Césaire, she approached the use of lighting, locations and sound/music in much the same way as she does with her fictional features.

Not only is Palcy's admiration for her celebrated countryman apparent in this ambitious television series, but also Césaire's influence on her own sense of identity. Her belief that "even if you don't know where you're going, you've got to know where you've come from" (Murray 1993, F3) and her choice of subject matter for her films are, according to Palcy (1997), a result of his influence.

> I am in search of my past. I want to know who I am, where I come from, you know, what's my cultural... my heritage... Césaire is my spiritual father like he is the spiritual father of so many of us... I was saying earlier that if I wasn't Caribbean, I wouldn't be making [this] kind of film. I wouldn't be treating this kind of subject except for Césaire, because Césaire changed my life. Césaire changed my vision of everything, you know. And he is the one who helped me to understand... where I came from. He was talking about Africa -- and who else talked about those things at [that] time? And he made me proud of myself, of my skin and part of my heritage.

Nevertheless, an obvious omission in this documentary is one that will be apparent to anyone familiar with Caribbean intellectual discourses in the past few decades, i.e., the emergence of a notion of Caribbean identity grounded in cultural creolization. Pick (1993, 9) argues that in the Caribbean, the mythologies of *mestizaje* or *creolité* have now become the master narratives of national identity. The most prominent proponent in the French West Indies of such discourses of hybridity, as discussed in Chapter 3, is Edouard Glissant, and his followers, Confiant, Chamoiseau, etc., all of whom are avowed anti-Negritudinists. The documentary does not make any reference to the antagonistic attitude of this movement and its attacks on Négritude in general, or on Césaire in particular.

Two possible reasons come to mind for this omission. Because of her admiration and respect for him, Palcy may have been reluctant to raise a reminder of what has been, according to Kesteloot (1995) rather hurtful attacks on Césaire by Glissant and his fellow proponents of creolity, despite their acknowledgement that "we are all children of Césaire." A second possible reason is that Palcy may have felt that since the target audience for the series was a French television audience, such debates may not only introduce a degree of complexity of little interest and/or comprehensibility to a mass television audience, but that it may reveal a degree of divisiveness among French West Indians that may not reflect well on them.

That Palcy shares ideological sympathies with both schools of thought is clear. She is herself a great admirer of Césaire's literary excellence as well as his valorization of the African aspects of Caribbean cultural identity. Nevertheless, as her own use of

Creole in *Sugar Cane Alley*, and her promotion of zouk music with its Creole lyrics in *Siméon* testify, she undoubtedly shares with the younger intellectuals a commitment to recovering respectability for Creole as a medium of expression, as opposed to the exclusivity of French, which was the language of "choice" of the Negritudinists.[165]

An analysis of Palcy's work reveals that her primary thematic concern is that of her African heritage. In this regard, her interest is not just in the Caribbean-African relationship. Her work reflects a pan-African perspective that encompasses an interest in not only the sociopolitical, historical and cultural aspects of Afro-Caribbean heritage, but in issues relating to people of African descent around the world. She states that "as a black filmmaker, I belong to the diaspora" (Palcy 1997).

Palcy's most recent project was a made-for TV movie about Ruby Bridges, the little girl who became the first person to integrate the New Orleans public school system. Palcy made the television drama for Disney and it was prefaced by remarks by President Clinton and by Michael Eisner, CEO of Disney. It was screened as a Disney special on the Disney-owned television network, ABC, in January 1998, as part of that network's acknowledgement of Black History Month, which in recent years has increasingly extended into January, beginning with the Martin Luther King holiday.

---

[165] I place the term "choice" in quotes because I believe that the specific historical conditions of the period when Négritude swept the Francophone world, probably necessitated breaking down the "master's house with his own tools."

Palcy's current project is a feature film on Bessie Coleman, an African-American aviatrix. *Wings Against the Wind* was inspired by Palcy's admiration of the late African-American filmmaker, the woman she calls "our big sister filmmaker", Kathleen Collins. After seeing a documentary on Collins made by Haile Gerima at a screening in Boston, Palcy was moved to inquire from Gerima about Collins' family and made a visit to her husband, in order to find out whether Collins may have had any projects in mind that she was not able to embark upon prior to her death from cancer -- and the Bessie Coleman film project was born (Palcy 1997). Her next project is planned as an epic about the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture.

A significant feature of Palcy's films is that she does not utilize romantic relationships as a vehicle to explore other issues. In fact, in *A Dry White Season*, Palcy was adamant that the love story that Warner wanted highlighted was not acceptable to her. Palcy's concerns are of a sociopolitical nature, and she has maintained a resistance to allowing romantic intrigues to subsume these concerns, even in *Siméon*.

Palcy's films do not appear to fall easily into either of the categories described by Diawara as constituting the two paradigms of black cinema aesthetics. Diawara (1993, 11) is, admittedly, describing the black American cinematic tradition. He argues that "the realist category has more in common with the classical Hollywood narrative, with its quest for the formation of the family and individual freedom, and its teleological trajectory (beginning, middle, and end). The symbolic narratives have more in common with Black expressive forms like jazz, and with novels by writers such as Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, which stop time to

render audible and visible Black voices and characters that have been suppressed by centuries of Eurocentrism."

Palcy's *A Dry White Season* can clearly be described as realist in style, being firmly grounded in the material reality of the South African situation, and with a linear series of events unfolding over a continuous period of time. *Sugar Cane Alley* and *Siméon*, on the other hand, combine both styles, utilizing linear narratives, but also expressive or symbolic elements. In the former, the past surfaces in the seamless integration of Afro-Caribbean folklore, rituals and the oral tradition within a linear narrative. In the latter, the cyclicality characteristic of the expressive tradition is not so much a matter of going back and forth between the past and present, but between the world of the living and that of the dead.

While Palcy's concerns do include gender issues, they do not take center stage. Palcy is concerned primarily with issues of racial identity as areas of exploration. In this sense, her priorities are reflected in the work of Gloria Rolando of Cuba, whose subjects of interest revolve around her African heritage, and issues relating to the African diaspora.

Much more directly concerned with gender issues, although in interaction with other factors such as class, linguistic imperialism, etc., is the work of the Sistren Collective in Jamaica.

CHAPTER 6: SWEEPING ON - THE SISTREN COLLECTIVE IN JAMAICA

Out of many, one people.

-- Jamaica's national motto

This chapter will focus on a women's theater collective, the Sistren Theatre Collective, established in Kingston, Jamaica during the era of Michael Manley's social democratic government in the 1970s.[166] The Sistren Theatre Collective has survived two decades of difficulties in its attempts to use drama as a medium of social and political advocacy. Sistren's use of drama aims to raise consciousness, conduct research, and influence national policy-making. This chapter will focus on the video documentaries produced by the Collective. By December 1997, Sistren had released five videos, *Sweet Sugar Rage* (1982), *Miss Amy and Miss May* (1990), *Moving On* (1991), *Carrying A Heavy Load* (1992), and *The Drums Keep Sounding* (1994/95).

Sistren's activities have taken place within a framework of organizational democracy in a country that continues to face acute class, race and gender inequities. As Ford-Smith (1989, 21) -- the Collective's drama tutor until 1988 -- has noted, Sistren's emergence in the 1970s differed from other women's organizations in Jamaica because it "emphasised new forms of communication (especially drama) as important ways of making the women's struggle and creativity visible. It also openly criticized male privileges and did so in a thoroughly Jamaican idiom."

---

[166] Michael Manley died in 1997.

While its primary strategy remains the use of participatory drama and workshops, Sistren has, since the early 1980s, produced several video documentaries arising out of its research activities. This chapter will examine those documentaries in greater detail later in this chapter. It is essential to understand Jamaica's historical, geopolitical and economic positioning as determinants of the social, economic and cultural milieu within which Sistren operates, and which inspires the Collective's concerns and influence its choices, both thematic and formal. As in other chapters, I will provide an overview of the social and cultural context before examining the structure and work of Sistren.

Geopolitical and economic background

Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean and is located about 90 miles south of Cuba. It has a population of just over 2.5 million (1994), with an annual per capita income of US$ 1,160. Jamaica's capital Kingston, is also its largest city, with a population of just under half a million people (Jamaica 1992).

The original inhabitants of the island of Jamaica, the Arawak Indians, were exterminated by the Spanish who controlled the island from 1494 until 1655, when the British captured the island. Jamaica became politically independent of British colonial rule in August 1962. Two generations of the Manley family have played a prominent role in the governance of Jamaica. Norman Manley was the Prime Minister of Jamaica prior to independence, and was declared a National Hero. His son Michael, became the Prime Minister of Jamaica in 1972. Two years later he declared his party's platform to

be one of democratic socialism and introduced sweeping social reforms.[167] It was during this period that support for grassroots organization and cultural movements led to the establishment of the Sistren Collective.

Jamaica's economy reeled from the devastation left behind by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, resulting in the re-election of Norman Manley's son, Michael Manley, and his PNP (People's National Party) in local elections in 1986 and in national elections in 1989.[168] Michael Manley left office in 1992 due to ill health. He had begun a program of economic restructuring towards greater market -oriented liberalization. Manley was succeeded by Percival James Patterson who was elected both party leader and prime minister. Patterson has continued Manley's privatization programs and other measures aimed at creating a more market-oriented economy in Jamaica. This has exacerbated the already severe social and economic inequalities that characterize Jamaica. Periodic disturbances in the slums of Kingston have been accompanied by politically-related gang violence.

Tourism and mining form the mainstay of the Jamaican economy, which has shown a slow but steady overall growth since 1991, although such growth is characterized by uneven performance in the various sectors. Tourism is now Jamaica's

---

[167] Predictably, this ideological stance was to earn the disapproval of the US, and segments of the Jamaican population. His party lost the next election, and when he was re-elected Prime Minister in 1989, his party (and Manley himself) has shifted their ideological stance to a decidedly capitalist one.

[168]45 people died and J$400 billion worth of damage was sustained in the wake of Hurricane Gilbert. (*Caribbean Handbook* 1994/95)

primary source of foreign exchange. Incentive programs have resulted in the establishment of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Kingston, Spanish Town and Montego Bay with strong US, Taiwanese and Hong Kong corporate representation.

Jamaica is a country heavily in debt, despite having its debts "forgiven" by the US in 1991, and those to several other countries rescheduled. Jamaica's debt is one of the highest in the world when calculated per head of the population (about US$1,800). The largest debt owed is to the IMF and the World Bank. The extent of its debt has had severe consequences for Jamaica's people. Forty percent of annual foreign currency earnings go toward servicing international debt, severely undermining the ability of the state to finance a number of public services, in addition to demanding restrictions on imports. The effects of the debt crisis on ordinary Jamaicans, especially women, is the subject of one of the video documentaries produced by the women's collective, Sistren.

The percentage of the population living in poverty in Jamaica has increased from 26.9% in the mid/late 1980s to 34.2% in the 1990s.[169] The cost of living (calculated for a family of five) is more than double the minimum weekly wage. Unemployment in 1992 stood at 30% of the economically active population, but in the ghettoes of Kingston, the figure is estimated to be as high as 75%. Desperate economic circumstances have forced many into the informal sector, where the work is irregular and badly paid. Nevertheless, the informal sector provides an impoverished population

---

[169]Burki and Edwards (1995) list a World Bank survey which does not provide a definition of "poverty."

the basic necessities at prices significantly lower than in the supermarkets. Today, Jamaica is one of the cheapest labor markets in the Caribbean (Bayer 1993), and emigration is widespread.

Sociocultural context

Jamaica's population is primarily (76.3%) of African descent, the descendants of Africans forced into slave labor, producing sugar in the colonial plantation economies of the New World, with small minorities of East Indian and Afro-East Indian (3.4%), Chinese and Afro-Chinese (1.8%), Afro-European (15.1%) and white (3.2%). An estimated 50% of Jamaica's population lives in the urban areas.

Even after emancipation in 1838, blacks continued to be discriminated against in education, the job market and in the judicial system.[170] Mulattos -- a term generally used to refer to people of mixed race, although a system of classification graded by degree of African heritage from mustafeeno (1/16th black) to sambo (75% black) continued to exist -- maintained an elevated status over blacks, but remained subordinate to whites. This mixed-race group forms the basis of the present-day Jamaican middle-class, having enjoyed better education and job opportunities than blacks, and continuing to identify strongly with whites and white values -- primarily British. Political power since independence remained in the hands of mulattos until 1992, when Patterson succeeded to the premiership, becoming the first black to so.

---

[170]Officially, slavery was abolished in 1834 in Jamaica, but continued to exist for a further four years.

The Maroons, descendants of runaway slaves who formed their own communities and fought numerous battles against the British to maintain their freedom and autonomy still retain some autonomy in Jamaica, nominally as separate states which are governed internally (Luntta 1993). Indians constitute one of the larger ethnic minorities in Jamaica, having first arrived from India as indentured laborers. Lebanese (often referred to as "Syrians" in Jamaica), Chinese, and Jews each make up less than 1% of the population, but the economic impact of each of these groups outweighs its numbers in the population. Of the whites, most are of British descent, and British systems still dominate government, law, education, etc. Germans, who arrived as indentured laborers, form a small segment of the white population.

Class and color are closely interconnected in Jamaica. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, these two factors parallel each other but are not strictly congruent. Chevannes (1994, 7) notes that a study of upward social mobility in Jamaica between 1943 and 1984 found evidence that blacks advance at a slower rate than lighter-skinned people. As late as the 1960s, an eminent judge was bypassed as chief justice because he was black. The author of the study noted that " the black majority is being held back by racial forces which operate directly in terms of economic power, as well as more indirectly through the medium of culture and ideology" (quoted in Chevannes, 8). The belief that "marrying up" means marrying a lighter-skinned spouse, thereby "improving the color" of one’s children, is testament to the persistence and strength of the ideology of white supremacy.

While the official language is English, most of the population speaks Creole (usually referred to as *patois* or *dialect* in Jamaica). In some of the more isolated hill areas and in rural regions, many Jamaicans speak only Creole, but according to Luntta (1993, 44-5), most urban dwellers "will use varying degrees of Patois depending on those they talk to, or more accurately, those they want to understand them." He also notes that "decreolization, or varying degrees of reverting to English, takes place as Jamaicans move toward social situations where the use of standard English is expected."

Popular culture in Jamaica

Much of Jamaican cultural expression emerges from a Jamaican respect for verbal dexterity. According to Abrahams (1983) eloquence, whether "broad talk" or "sweet talk", is highly regarded in Jamaican society.[171] Jamaican patois, bawdy humor and audience participation characterize theater in Jamaica. Sistren, the women's theater collective whose video documentaries will be discussed further in this chapter, is one of the better-known of many active theater groups.

Bateson (1969, 161) argues that a society's worldview is deeply embedded in its forms of communication, its "conventions of communication."

---

[171] "Broad talk" refers to the use of witty repartee, including sexual jokes and slander, and usually utilizes Creole as its linguistic medium. "Sweet talk", also termed "good talk" utilizes the standard English of the locality and refers to the effective use of elevated diction, vocabulary and syntax.

> In a sense, a philosophy of life is describable as a set of rules for constructing messages, and the individual's culture or weltanschauung, ... is built into his [sic] conventions of communication.

Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the validity of Jamaican Creole as a form of speech that is worthy of recognition and analysis is, according to Watson (1990, 291) a relatively new development, "certainly not predating Jamaica's political independence in 1962." Dismissal and denigration of Creole continues today, as illustrated by such headlines as the ones in *The Sunday Gleaner*, one of Jamaica's major newspapers, which read, “Patois - a barefoot language" and "Corruption of language is no cultural heritage” (Cargill 1989; Hearne 1990). Cooper (1995, 11) argues that poetry such as Louise Bennett's, written in Creole, is still "located on the fringes of literary respectability." However, as I shall show later, the validation of Creole as a medium of expression for working-class Jamaican women continues to be a significant aspect of the agenda of Sistren.

Women in Jamaica and in Jamaican Popular Culture

Although there are reportedly no *de jure* limitations to the participation of women in politics at any level in Jamaica. In practice, women constitute a small minority of national parliamentarians and an only slightly higher proportion of local council members. In Jamaica, as in most countries, women hold few leadership

positions in either politics or business, but tend to be more successful in administrative areas.

One group of women in Jamaica that has attained a degree of economic independence is the "higgler" (informal vendors), a term used to refer to a type of petty trader who buys her produce from small farmers and sells it in the urban and village markets. The "higglers" of Jamaica are mostly women. In the rural areas, some of these higglers go selling from house to house. Some higglers engage in inter-island trade, while others have created an "internationally-travelled female merchant class" (Cooper, 57).

The representation of women in Jamaican popular culture varies from ambivalent to negative. Advertising has been a particular target of women's groups, with their perpetuation of a white sex object as the prototypical woman. In other mass mediated popular culture such as film, Jamaica's first home-grown feature film, *The Harder They Come* (directed by Perry Henzell, 1972), a reggae vehicle portraying life in the Kingston ghettos, depicts three women characters -- a rejecting mother, a treacherous lover and a promiscuous woman used as sexual bait to trap the (anti) hero. In the popular oral culture too, in music, storytelling, proverbs and sayings as well as in the written literature, women are generally portrayed as cunning or evil.

Concurrently, the paradigm of resistance, of the “rebellious woman”, is one that is also pervasive in Caribbean culture. The paradigm of “marooning” in which the rebel figure becomes the icon of black Caribbean identity is notable in Jamaica for the prominence of women. Drawing inspiration upon female models like the Maroon

leader, Nanny, Jamaican women have been able to appropriate the rebel figure, viewed largely as a male construct by male-centered nationalist ideologies.

In her Introduction to Sistren's *Lionheart Gal*, which is a collection of personal stories by Sistren members, Ford-Smith (1986, xiii) observes that the stories "explore two opposing images of the black woman, which co-exist in the psyche of Caribbean women: the image of the warrior woman as typified by Ni (Nanny), the Maroon leader… and the image of nanny, the domesticated servant woman."[172] Nanny's exploits as a militant rebel leader who took on the British "drew on the tradition of the Ohemaa (the Ashanti Queen Mother)". However, this image was gradually colonized into the figure of the nanny –- equivalent to the Mammy figure so beloved of Hollywood – the black matriarchal figure whose complacency as a servant in another's household emanated from an instinctive maternal love that was extended to her oppressor. That this benevolent image is a figment of the colonizer's imagination, or betrays the colonizer's efforts to tame the Nanny of the Maroons, is undoubtedly why, as Ford-Smith observes, "behind the familiar image of the domesticated nanny lurks the eternal Ni." A contemporary figure who is regarded as embodying an Afro-Caribbean rebel consciousness is folklorist Louise Bennett (generally known as Miss Lou in Jamaica), who is regarded as one of the pioneers in popularizing Creole as a medium of cultural expression through her poetry, and who is the subject of a Sistren documentary, *The Drums Keep Sounding*.

---

[172] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Nanny.

Film/video/television production in Jamaica

According to Victoria Marshall (1992, 99), while there is no formal film industry in Jamaica, there does exist a "likkle but tallawah" (small but aggressive) practice of filmmaking. Legislation intended to encourage the establishment of a film production infrastructure, through the establishment of production facilities such as film processing laboratories and postproduction houses, has not stemmed continued use of Jamaica primarily as the location for the films of foreign production companies. Marshall also points out that local production facilities on the island do exist but that their output comprises primarily commercials and music videos. A listing on the Jamaica Promotions Board website lists over 20 such companies, many of which provide support services to foreign motion picture producers shooting films in Jamaica.

While Jamaica has a long history as a generic tropical island location, the 1980s saw the release of several Jamaican films (as opposed to films simply shot in Jamaica). These include Lenny Little-White's *Children of Babylon* (1980), Barbara Blake-Hanna's *Race, Rhetoric & Rastafari* (1982), *Countryman* by Dickey Jobson (1983), Hugh King's *Body Moves* (1985) and Little-White's *Way Back When* (1985). The best known Jamaican film, however, was made earlier -- in 1972. Perry Henzell (a white Jamaican) directed Jamaica's first full-length feature film, *The Harder They Come*, starring reggae star, Jimmy Cliff. *The Harder They Come* was Jamaican in more than the sense of being directed by a Jamaican national; it was Jamaican in language, theme and perspective (the latter is working-class Jamaican).

There are no formal training institutions, although Carimac (Caribbean Institute of Mass Communication at the University of the West Indies) offers a general introduction to the "mechanics of audiovisual media presentation" (Marshall, 104). Most technical training is obtained on the job or abroad.

Although Jamaican women's involvement in the broadcast media has an early history, women appear to have made few inroads into the mainstream mass media in subsequent years. Ford-Smith (1988) notes that the black nationalist and feminist writer, Una Marson, was involved in the establishment of a BBC radio program, called "Calling the West Indies", in England as early as the 1930s. According to Ford-Smith (1988, 27-8), Marson attempted to find a link between black consciousness and women's liberation, and introduced an approach "which expresses and articulates women's issues through aesthetic forms and which uses processes associated with producing these forms to mobilize and organize women, and to analyze their reality." The Sistren Theatre Collective, of which Ford-Smith was a member, reflects this approach in Jamaica today.

The Sistren Theatre Collective

The Sistren Theatre Collective, established in 1977, is based in Kingston. The Collective was established by 12 working-class women, with Honor Ford-Smith of the Jamaican School of Drama as their drama tutor, during a period when the Manley government’s democratic socialism promoted grassroots organization and cultural activity. Within a few years of its establishment, however, the conservative opposition

swept into power, and programs aimed at building popular power were dismantled. Sistren was declared subversive and banned from radio and television (Ford-Smith 1989). Other problems that the members of the Collective have faced include physical violence from their spouses, and a lack of funds from institutions that dismissed them contemptuously -- even after six years of drama training -- as a bunch of "unqualified untrained street cleaners." Ford-Smith (1986, 5-6) notes that this left them reliant on "foreign grants or certain starvation in a society which did not pay for the kind of work we did. Our labour did not produce things which could be marketed for individual profit."

Nevertheless, Sistren has achieved international acclaim because its "untrained street cleaners" developed a method of participatory drama and organization in response to the challenges that its members -- as poor, working-class women -- faced, and they used Creole which helped them reach working-class audiences. As Wilson (1993, 42) notes:

> Since the Sistren members had no previous knowledge or experience of drama, they developed the technique -- it has made them famous -- of creating scripts using improvisation and the strong oral tradition rooted in African ancestry. They always began by examining their own experiences, but very quickly developed the technique of creating

characters outside their own lives to enrich and add further meaning to their interpretation of their own social existence.[173]

Twenty years after its birth, however, Sistren is thriving as an internationally-renowned women's collective that has supplemented its theatrical performances with workshops on various social issues, and which produces books, textiles, videos and a magazine called *Sistren*, published three times a year.

It was a series of workshop sessions conducted with female sugar workers in the mid-island parish of Clarendon in the early 1980s that led to the production of their play entitled "The Case of Iris Armstrong." Their documentary film, *Sweet Sugar Rage* (1982), followed shortly afterwards. While the video documentary captures the grueling working conditions of women field hands in the Jamaican sugar industry (*Jamaica* 1985), it is primarily a documentation of the Collective's aims and methods of operation.

Sistren's theater audience consists primarily of working-class women with whom Sistren members engage in workshops in order to further explore an issue, and to come up with alternative solutions to problems and/or suggestions for action. The

---

[173] Collective improvisation as a method for developing a dramatic script, as well as songs, is also common practice among black South African grassroots/amateur theatrical groups, and is known to be practised in other African countries such as Kenya.

plays are developed through improvisation and then scripted into short dramatic pieces, which are developed further in subsequent workshops. Initially drawing on personal testimony and experience for their choice of subject matter, the group has gone on to delve into the history of women in Jamaica in order to contextualize their present-day situations.

Sistren attempts to increase awareness of women's, particularly working-class women's, issues through the production of popular theater. For example, their first play -- entitled *Downpression Get A Blow* -- dealt with the attempts by Jamaican women in the garment industry to form a union. *Downpression Get A Blow* also depicted the exploitative relations between the white American male management and the black female Jamaican workforce -- one that took for granted the availability of women workers for sexual services. Another play, *Bellywoman Bangarang*, highlighted the substandard conditions under which poor women are forced to deliver their babies. Other plays have dealt with poverty, rape, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, unemployment and other social issues and, crucially, how these are related to one another. The importance of these themes is reiterated by the pervasiveness of violence against women in Jamaican society.

Sistren’s focus on advocacy theater is aimed at increasing the social, cultural and economic sovereignty of women, particularly black working-class women. As such, the women draw on their own traditions of storytelling, songs and rituals, arguing that this tradition has long been one of protest and struggle, noting too that modern Jamaican music, while a popular form of working-class cultural expression, does not

reflect their experiences as (primarily) working-class women, focusing as it does on the experiences of ghetto male youth.

Ford-Smith (1989, 31) notes that Sistren has responded by building "an aesthetic which is based on the daily reality of Jamaican women combined with popular myths, images and dramatic poetry. The use of documentary investigations of women's lives, oral tradition, ritual and popular music have all combined to contribute to the development of Caribbean theatre and literature…[and] a series of screen-printed designs have created alternative visual images of women and gender."

Sistren has expanded its reach, going beyond the limitations imposed by the geographical proximity necessary for live theater, to utilize the electronic medium of video. While Marshall (1992, 99) expresses concerns regarding the growth of video production, the use of video -- a cheaper, more accessible medium than film -- has allowed a group such as the Sistren Theatre Collective to produce several documentaries. The limitations arising out of lack of funding, government regulation, broadcasting policy, lack of film processing facilities and distribution resources, have been bypassed by Sistren's use of video as a medium of production.

In her discussion of film and video production in Jamaica, Marshall (1992) categorizes film/video activity in Jamaica as a) the servicing of foreign film crews, b) production of commercials for local and international products, c) television production, d) independent production of feature films and videos. The production of short, small-format videos, the form overwhelmingly "chosen" by black women, is excluded from discussion.

Sistren's video documentaries are shot on the ¾" video format, and then made available for consumer use in the VHS format. Sistren itself distributes many of its own videos, although some titles, such as *Sweet Sugar Rage* (1982) and *Miss Amy and Miss May* (1990) are also available from distributors in the United States. Within Jamaica, Sistren distributes its videos to schools, libraries and museums, but the Collective recognizes that it has not developed an effective campaign for promoting its video documentaries, nor the structures necessary for distributing them (Foster-Marshall 1997).

The video documentaries are produced by Sistren Research, the investigative and research arm of the Collective whose "mandate [is] to research the undocumented lives of Jamaican and Caribbean women who have made, or are making history."[174] Although the technical aspects of production are farmed out to independent/freelance personnel, Sistren generally utilizes its own members to conduct research, write, produce, direct and perform in its video documentaries.

Sistren's first video project, *Sweet Sugar Rage* (1982) explores the working conditions of Jamaican women sugarcane workers, and documents the manner in which Sistren conducts its dramatic workshops. Its second documentary, *Miss Amy and Miss May* (1990), profiles two Jamaican women from very different backgrounds, one white and one black, both social/political activists. Sistren's third production, *Moving*

---

[174] This statement appears on the blurb of the box cover of the video, *The Drums Keep Sounding*.

On (1991) reflects on the Collective's achievements and future possibilities. *Carrying A Heavy Load* (1992) utilizes a mixture of dramatic and documentary elements to focus on how the fact that "Jamaica is debt-rich" (Nettleford 1993, 173) affects working-class women in terms of their everyday lives. Sistren's most recent production has been *The Drums Keep Sounding* (1994/5), a documentary profiling "Miss Lou", i.e., Louise Bennett-Coverley, folklorist, poet and activist, who has dedicated her life to winning respect for Jamaican Creole/patois as a literary medium. A production entitled *Garvey Women* was scheduled for production in 1996 but has been shelved until sufficient funding is obtained.[175]

Sweet Sugar Rage

Sweet Sugar Rage is a documentary exploring Sistren's use of workshops and field research to create dramatic performances which, in turn, are used to explore possible solutions to social problems or courses of action. *Sweet Sugar Rage* documents how Sistren became involved in the case of Iris, a supervisor on a sugarcane plantation who is being paid half the salary of her fellow male supervisors, and the problems that she encounters with not just the project manager of the plantation, but the male union representatives to whom she turns for help.

Sweet Sugar Rage utilizes a framework in which the camera follows a Sistren member during the course of her activities with the Collective. Beginning with a

---

[175] Personal correspondence with Sistren, October 1995 and September 10, 1997.

sequence showing the woman's early start to the day, the camera follows her as she makes breakfast, dresses the children, and completes several household tasks, including sweeping the yard. Over this entire opening sequence, the song "Sweep on" (particularly apt, considering Sistren's founding members were street cleaners) with its catchy reggae rhythms, acts as a narrational device, replacing dialogue, or voice-over commentary, that would usually be utilized to establish the characters, setting or subject matter.

Note some excerpts from the song's lyrics:

Every day we wake up
It's the same condition
Long time we been working
Frustration remaining
This could never be our destiny
Life must have something else in it
For all a' wi

Talking 'bout sugar workers
And women who are mothers
If society don't recognize us
Or realize our dignity
Then the harder the battle
The sweeter the victory

The dust will remain in the corner

Till the broom sweep it away

Chorus:

We’re gonna sweep on

Sweep on

Sweep out poverty

Sweep out slavery

...

Time to break down the cages

We want better wages

...

The connection with Sistren is established by a rear shot of the woman, who is wearing a tee- shirt with the Sistren logo. This sequence’s transition to the woman’s participation in the Collective is introduced by the use of scrolling text describing Sistren and its goals, over images of a group of Sistren members traveling in a car to the nearby rural county of Clarendon. The women speak in varying degrees of patois, but the voice-over commentary -- by Sistren member Beverley Hanson -- is in standard English.

Sweet Sugar Rage is primarily a documentation of the Collective’s mission, and its dramatic and educational techniques. In this video, the Collective’s involvement in analyzing and educating its audiences about the working conditions of women on the

sugar estates is used as an illustration of the Collective's day-to-day activities, beginning with its initial field research and ending in its dramatic workshops.

After the Sistren members arrive, they go into the field and interview a number of women whose work involves back-breaking manual labor in the sugar fields. The women talk of the constant struggle to survive long days of work, work that does not end when they get home and have to take care of their families. Their words (subtitled, as they speak in patois) reveal that their working conditions involve not only hard, physical labor for long hours, but also extremely low pay and unsafe working conditions and, despite Jamaican law requiring equal pay for equal work, an exploitative management and an indifferent union.

After collecting the information they need, Sistren members, back in Kingston, analyze their findings as a group, and discuss how best to address the issues raised. They decide to use the situation of one of the women, Iris Armstrong, who is being paid half the wage of her fellow male supervisors. In deciding to adopt Iris' case, Sistren members note that her case raises an issue that is of relevance to all women, i.e. why the law requiring equal pay for equal work continues to be violated without consequence when women are discriminated against on the basis of gender.

The video also documents Sistren's mode of participatory drama. Sistren puts together a story dramatizing Iris' situation. After a performance, the audience is asked to analyze the situation and propose solutions to Iris' problem. In the following sequence, Sistren members conduct a dramatic workshop in a nearby town where the urban participants are encouraged to role-play the kind of work their rural sisters have

to perform. The voice-over notes that these urban women are from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds, stressing the importance of reaching such middle-class audiences, and encouraging their participation in addressing some of the issues raised. Excerpts from a performance of the play follow, and are edited together with interviews with the actual participants in the situation, i.e. Iris herself, the project manager, the trade union representative, etc.

The play depicts Iris confronting the plantation manager and the trade union representative about the wage inequity between herself and her male peers. The collusion of these two men, who drink together and make jokes about women, identifies a systemic hindrance to the struggle to end wage inequities based on gender. Stereotypes about women and their roles in society make even the trade union representatives indifferent to the exploitation of women.

The play's participants are primarily audience members. The intervention begins with the use of songs and games. The participants are encouraged to go beyond simply dramatizing women's oppression. They are encouraged to develop and dramatize alternative solutions or approaches to Iris' problems. However, Iris's situation is not depicted as a simple binary opposition based on gender -- while the male representative of the trade union is depicted as unconcerned with unfair labor conditions for women, Iris' field supervisor is a man who is willing to stick his neck out for her.

After the play, a heated discussion ensues about strategies women need to employ to address issues of discrimination. After the discussion, the audience

participants role-play alternative solutions to Iris' dilemma. After deciding that the trade union was of little help when it came to mobilizing support for Iris' problem, the participants identify the church as a site where women can be mobilized to support the struggle to eliminate gender-based wage inequities. The documentary depicts an excerpt from the dramatization of one such possible scenario in which a group of women, although having to be coaxed by Iris to support her, eventually confront the project manager. Songs and dances are integrated into the performance.

However, the process does not end here. After this dramatization by the town's participants, a new discussion ensues to evaluate the effectiveness of this particular strategy in addressing Iris' situation. Much of the discussion is heated, but an important element that emerges is the recognition of class differences among women that continue to hamper efforts towards women's solidarity, and the difficulty of getting middle-class women to concern themselves with issues facing working-class women. In addition, these dramatic skits, and the discussions afterwards, generate greater understanding among the audience of the role played by larger political and economic forces or structures in determining the quality of their everyday lives.

In a voice-over commentary, Hanson informs us that the women who participated in their initial workshops seen earlier in the documentary subsequently went on to organize themselves into a women's group, mobilizing young people in their community to become involved in a series of ongoing workshops. Testifying to the reproductive nature of Sistren's efforts towards utilizing collective and dramatic

methods for social advocacy, this group successfully organized a campaign to improve the water supply in its community.

Miss Amy and Miss May

Sistren's next venture into video production was the documentary, *Miss Amy and Miss May*, produced in 1990, and directed by 70-year old Cynthia Wilmot, who conceptualized and directed the documentary. Spurred by the destruction of much of her 40-year collection of historical information and documents as a result of Hurricane Gilbert, Wilmot co-scripted *Miss Amy and Miss May* with Honor Ford-Smith. Using the surviving material, she had the lives of two important Jamaican women captured on film/video. *Miss Amy and Miss May* won a special jury prize at the 1990 Images Caraïbes (Kramer 1994).

Miss Amy and Miss May explores the lives of two women, one black and one white, both of whom were actively involved in women's movements in Jamaica in the 1930s -- well before the second wave of feminism in the US. The film combines interviews with the two women, Amy Bailey and May Farquharson, dramatized reenactments of their long and sometimes rocky friendship, and archival film footage and stills. Each introduces the other. This creativity, especially in terms of the formal style of the film easily fuses past with present, while reflecting on issues of race, gender and rights for the elderly.

The documentary opens with a cameo shot (i.e. a small oval frame) with Amy Bailey, played by Sistren member Pauline Crawford, and May Farquharson, played by fellow Sistren member Honor Ford-Smith, seated closely together. They comment on

the fact that together they made a “dangerous team” as two Jamaican women who fought for the rights of women, of blacks, of the elderly, and of the poor. The opening credits, accompanied by the song “Side by Side”, reinforce the notion of the women as constituting a team. The documentary proper opens in the present, with the two women, now in their 90s who, in separate interviews, reflect on their pasts. According to Amy Bailey, what attracted the women to each other was a mutual recognition of what she (Bailey) refers to as an “imprisoned splendor.”

This is followed by a sequence in which Pauline Crawford, as the young adult Amy Bailey, provides biographical information and historical contextualization of the development of Farquharson’s activist consciousness. Period photographs are accompanied by voice-over commentary by Crawford, illustrating the racially and economically polarized nature of Jamaican society. A transition to a dramatization of May Farquharson as a child follows. Beginning with a shot of Crawford, again as the adult Amy Bailey, standing on the porch of a large house, the shot combines past and present as a little red-haired girl enters the frame, picking flowers. Farquharson, the daughter of a wealthy colonial sugar grower and an English socialite unhappy in the tropics, overhears her parents arguing over her father’s involvement in the movement for improving labor rights and working conditions for plantation laborers. Still photographs of her (actual) parents are interspersed with the young girl’s response to what she overhears. This sequence demonstrates that despite her mother’s conservative concerns about the acceptance and mobility of her daughters in colonial social circles,

Farquharson's activism resulted from her father's insistence that he would not tolerate his daughters becoming "empty-headed clothes-horses."

The real Farquharson, now in a wheelchair, returns to comment on her father, later knighted, and his involvement in labor issues. This is followed by a sequence parallel to the earlier one in which Crawford, as Amy Bailey, had introduced us to the child May Farquharson. Now Ford-Smith, as a adult Farquharson, introduces the child Amy Bailey while standing in front of Bailey's childhood home. Cutting to a little girl, neatly dressed, skipping along in the garden, the camera pans along with her until she walks behind Ford-Smith. We learn that Amy is one of eight children born to a very proper, middle-class couple, both of whom are teachers (although her mother also works part-time as the local postmistress). Her father organized the first union of Jamaican schoolteachers.

A cut brings us back to the present with Farquharson remembering that she once got herself into trouble by referring to the Baileys, in a speech, as the royal family of Jamaica. In a dramatization that begins with another shot depicting a dual temporality, there is, once again, a parallel to the earlier sequence on Farquharson, when the child May overheard her parents discussing her future. Both scenes reflect an effective use of offscreen sound, conveying the power of authoritative parental influence, and at the same time, constituting a low-cost alternative to using actors to depict the parents visually. Bailey is inculcated with the belief that education is the only avenue for black social, political and economic upliftment. This belief, as we later see, is the foundation of Bailey's commitment to racial justice and equality.

The Baileys share a determination that their daughter would become a teacher, both disclosing a deep faith in education as the path to black Jamaican socioeconomic mobility. In a later dramatization, Bailey, as a child, is seen in an empty church, noting the racial/social hierarchy in the seating arrangements, and the differences in the way people dressed when attending church. Revealing a sense of shame at the class differences between blacks on the one hand, and mulattoes and whites on the other, the young girl prays for help in becoming a good student, having pretty, tidy clothes and becoming "a proper Bailey."

The vignettes of representative moments in both women's childhoods establish critical influences on both women, particularly the values and beliefs of their parents. In the case of Bailey, these comprise the twin concerns of education and being proper, with their roots in a middle-class background that was uncommon for blacks in the Jamaican racial hierarchy. In Farquharson's case, the influence of her father prevails (her parents are revealed to have later divorced), reinforced by exposure to similar attitudes espoused by a teacher at the fashionable Cheltenham Ladies College in London which she later attends. The teacher, Miss Faithful, it appears, was a very influential figure, espousing the belief that "privilege carries with it responsibility. One of the responsibilities of women of education is to help clean up the mess that men have made of the world!"

The documentary goes on to depict how both women become involved in their respective causes. Farquharson's interest lay in improving access to pension funds for the elderly, while Bailey was passionate about improving black access to jobs in

government and the civil service. A dramatized encounter between the women at a social gathering, however, reveals both women's class biases. Note the following dialogue as Bailey responds to having the afore-mentioned Una Marson pointed out to her in the gathering. She states to Farquharson:

> The other day I bumped into her in King Street, carrying a basket on her head. Now, you tell me, black women need to aspire to more than just higglering. We need dignity. And the only way to get that is through education.

Farquharson replies:

> But Miss Bailey, I think you have to see that you can't expect people who sleep in canefields and who suffer the most dreadful diseases to fight for education. First, you got to get them to stop breeding like flies and give them a decent place to live.

The two women began to combine their efforts after their initial meeting in 1935, and especially at a time when Jamaica was affected by labor unrest as workers went on strike in 1938. Period footage and a voice-over commentary reveal that black working class women played a crucial role in these strikes, many of them leading the struggle, and organizing marches and rallies, but that their participation has received

little recognition. At this time, both Bailey and Farquharson began to write for a progressive newspaper. Bailey raised issues of racism and pigmentocracy in hiring practices, and Farquharson wrote on concerns for the elderly. Both women were also great supporters of birth control as a solution to many of Jamaica's social problems.

Although both women are seen to have participated in organized struggles for women's suffrage, that Bailey's faith in education and being proper was to have negative consequences is glossed over in this documentary. Reddock (1989, 30), noting the class-based nature of women's movements in the Caribbean, points out that while upper and middle-class "black and coloured women...sought to change their status vis-à-vis white women and men, their position vis-à-vis their working class sisters was never in question: not surprisingly, by mid-century both Amy Bailey and Audrey Jeffers voted against universal adult suffrage; i.e., extending voting rights to all -- a right which they fought so passionately for themselves."[176] Unfortunately, the opportunity to explore the complexity of intersections of race, class and gender, afforded by Amy Bailey's concerns and activities, is not taken advantage of, at least not sufficiently. Allusions are made without further elaboration. For example, in a dramatized reenactment, Bailey addresses the first Jamaican women's conference held in 1939 by the Jamaican Women's League, in which she brings to their attention the essential role played by black working class women during the labor strikes. "Let us

---

[176] Audrey Jeffers was the first woman to be elected to municipal office in Trinidad and Tobago.

not betray them", she states, yet her later refusal to support their political enfranchisement is not mentioned, missing the opportunity to explore the seeming contradiction in her political stance.

Both women received several national awards, so they did not go unrecognized. The documentary begins its concluding phase with contemporary footage of photographs, newspaper articles and footage of women working, to comment on both the progress made by Jamaican women towards greater social, political and economic equality, as well as continuing inequities faced by women. Amy Bailey and May Farquharson observe that they could have done more.

The documentary ends on a humorous note as the two women, once again in a cameo shot, bicker about their disagreements. A grumbling comment in patois by Bailey provokes a mocking response by Farquharson about Bailey's insistent refusal over the years to acknowledge any ability to speak patois, or any knowledge of Jamaican folklore such as the Anancy stories.

Sistren's dramatizations of aspects of both women's lives, as well as some of the encounters between them occasionally display a rather "stagy" feel. In some of the dramatized segments, the actors have retained an acting style more suited to live theater than to the media of film or video, which require a more natural style of acting. The movement of the actors, use of gestures and facial expressions, and the delivery of lines of dialogue sometimes appear overly amplified. Dialogue is delivered with a degree of enunciation and voice projection not necessary in a medium that utilizes microphones to pick up and amplify the human voice, and gestures and facial

expressions need not be magnified, since variable lens magnification and camera movement can be utilized to draw the audience's attention and/or manipulate the audience's point of view.

Moving On

Sistren's next production, *Moving On* (1991) was also scripted and directed by Cynthia Wilmot.[177] *Moving On* presents an overview of the Collective's activities to date, and ends with some of the members reflecting on the issues that the Collective faces and possibilities for future. Opening with a black and white segment in which the camera roves through the streets of Kingston, an accompanying voice-over comments on poverty, especially as experienced by women in Jamaica.

This sequence cuts to a shot of Sistren member, Beverley Hanson, on a stage, dressed in a bright, multicolored jester-like outfit. Microphone in hand, Hanson sings and jokes with an unseen audience, before introducing Muffet. When more than one woman steps on the stage claiming to be Muffet, Hanson poses the question of who really is Muffet and the response announces the play's title – *Muffet in all a wi*. The introduction of this Sistren play acts as a framing device for the video documentary. The opening is accompanied by lively reggae rhythms.

---

[177] I have used the shorter title, *Moving On*, as reflected on the label of the videotape, and as referred to by Sistren member Lillian Foster-Marshall. However, the title credit in the documentary itself is *Sistren...Moving On*.

The documentary proper begins with a series of interviews with Sistren members who recollect and recount the history of the Collective's formation and development, their own backgrounds, the Collective's collaboration with Honor Ford-Smith of the Jamaican School of Drama, the cultural and political vitality of the period, the class-based nature of their agenda, and the staging of their play, the hard-hitting *Bellywoman Bangarang*, with its unflinching exploration of women's sexuality and domestic violence. These interviews are interspersed with various segments exploring specific themes. The first of these, Sistren on Stage, uses black and white footage of excerpts, or stills, from some of the early plays, including *Bellywoman Bangarang*, *Nana Yah* and *QPH*.[178]

The documentary goes on to note that in the 1980s, the Collective began to move towards greater audience involvement by introducing the workshop format. These involved discussions of broader socioeconomic issues and public policy matters. At this time, Sistren also went on the road with some of its plays, including other parts of the Caribbean.

The following segment, Sistren Research, discusses the establishment, in 1985, of this arm of the Collective; its mission was to document the everyday conditions of working women in factories, on farms, etc. Field research was supplemented by academic and historical research into the history of women's involvement in labor

---

[178] Although this is not apparent in the brief mention of the play in this documentary, *QPH* is a play structured around an African-origin ritual ceremony honoring the dead, viz., the Etu ritual (Ford-Smith 1985; Allison 1986).

struggles, and in the development of political parties in Jamaica. Sistren Research now has a center in Kingston where it makes available, to anyone interested, its research materials and findings, and its publications, information on social issues, teaching aids, etc.

The next segment, Sistren Abroad, provides an overview of Sistren's tours in Europe, the UK, Canada, Suriname, Martinique, Belize, Aruba, and the US. Excerpts from performances in these locations, and press reviews attest to the success of the group's performances away from home. This is followed by a segment on Sistren Textiles, its silk-screening activities, and the need to expand its overseas markets. The following segment documents the workshop process of putting a new play together, its performance, and taking the new play on tour into the rural areas of Jamaica.

The documentary ends with Sistren members noting that the Collective has arrived at a crossroads, of the need for evaluation of the Collective's existence, especially as a result of continuing difficulties in obtaining funding, and of the increasing establishment of other organizations and women's groups which have begun to take up some of the issues for which the Collective has struggled.

Carrying a Heavy Load

In 1992, Sistren produced *Carrying a Heavy Load*, a documentary that examines the disproportionate impact of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) on women in the Caribbean. Bayer (1993) notes that the harsh effects of IMF-imposed policies have not only increased income disparities between the poor and the middle-

classes, but that women have been more severely affected than men. Unemployment figures for women are twice that for men -- in a country in which 40% of households have a woman as the sole breadwinner. Young unskilled women are believed to be the group most affected by unemployment -- over 65%. Underemployment is difficult to quantify, but many of those in the informal sector could be included in this category -- car window washers, holders of roadside stands, unlicensed car repair services, etc. Of these, the so-called "higglers", or "informal commercial importers" as they are officially called, and most of whom are women, have been especially hard-hit by the steep decline in the value of the Jamaican dollar in recent years (*Jamaica: Foreign labor trends* 1993). Ford-Smith (1989, 29) notes that "as the IMF dumped heavier and heavier burdens on women and as the government offered cheap female labour as a carrot to bait investors, the situation seemed to demand feminist comment and action."

Sistren's response was the video documentary, *Carrying a Heavy Load* (1992). The opening segment of *Carrying a Heavy Load*, prior to the opening credits, shows a woman (Beverly Hanson, again) on stage, urging an invisible audience to join in the evening's fun. Responding to the half-hearted applause, she poses questions to members of the unseen audience.[179] The string of explanations from the audience members' for their lack of enthusiasm provides a litany of how SAPs have affected the

---

[179] Although similar to the device used in *Moving On*, which shows the introduction of an actual play performed by the Collective, this appears to be a performance of a performance.

daily lives of women in Jamaica. These include difficulties in access to health care and medical services, ability to afford food and clothes, unemployment, etc. Once again, Hanson poses a question, "What is bothering all you people?" and the response, "Structural Adjustment!" announces the subject of the documentary.

The familiar strains of an adaptation of Psalm 137, "Rivers of Babylon" accompany the opening credits. Under the funding credits, the camera follows a woman who glares back at the camera, and as it follows her, she lifts her hand in a dismissive gesture. When the camera persists, she stops and turns around, machete in hand, and glowers at the camera. This segment raises some important questions regarding iconography, representation and spectatorship and the role of gender in all of these. The recurring icon of the machete is, notably, masculine. However, this shot re-appropriates the iconic image of the machete -- which is both a tool and a potential weapon -- by women. In this instance, it fuses into the defiance of a woman who resists (albeit unsuccessfully) the appropriation of her image for purposes she cannot influence or control. What implications are there for one who returns the camera's gaze? As one who is not behind the camera, she boldly gazes back at it, exemplifying what bell hooks (1992, 116) has called the oppositional gaze, which hooks sees as being a form of resistance.[180]

---

[180] hooks views the breaking of the taboo at staring, such as that imposed on children who are often chastised for staring at adults, or the punishment risked by slaves for staring back at slave owners, as an act of agency and therefore, within these contexts, as an act of resistance.

The voice-over commentary accompanying the opening sequence described above, which changes to images of people walking along what appears to be a rural road, notes: “For as long as our ancestors can remember, people in poor countries, and particularly women, have had to struggle to survive.” The machete reappears, this time in the familiar image of a man swinging the machete as he cuts down sugarcane stalks. The commentary continues: “In recent years, poor countries have borrowed vast sums of money from private banks and international lending agencies, and we are told that this will bring progress, but we see the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Why is this so? We hear the words like ‘external debt’, ‘World Bank’ and ‘International Monetary Fund’. But do we really understand what they mean?”

The opening voice-over commentary establishes the framework of the documentary as one that attempts to explain the concepts and issues revolving around international monetary structures and policies, and international debt. Joan French of CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action), explains the term “structural adjustment” in terms of its consequences for most women in the Caribbean, i.e., less access to hospital and other medical care, lack of decent jobs, and/or access to education for their children, etc. French’s words are followed by a dramatization in which an off-screen voice begins with the statement, “Woman’s trouble started long, long time ago, when my grandmother said her grandmother tell her about slavery time when they brought our people down into the Caribbean to be sold into bondage.” As these words evoke the importance of what Willis (1987) has called “motherlines”, the lights fade up to reveal a woman with a basket of fruit stepping on a bare stage. She sets

down the stool, sits on it, and begins to peel some fruit, continuing her monologue in a solemn tone. “Hmm, you might say we were the first merchandise for the Caribbean first free market. And as so things go, the rich countries use our sweat and blood to make themselves richer.” She goes on to point out that not only do discrepancies in wealth occur among nations, but also within nations, noting that color and gender are determinants in the allocation of wealth and resources, and pointing to her own position in the socioeconomic hierarchy: “I am from a poor country. I am a poor person, *and* black. And most of all, I am a woman.”

The monologue is intercut with Hanson continuing her earlier performance, this time rapping to heavy bass rhythms about the promise of global technologies, ending on a (sarcastic?) chorus of “you’re bound to get, bound to get it, yeah!” Joan French reappears to argue that what had seemed, initially, to have been gender neutral SAP policies were, on further examination, specifically geared with women in mind, i.e., relying on women to take over the responsibilities of government social services that had been cut, such as care of the aged, the sick and of children, without recompense. The dramatization returns, this time the persona is of a woman who we see in conversation with a relative, explaining the difficulties of having to take on added responsibility for the care of her aged grandmother, not only on herself but on her entire family.

The dramatized segments of the effects of SAPs focus primarily on experiences of working class women, although a middle-class ex-teacher is also included. “What we respectable people have to put up with nowadays”, she complains, after spending two days in a hospital waiting room, waiting for medical attention. These dramatizations are

interspersed with the conventional documentary devices of charts, graphs, expert opinions, voice-over commentaries, etc. These provide graphic visual information demonstrating the increasing disparity between income and cost of living in Jamaica, as well as the global distribution of the world's wealth.

Carrying a Heavy Load was directed by Cynthia Wilmot and co-written by Wilmot and the cast. It is a lively mix of documentary and fictional elements in which "expert opinions" come from both professional and working-class real women -- and these are not just Jamaican women, they are from all over the Caribbean, including St. Vincent, Dominica, reiterating a pan-Caribbean experience. The documentary also addresses the issues raised by the establishment of "free zone" areas, noting that the supposed increase in jobs are in such "free zone areas where most workers are women, paid starvation wages. Trade unions are discouraged. Is it any wonder we ourselves break down under the strain." A female medical doctor discusses the toll taken on women's social, physical and mental health by the disproportionate impact of SAPs on women. The region's economic woes have also led to massive emigration, not just from Jamaica, but also from other Caribbean countries such as Guyana.

The documentary also comments on the hypocrisy of the country's elite. Through a combination of song -- Hanson sings a song entitled "tighten your belt" -- and a dramatic skit, we learn that many of the country's elite indulge in a lifestyle that affords them such extravagances as satellite dishes, luxury cars, etc., even as they urge the rest of the populace to tighten their belts in the interest of the country's economy. This is particular disturbing amidst the depictions of the increases in prostitution, with

many women turning to the streets for economic survival, and in sexual harassment in the workplace, as some employers exploit the desperate competition for jobs.

The differential impact of the SAPs on the country's population has, according to Joan French, resulted in women taking a leadership role as the first to mobilize against these policies, even as such resistance hits them the hardest, i.e., these women are least in the position of being able to spare the time, or the money, required to travel to rallies and protests.

Despite the gloomy conditions explored, the documentary's ends on a heartening note, taking us on a tour of women's responses to economic adversity, which has resulted in such projects as the Red Thread project of self-employment in Guyana, protests and strikes by women workers on sugar estates, etc. French notes that many of the issues first raised by women have now been adopted by NGOs in general. One of the dramatic personae urges women to mobilize, arguing "you know, policy-making is just not [sic] the task of our government, it is the responsibility of all of us."

As in all of their work, Sistren celebrates women's strength, as Beverley Hanson and a chorus of women sing:

> Women are strengthened, women are warrior
> Hard worker and relentless struggler
> Me get down-hearted, still try to cope
> When things get harder, we still try to cope
> Teacher and mother, conqueror!

Students and higgler, conqueror!

Domestic helper, Conqueror!

…

What we demanding is quite simple

We want people to get up and listen

We want the government to stop and listen

…

We getting together, we stand up strong

Is woman time now, so come sing this song

Chorus

…

Come follow me! Come follow me!

The Drums Keep Sounding

Sistren's most recent documentary, *The Drums Keep Sounding* (1994/5) was, once again, scripted and directed by Cynthia Wilmot. A biographical documentary profiling "Miss Lou," otherwise known as the Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverley, folklorist, poet and activist, to whom it is dedicated "with nuff respect," *The Drums Keep Sounding* combines contemporary interviews with Miss Lou -- and with several of her friends and colleagues -- with dramatized recreations of incidents from her life.

The Drums Keep Sounding is the longest of Sistren's productions, with a running time of 70 minutes, compared to about 40 minutes each for the others. It

begins with a short clip from one of Miss Lou's early performances, the grainy black and white images dissolving into a shot in which an actress (Marguerite Newland) portraying Miss Lou comes off the stage, wiping her brow. After the credits, the documentary begins with a dramatized scene, set in 1974, in which Louise Bennett and her husband, Eric Coverley (played by John Jones), a man of many achievements himself, welcome a television crew to their home for Miss Lou to be interviewed. Her husband proudly lists her many accomplishments, including being awarded the Order of Jamaica, among many other awards, publication of a number of books of her poetry, her work in Jamaican theater and radio, and becoming the first Jamaican to have her own show on BBC-TV. Miss Lou's extends much hospitality and food to the reporter and crew.

A question posed by the interviewer begins a flashback sequence beginning with the story of Miss Lou's grandmother, Mimi, and her mother, both seamstresses. "It was a house of women", asserts the character of Miss Lou in a voice-over, as she sketches the biographical details, including a great-aunt's involvement with the Marcus Garvey movement in Costa Rica. "I grew up surrounded by an air of black dignity" remembers Miss Lou, to which her husband adds, "and surrounded by strong black women." The fictional Miss Lou then recites one of her poems celebrating the Jamaican woman, her husband joining in from time to time. The scene captures the deep bond and mutual admiration between the couple.

The sequence cuts to the real Miss Lou talking of her childhood in Kingston, where local women gathered at her mother's sewing room. Another dramatized

sequence is triggered by this memory, in which a wonderful sequence depicting a young girl's point of view is powerfully captured in shots of the women as they engage in their various sewing activities. Snatches of eagerly overheard conversation in the familiar patois of everyday life, float in the air amidst shots of several pairs of feet, some on sewing machine pedals, beating to some unheard rhythm, and hands that move unceasingly to and fro, with needle and thread, in seeming autonomy. [181]

The real Miss Lou returns to remind us that "they're talking Jamaican, you see, they're understanding Jamaican. My gosh, it was the sweetest thing to me." Miss Lou was led, even at an early age, and cocooned as she was in this protective and woman-centered environment, to question why "everything that was black was bad, everything that came out of the people [was bad]... Their songs was bad, their speech was bad, their hair was bad!" The rebellious spirit of folk culture, however, is symbolized by the drum, reflected in the title of this documentary, which emerges from a childhood memory, shown in flashback, as Miss Lou is wakened by the sound of drums. In voice-over, she remembers, that "sometimes at night, the drums sounded like a heart beating. My mama said that they wouldn't allow drums in town anymore. But at night, from the hills, I could always hear the drums."

---

[181] This shot evokes Césaire's description of his mother sewing late into the night, described in his epic poem *Notebook on the return to my native land*, in which he recollects being awakened by the sound of his mother's "tireless limbs which pedal the night, by the bitter puncture in the soft flesh of the night made by a Singer machine my mother pedals, pedals for our hunger" (Snyder 1971).

The dramatized sequences are interspersed with the real Miss Lou reminiscing, and reciting some of her poetry. All of these serve to capture the vivacity and seemingly unending vigor of this charming, generous and committed woman. As previously noted, Miss Bennett is a contemporary figure embodying an Afro-Caribbean rebel consciousness. As one of the pioneers in popularizing Jamaican Creole as a medium of cultural expression through her poetry, her oral performances have been described as expressing "the subversive creativity of everyday 'Calibans' striving to articulate meaning in a hostile world, to establish – in urgent speech – a site free of colonial inhibitions and paternalistic constraints" (López-Springfield 1997, xii). In addition, Brown (1978, 116) observes that "no other West Indian writer has dealt at greater length with the West Indian woman. And in no other writer has the world of the Jamaican (and the West Indies as a whole) been presented almost exclusively through the eyes of women, especially the rural women and the poorer women of the city."

Joseph (1980) notes that oppression does not automatically generate a revolutionary consciousness and perhaps Bennett's poetry, in the form of voices of various persona representing women from the working classes, leads us to understand the reason why -- the internalization of the values of the middle-class, and the energy spent aspiring to attain these. Consciousness of systemic reasons for one's class exploitation becomes subsumed under both the burden of survival and the ideologies of economic/racial imperialism and patriarchy.

The Drums Keep Sounding also explores Bennett's introduction and partnership – personal and professional -- with Eric Coverley. Coverley was an established actor

and impresario when he first saw Bennett at a high school performance; he gave her her first chance at public performance. The documentary also briefly explores Bennett's relationship with Lady Molly Hoggins, the Jamaican Governor's wife, and their participation in the Jamaican Women's League. In 1945, upon Hoggins' urging, Bennett applies for, and wins, a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London, where she is introduced as being from South Africa, Jamaica! It is here too that, after being impressed by an audition in which Bennett skillfully utilizes her patois, RADA director Sir Kenneth Barnes asks her to help another actress with a "dialect role" -- as a Mexican. Christmas greetings in patois to her family in Jamaica on a BBC radio show, however, results in a contract from the BBC, and she begins to make regular appearances on a number of BBC radio and TV shows while still a student.

It is also in London that her small apartment becomes a regular gathering place for many black intellectuals and future leaders, including Michael Manley and Kwame Nkrumah. Manley makes an appearance in the documentary, in which he comments on the turmoil of the pre-independence period and Bennett's "uniquely revolutionary contribution" in validating Jamaican folk culture and Creole.

In the 1950s, Bennett moves to New York where the pervasive racism of the day results in her having to take a position as a clerk at Macy's -- a far cry from broadcasting on the BBC. It is during this time that Bennett is introduced to and befriends Alma John, described in the documentary as the only African-American woman in television at the time. John introduces her to a young ballad singer named

Harry Belafonte, the son of West Indian parents, who needs some help in learning a few Jamaican folk songs to pep up his act. Upon returning to Jamaica, Bennett takes on the “nearly all-white” Jamaican Pantomime with a fellow black performer and director, Ranny Williams, changing its complexion. They team up again later for the “Lou and Ranny Show” on JBC Radio; its use of patois as the primary language of the show stirs up controversy for being “too local.”

Bennett and Coverley were not only intimately involved in performance and theater in Jamaica, they also adopted a dozen children. In 1994, they were forced to relocate to Toronto, as a result of Coverley’s ill-health. In the last segment of the documentary, Miss Lou reiterates that “our drums never stopped beating, that’s why our culture has survived.”

Sistren’s video documentaries utilize the full repertoire of Sistren's theatrical performances-- song, dance, games, along with straight drama, Jamaican patois, humor and audience participation. Ford-Smith (1989/90, 27-28) notes that “in the societies with a history of slavery, forms such as dance and language offered a site for covert resistance that could survive and build precisely because it could not be conceptualized with the tools of the oppressed. Lodged within the body of the oppressed, the oral tradition and the dance, as Rex Nettleford has pointed out, could not be controlled by the slave owner who nonetheless owned the body of the slave.” Songs are drawn from the repertoire of Jamaican folk and popular songs, as well as original compositions in Jamaican genres. These songs are often used as forms of narration instead of dialogue, such as the opening song in *Sweet Sugar Rage*, “Sweep On”, which invokes both the

burden of, and the resistance to, their poverty that makes up the daily lives of Jamaican working-class women. The song entitled “Ginger Root” celebrates the strength and courage of women. The songs are composed by Winston Bell and Sistren.

However, a pattern that emerges from an examination of Sistren’s video documentaries and from discussions of their plays, is that the Collective is more willing to address painful social issues of tenant exploitation, sexual violence, gender discrimination in the workplace, and teenage pregnancies, in their plays than in their videos. The video documentaries are primarily used for documentation purposes, either of the Collective’s own activities (*Sweet Sugar Rage*, *Moving On*), or of the lives of women who have played a significant role in Jamaican history (*Miss Amy and Miss May*, *The Drums Keep Sounding*). It is only in the case of *Carrying a Heavy Load*, that the video medium is used directly to explore a social/economic issue of concern to Jamaican women.

However, even those documentaries that are utilized primarily as an archival forum, make creative use of the medium. Sistren’s stated reasons for producing these documentaries include utilizing the results of its research to reach larger audiences as part of an educational outreach program. The choice of the documentary genre rather than the fictional narrative -- which may have seemed a more obvious choice -- has permitted the Collective to incorporate more of its research findings than the creative use of such information in dialogue may have allowed. Unlike their plays, which permit greater interaction with a live audience, the use of many standard documentary techniques (use of archival footage, period photos, charts, interviews) substitutes to

make effective use of the cinematic medium which, through careful editing, does not disrupt the dramatized narrative.

Another reason for the more radical nature of the plays may be that funding for most of the video productions are obtained from foundations and sponsors from the US, Canada and the UK (Foster-Marshall 1997). The problems associated with international funding has been discussed by Ford-Smith (1989), who notes that international development agencies bring their own agendas, and their demands are often based on First World notions of what constitutes "development." In addition, such agencies often attempt to impose restrictions. For example, the inter-American Foundation characterized Sistren's organization of an anti-apartheid rally as "unacceptable political" activity, and withdrew its funding. According to Ford-Smith, this funding was the Collective's only substantial funding at the time and the loss of funds almost resulted in the collapse of the Collective.

The videos are all directed by Cynthia Wilmot, except for the first, *Sweet Sugar Rage*, which is co-directed by Honor Ford-Smith and Harclyde Walcott. The credits reflect a predominantly male technical crew. As Sistren simply draws on existing technical personnel on the island, one can assume that this simply reflects male dominance of the field. When asked why Sistren members had not a attempted to develop the necessary technical training, Foster-Marshall responded that this was due primarily to financial constraints, and not to any gender bias in access to media resources in Jamaica. In addition, it may be that Sistren members see themselves primarily as theatrical performers and are willing to utilize those skills that can be

transferred to the technological medium of video -- creating a script, producing, directing, and of course, acting -- but do not appear to consider the acquisition of technical skills in video/film production as a matter of priority or interest.

Nevertheless, in addressing the various issues of concern to women in the Caribbean, through Sistren's work, whether in the form of live staged dramatic sketches, or documented on video, it becomes apparent that Caribbean women display a considerable deal of courage and inventiveness in dealing with the challenges of economic survival.

Sistren's own survival in the face of numerous difficulties and its members' resistance to oppressive structures arising out of gender, race and class oppressions, whether manifested in linguistic imperialism, sexual and domestic violence, economic hardships, persistent denigration of women in popular culture (including those within the oral tradition) or indifferent health care, illustrate what Ford-Smith in her introduction to *Lionheart Gal* (1986, xiii) calls "the creative power of rebel consciousness."

The paradigm of the rebellious woman can be effectively utilized to explore the work of Sistren. Embodying the resistance to marginalization, whether linguistic, economic, political, legal, or sociocultural, Sistren's survival in a hostile environment reflects a maroon consciousness inspired by rebellious women of the past, as well as by contemporary figures such as Bennett. In fact, Sistren paid a tribute to the Maroon leader, Nanny, in the 1980 play entitled *Nana Yah*, the first play by Sistren to explore the role of women in Jamaican history. The notion of the rebellious woman, and of

female solidarity, is a recurrent theme in Sistren's plays. Their play, *Muffet in all a wi*, refers to the timidity of the nursery-rhyme character, Little Miss Muffet, but "the play reverses the cowardice and timidity of Miss Muffet and portrays Muffet as Everywoman, whose life is a constant struggle but who must stand up for her rights against all exploitation from thieves, rapists, employers, and oppressive husbands" (Allison 1986, 12).

Sistren's non-hierarchical organization and its mix of social activism and drama have been adopted as models by groups elsewhere. Noel (1988) has noted that the folk traditions of storytelling, dance and song that Sistren members have included in their performances are rooted in a culture of resistance to a colonial system, which Wilson (1993, 44) describes as Sistren "unearthing its cultural antecedents in the exercise of dramaturgy."

It was not just Sistren's dramatic techniques that were an innovation. According to Gibbons (1988), "the presentation of women's voices in Caribbean theatre [was] a rare occurrence." Ford-Smith (1989, 31) reiterates the significance of Sistren's activities for working class black women.

> The voices of black working-class women, in particular, would have probably continued to remain unheard if Sistren had not felt free to adopt Creole as a medium to produce drama that is politically committed. In a general sense the group has offered an alternative image of women, particularly of black working-class women. Through its plays, workshops and other activities,

> Sistren has brought to light many women's hidden experiences… It has also encouraged women to organize and express their ideas through the arts (although the extent to which it has been able to offer women the concrete means to do this has been limited). In this sense Sistren has offered an example of an alternative to the white, glamourized icons presented on television and the newspapers in Jamaica.

Wilson notes that groups from the lower socioeconomic strata of a society are forced to seek ways of communication that are relevant and accessible to their social circumstances and that conventional media structures provide limited access to such groups. In Jamaica, as previously discussed, the mainstream media continue to display a contemptuous attitude towards Creole.

The dynamics of class /color conflicts within Sistren, inevitable in a society where these factors constitute important determinants of opportunity and success, have been explored by Wilson (1993). Despite its explicit feminist agenda, Sistren's class dynamics illustrate the importance of class differences within feminism in the Caribbean. Roy-Fequiere (1994) and Paravisini-Gebert have explored the role of class within the feminist movements in the Caribbean. Roy-Fequiere's (1994, 916) analysis of the women's movement in the early part of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico notes that class identification was more powerful than solidarity based on gender among educated Puerto Rican women. "What Creole women desired was a restricted

modernization of the gender system; what they sought was change and opportunity for the women of their class background."

It was inevitable, given the structuring importance of class in Jamaican society --mirrored in other Caribbean societies -- that Sistren's innovativeness in terms of its organizational structure would generate tensions within the Collective. Although it was started by a group of working class women, Sistren later added to its ranks women from more privileged socioeconomic strata. As a result, the inequities of the larger Jamaican social structure began to be reproduced within the Collective. The facility of middle-class members in standard English and their organizational skills constituted a class advantage, which was addressed through experiments in rotating leadership and greater use of Creole within the Collective in an attempt to establish more horizontal forms of communication. Wilson (1993, 45) notes "speaking Creole gives working-class members confidence. Interaction between members and the middle-class inside and outside the Collective allows for proper communication without any sense of defensiveness or embarrassment."

Arguing that the use of oral tradition is a tactical strategy in the decolonization process, Katrak (1989, 176) notes that the women of Sistren do not simply use these traditions as a form of nostalgia, but as a framework that is appropriate for the concerns they articulate, and that "*selection* from the oral tradition is crucial in order to recreate empowering figures from the past, such as the many stories of Ni, rather than the negative, sexist images of women that are also prevalent in oral tradition."

Such selective use of the oral tradition is an exercise of power, recognizing the potential of cultural forms to (re)construct history. Ford-Smith (1986) notes in her introduction to *Lionheart Gals*:

> To create such tales is a collective process accomplished within a community bound by a particular historical purpose. The tales and the process of making them suggest the possibility of a unity between the aesthetic imagination and the social and political process.

Katrak draws on postcolonial theories of decolonization, particularly Fanon's notion of decolonization as an always violent phenomenon, to argue that Sistren's use of "testimony" and other elements of oral tradition, including ritual, proverbs and riddles, its workshop method of producing drama (that does not always result in a written script) and especially its use of Jamaican patois -- which, as Brathwaite (1984) has noted, is both African and English at the same time and, therefore, the object of middle-class disdain -- constitute cultural and linguistic violence to the norms of the (neo)colonizer.

Both the structure and the activities of Sistren reflect values and norms that I have outlined as characteristic of a pan-African feminism. In addition to the notions of collectivism and female networking inherent in the decision to promote their agendas through the formation of a non-hierarchical collective of women, Sistren's explicit aim is to help women mobilize, in order to address issues of concern to them, and to

actively challenge inequities through collective action. Sistren has extended these linkages to other groups doing similar work not only within Jamaica, but to other Caribbean states such as St. Vincent, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Surinam and the Grenadines (Wilson 1993), as well as to groups in the US and Canada (Ford-Smith 1989). In addition, as I have noted, Sistren celebrates women's strength and courage against the context of a popular culture, both mass mediated and oral, that is permeated with demeaning or derogatory images of women.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In examining the texts and contexts of Afro-Caribbean women's cinema, it becomes apparent that the small but emerging body of scholarship that has developed frameworks for analysis of black women's films appear to be of limited relevance within a broader, more diasporic perspective. For example, while Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers display a strong pan-African sensibility, including an often explicit concern with their African ancestry, they do not appear to share with their African, or African-American, counterparts the utilization of female-centered narratives as part of a liberatory aesthetic. Thus, frameworks that emphasize female-centeredness, womanist concerns with gender, race *and* class, and which draw on literary models are useful, but not sufficient, as frameworks for comparative analyses of African/Diaspora women filmmakers.

The critical framework I have proposed, i.e., a pan-African feminist approach, allows us to identify strategies other than female-centeredness, strategies that do not privilege any single vector of oppression, or any single form of resistance to oppression. A pan-African feminist framework allows us to draw upon a broad spectrum of cultural expression -- including drama, music, storytelling, legendary tales, etc. -- and cultural norms and values, including collectivism over individualism, social

versus psychosexual concerns, etc., while avoiding imposing culturally inappropriate dichotomies such as that between femininity and strength.[182]

In this chapter, I will review the body of work discussed in this dissertation in the light of what I have proposed as characteristic features of a pan-African feminist critical praxis.

Multiple oppressions and concerns

A recognition of the multifaceted nature of black women's oppression, and consequently, the need to fight oppression on multiple fronts, is apparent in the diversity of themes adopted by Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers. The most consistent of these themes, however, relates to the desire to resuscitate the **African heritage** as a crucial element of Caribbean identity. This recurring theme is most overtly evident in the work of Euzhan Palcy (*Sugar Cane Alley*, *Aimé Césaire, A Voice for History*) and Gloria Rolando (*Oggun: Forever Present* and *Eyes of the Rainbow).* Recognition or acknowledgment of African heritage is an important element, but not as central, in the work of Sara Gómez, including her only feature *One Way or Another*, and in her documentaries *Iré a Santiago, Y…tenemos sabor* or her *Crónica di mi*

---

[182] While the "strong black woman" is a recurring image, it should be borne in mind that, in most Western cultures, such strength is considered antithetical to femininity, i.e., the strong black woman is usually also depicted as emasculating, domineering or asexual.

familia. The diversity of Cuba's black population is explored in Rolando's *My Footsteps in Baraguá* , drawing attention to the history of migration of people of African descent within the Caribbean and the cultural hybridity that ensues.

The related issues of **racial stratification and racism** are also recurring themes, especially in the work of Euzhan Palcy (*A Dry White Season*, *Sugar Cane Alley*, *Ruby Bridges*) whose work explores their manifestations in various geopolitical contexts, including South Africa, Martinique and the US. Rolando's *Eyes of the Rainbow* examines the life of an African-American revolutionary forced to escape racial and political oppression in the US.

Linguistic marginalization arising out of (neo)colonial or racial/class configurations are the concerns of Palcy's *Siméon*, which celebrates the Afro-Caribbean genre of music known as zouk, with its Creole lyrics, and Sistren's *The Drums Keep Sounding*, profiling a passionate advocate of Jamaican *patois* as a legitimate medium of linguistic and literary expression. Other Afro-Caribbean themes or concerns include Afro-Cuban religions which play a key role in Rolando's *Oggun* and *Eyes of the Rainbow*, and in Gómez's *One Way or Another*.

Gender as a crucial component of oppression and marginalization is the focus of all of Sistren's video documentaries and plays, particularly its interconnection with class and race, while gender dynamics in a revolutionary socialist society is the thematic focus of Gómez's *One Way or Another*. Resuscitation of women's suppressed history, or contemporary women's struggles, are the themes of Sistren's *The Drums Keep Sounding*, *Miss Amy and Miss May*, and *Sweet Sugar Rage*, as well as Palcy's

Ruby Bridges, and her forthcoming feature film on the pioneering African-American aviatrix, Bessie Coleman, *Wings Against the Wind*.

The **differential impact of international monetary policies on women** in the Caribbean is the subject of Sistren's *Carrying a Heavy Load*. **Poverty**, esp. as related to colonialism, class and race, is a theme explored in *Sugar Cane Alley*, *Carrying a Heavy Load* and *Sweet Sugar Rage.*

Music constitutes both the subject of analysis and an important formal element in the films/videos of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers. This is, perhaps understandable, as several of the filmmakers are also musicians, or have formal musical training (Palcy, Rolando, Gómez). As subject, music is the focus of Gómez's *Y… tenemos sabor* and Palcy's *Siméon*. The use of music as part of the storytelling process is particularly notable in the video documentaries of Sistren, and in Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley.* Music is also an integral element, as vivid and as powerful as the visual images, in Gómez's *Iré a Santiago*, Rolando's *Oggun* and Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley.* All of these filmmakers use of music constitutes a narrational device, providing commentary in the same way others may use a voice-over or dialogue.[183]

That the liberatory aesthetic of the filmmakers discussed here do not always privilege gender should not be seen as a form of pre-feminist consciousness, but a different kind of feminism altogether -- namely a humanistic feminism as proposed by

---

[183] I am using the term "narration" here to mean the ways in which a story is presented to the viewer.

Filomina Steady and other African/Diaspora feminists. The imposition of the criterion of "female-centeredness" runs the risk of perpetuating a white mainstream feminist agenda that demands gender be regarded as the primary, if no longer exclusive, frontier of oppression that women face. However, I emphasize that (black) female-centeredness remains a valid strategy as a liberatory pan-African feminist consciousness. I merely argue against it becoming a prescriptive element in the recognition of a feminist consciousness.

That Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers such as Rolando may focus on racially-based religious suppression in one text, and celebration of black womanhood in another, or that Palcy has a male child protagonist in one film and a female one in another, or that she celebrates an elderly statesman in one, and an African-American woman pilot in another, can only be seen as the result of an embryonic feminist consciousness if one imposes a linear developmental model of feminist consciousness. Such a model views the limited concerns of Western mainstream feminism as the ultimate goal to which all women (and men) should aspire. The films discussed here explore colonialism and neocolonialism, apartheid, poverty, music, sexual violence and inadequate health care, forgotten or suppressed history, and the intersections of these with one another and/or with gender and/or race. These diverse areas of interest or concern, together with the fact that both Sistren and Palcy consider linguistic imperialism an issue of vital concern, all reflect the multifaceted nature of oppression that Third World women, especially those of color, face everyday, as well as resistances to such oppression.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, some scholars have decried the fact that within the documentary tradition in Cuba, only a handful of the women-directed films focus on "women's issues." Similar criticisms have been leveled against Palcy. I reiterate that I believe this criticism is a questionable transference of First World liberal feminism's concerns to other national contexts, one which functions ultimately to constrain women's activities, as well as ghettoize women's work. The concerns of Cuban women filmmakers (and of Palcy and Rolando) are in the tradition of Third World and pan-African feminist ideologies which refuse to privilege sexual oppression over other forms of oppression, and which see all human issues as constituting the landscape of women's concerns. Such differences in feminist agendas has had the problematic consequence that those women's films which do not meet the criteria of (a) having a woman protagonist, or, (b) dealing with "women's issues," are refused acceptance for distribution by some non-commercial feminist distributors such as Women Make Movies in New York.

The struggle for social transformation

A pan-African feminist approach does not divorce politics from aesthetics. As such, the struggle for social transformation is not confined to a notion of politics that is defined by activity conducted within the conventional structures of electoral politics. The struggle for social transformation may utilize whatever channels -- legal, cultural, political, educational, social -- are available and/or deemed useful. Thus, the struggle for social transformation may also take several forms, including intervention into

policy making, education and consciousness-raising, resuscitation of aspects of one's cultural heritage often devalued in society, or of aspects of one's history that have been suppressed.

The corpus of work under examination here provides a number of examples. Most obviously, the plays and some of the videos of Sistren are explicitly intended to act as intervention in policy-formation, and in effecting a change in social and political consciousness about the role of gender in many issues not generally considered "women's issues", as in the case of Sistren's video documentary *Carrying a Heavy Load*. Much of Sistren's activities, as depicted in *Sweet Sugar Rage*, are efforts at education and consciousness-raising, while their documentaries, *Miss Amy and Miss May* and *The Drums Keep Sounding*, document and celebrate women activists and their causes.Without such documentation, such history is at risk of being lost. *Sweet Sugar Rage* also testifies to the reproductive nature of Sistren's efforts in utilizing collective and dramatic methods for social advocacy.

Palcy's films too both depict -- and are themselves -- efforts at social transformation. *A Dry White Season* attempted to reach a worldwide audience with an anti-apartheid message that would provoke outrage against apartheid, while Médouze's storytelling (as well as the inclusion of various other elements drawn from African cultural traditions) in *Sugar Cane Alley* acts as an intervention in the colonial logic that erases a people's history by producing official versions of history that do not acknowledge the role of black resistance to slavery.

Sara Gómez's *One Way or Another* is a direct intervention by a committed supporter of the socialist revolution in Cuba, exploring the intersections of race, class and gender in a society working to eliminate inequities arising out of all of these factors. Similarly, *Eyes of the Rainbow* is, according to its director, Gloria Rolando, "dedicated to all women who struggle for a better world" (*Afrocubaweb 1998)*, and profiles a woman who continues to maintain an activist stance against racial injustice in the US from a position of an exiled refugee in Cuba.[184] *Miss Amy and Miss May* honors two women who fought lifelong struggles for social transformation, including struggles against racial injustice, poverty, etc., in Jamaica. Similarly, *The Drums Keep Sounding* celebrates another committed proponent of transformation of social attitudes, folklorist, poet and activist, Louise Bennett, who has dedicated her life to winning respect for Jamaican Creole/patois as a literary medium.

A struggle for social transformation also includes the recovery of suppressed or forgotten history, and aspects of one's cultural heritage (language, food, styles of artistic expression, body ornamentation, forms of social and political organization, religious beliefs and forms of expression, value systems, etc.) that have been denigrated and/or relegated to subordinate status. In this category, we can include

---

[184] The US government is reported to have requested Pope John Paul II to intervene in the case of Assata Shakur by persuading Cuba to extradite her to the US. In response, Shakur wrote a letter to the Pope explaining her position and her continued commitment to revolutionary struggle. This information has been circulating on electronic releases on the Internet, and excerpts from Shakur's letter were read out loud by Angela Davis during a lecture given at the University of Illinois at Chicago, January 1998.

Rolando's *Oggun*, Palcy's *Siméon, Ruby Bridges, Wings against the Wind,* and *Sugar Cane Alley*, Gómez's *Y ...tenemos sabor*, and Sistren's *The Drums Keep Sounding*.

Not only do many of these texts depict struggles for social transformation, one can argue that the production of these texts themselves testify to their creators' struggle for social transformation, constituting an intervention in discourses surrounding various social issues. Clearly, none of the texts can be categorized as reproducing the kind of narratives that simply explore an individual's personal psychological or psychosexual development. In instances where an individual's psychological development is of concern, it is situated within a context of social and political issues that are the central concern of the film, such as Palcy's *Ruby Bridges* or *A Dry White Season*. However, both films are acknowledged as constituting, at least partially, a concession to Hollywood conventions which rely heavily on the use of narratives of psychological development as a means to facilitating viewer identification with the characters. However, even in these instances, issue of psychological or personal development are explored within the context of narratives of broader sociopolitical import, not as familial or individual introspection.

The paradigm of the "rebellious woman"

The critical framework I have proposed allows us to look beyond the demands that female-centered narratives constitute a necessary element in a liberatory aesthetic. It allows us to identify other strategies of resistance, that while less didactic are no less

confrontational or combative. While *Sugar Cane Alley*, for example, mirrors the novel's adoption of a male (child) protagonist, leading Lesage (1994, 501) to refer to it as "a conventionally acceptable theme about the talented young male intellectual who can escape and then reflect nostalgically on his roots," Palcy's Ma Tine is a rebellious woman who refuses to accept what others like her have resigned themselves to – a life in the sugarcane fields for their children as it was for them. Her memorable response upon hearing that José's scholarship was only a partial one, "You *will* go to their school," reflects this rebellious spirit. Not only does the "subaltern" speak, she speaks defiantly! The feminist consciousness of the peasant women of the sugarcane fields may not reflect the priorities or agendas of First World feminisms, but the self-reliance and female networking that is part of their everyday lives suggests that in the face of extreme poverty and colonial oppression, it had to take forms which require us to "readjust one's sense of the rules of resistance and the limits of power" (Sistren 1986, xiv).

It should be emphasized that the iconic image of the "rebellious woman" is not a monolithic one. It may take the form of Ma Tine, or of other peasant women such as the sugar workers in Jamaica who mobilize to fight against unfair and unsafe working conditions, or it may be seen in the women of the working-class urban poor, such as the Sistren Collective members, who have to maintain a vigilant battle against attempts to marginalize them. It includes women who refuse to accept the denigration of Afro-Caribbean folk language or culture, such as the character of Rosalyn in *Siméon*, and real-life women who maintain and defend its use, such as Sistren, or those who

advocate its legitimacy as a form of literary expression, such as Louise Bennett in *The Drums Keep Sounding*.

The iconic power of the rebellious woman is manifested in the stubborn resistance of Emily in *A Dry White Season*, as a wife and mother who will not submit even in the face of a powerful state that murders her child and husband, or in Yolanda in *One Way or Another* who will not submit to macho expectations, in Assata Shakur who embodies the *orisha* Oya, goddess of the ancestors, of war, and the winds in *Eyes of the Rainbow*, and in Amy Bailey and May Farquharson (*Miss Amy and Miss May*) whose unlikely friendship and alliance in colonial Jamaica took on struggles against racism, poverty and neglect of the elderly.

The paradigmatic rebellious woman includes pioneering figures such as Bessie Coleman, the first African-American woman to become a pilot (*Wings Against the Wind*), and 6-year old Ruby Bridges (*Ruby Bridges*) whose remarkable calmness in the face of vicious bigotry continues to amaze. It must be stressed, however, that their rebellious or defiant behavior is not that of the individual expressing his/her own personal desires and suffering alienation from their own communities, but the rebellion that allows resistance to oppression while firmly rooted within one's own culture.

These are images of women who, while not flawless, are remarkable each in their own way -- resolute, strong, beautiful, warm. The iconic image of black women produced by Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers are a far cry from the "mammie-mulatto-jezebel trio" described by Anderson (1997) as paradigmatic of African-American women's representation on mainstream American stage and screen. Even

more striking, however, is the fact that the rebellious, womanish or warrior woman continues to be a recurring image even in this corpus of work not notable for any preponderance of female-centered narratives.

Male-female complementarity

Depiction of males, especially black males, in the work of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers rarely makes them the sole source of women's oppression, and the concerns the filmmakers raise are often applicable to both males and females, such as linguistic imperialism, poverty, racism, etc. -- even though gender may have a differential impact on how, and to what extent, men and women are affected. The wretchedness of life in colonial Martinique's sugar plantations, for example, is a source of despair and frustration for both men and women.

Even in the plays and video documentaries of Sistren, all of which most directly and explicitly address issues of gender oppression, men are not depicted as uniformly or solely the source of women's oppression. Thus, in *Carrying a Heavy Load*, Sistren depicts the exploitative working conditions engendered by an economic situation in which women desperate for employment face increasing sexual harassment, but in *Miss Amy and Miss May*, the Collective acknowledges that the fathers of the two women profiled played a crucial role in encouraging their daughters to become independent and assertive women. In *Sweet Sugar Rage*, the male trade union representative and the male farm manager are both indicted as colluding to exploit

female labor, but men are not portrayed as uniformly oppressive of women. Iris' male field supervisor actively supports her in her struggle to obtain a fair wage.

While many of the films/videos profile remarkable women (*Eyes of the Rainbow*, *The Drums Keep Sounding*, *Wings Against the Wind*, *Miss Amy and Miss May*) and a little girl (*Ruby Bridges*), two documentaries honor men who are highly respected by the filmmakers. Palcy's three-part documentary on her countryman, *Aimé Césaire, A Voice for History* weaves together the voices of a diverse group of this century's intellectuals, as well as of Césaire himself through his writings and interviews, to capture the achievements of a seminal figure in Caribbean and African Diaspora intellectual and creative endeavor. Rolando's *Oggun* is a profile of, and tribute to Cuba's leading *akpwon* (*orisha* praise singer/chanter), Lázaro Rós, who is also a devotee of Oggun, god of metals and war. Palcy's planned production of an epic film about Toussaint L'Ouverture promises to continue her tributes to important figures in black history, male *and* female.

Female autonomy and self-reliance

As discussed in Chapter 2, the African notion of parallel autonomy in gender relations was impossible to achieve under slavery, since Africans were allowed no autonomy at all. The closely related concept of self-reliance was substituted as an ideology, together with a strongly activist stance in the struggle against slavery and later, against other forms of oppression, including colonialism and/or racism.

Survival imperatives under conditions of slavery and colonialism resulted in female networks as well as a strong sense of self-reliance. Though these may sound like mutually exclusive characteristics, they co-existed in the manner depicted in *Sugar Cane Alley*. Palcy includes a number of scenes reflecting the nurturing women of Black Shack Alley, such as the care that other women, including Tortilla, take of M'man Tine and of José when the former is ill. The depiction of women, including M'man Tine, is one of women who are self-reliant but whose self-reliance is itself rooted in a deep sense of interdependability. As such, Palcy reflects the pan-African feminist celebration of female autonomy and self-reliance through female networks, of collectivity over individualism. However, except for this first feature film, Palcy's subsequent work does not generally explore the role of female networks as a strategy for survival or self-reliance.

Female networking is clearly both the strategy and the aim of the Sistren Collective, demonstrated in its very constitution as a collective. As already mentioned, the reproductive nature of Sistren's work exemplifies the Collective's faith in mobilizing women to work together. Sistren's strategy involves networking and cooperation with other women's groups. Female networking and cooperation is evident in *Miss Amy and Miss May*, and emphasized as a central aspect of Sistren's own strategy and work in the documentaries profiling the Collective, viz., *Sweet Sugar Rage* and *Moving On*, and in the depiction of women's spaces in *The Drums Keep Sounding*.

Vrinda Nabar has problematized the notion of female bonding, pointing out that in some Third World countries, such female bonding is the outcome of a lack of choice

in societies with strict or systematic gender segregation.[185] However, such gender segregation is not the norm in any of the societies depicted in the films or videos discussed here. Nor does Genovese-Fox's (1982, 23) universalizing argument that the ideology of separate spheres "helped to legitimate the economic dependence of women upon men and the exclusion of women from the expanding worlds of politics, business, the professions and organized labour" stand up to evidence being brought to light by anthropologists and historians of black women's experiences under slavery, and in both precolonial and colonial Africa.[186] For example, anthropologist Filomina Steady (1987) has noted that the sexual division of labor in pre-colonial Africa was essentially along parallel lines rather than hierarchical, giving women's work equal value to that of men, while Sudarkasa (1987, 37) notes that under slavery, "there was complementarity and parallelism in the historical roles of male and female leaders among black Americans that bore clear relationship to what existed in Africa."[187] However, such parallel spheres may no longer enjoy equal status.

---

[185] Lecture delivered at Northwestern University, 10/15/97

[186] See Steady (1987) and Terborg-Penn (1987).

[187] Sudarkasa (1987, 33) also notes that especially "in [pre-colonial] West Africa, the 'public domain' was not conceptualized as *the world of men*. Rather, the public domain was one in which both sexes were recognized as having important roles to play."

Collectivity/ individualism

Discussions of the question of individualism[188] and collectivism[189] as cultural norms entail the risk of oversimplifying the terms of the debate to a simple binary opposition between the two norms. I would argue that these concepts would be more effectively viewed as constituting a continuum, and that African Diaspora feminisms reflect a greater tendency towards collectivism, as already demonstrated in the discussion on female networking.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1982, 26) has argued that much of feminism's struggle within capitalism is for access to individualism, noting that "for women, their relative exclusion from [the] process of commodification went hand-in-glove with their exclusion from full individualism." Individualism as a norm is not characteristic of African Diaspora feminisms. However, this is not to suggest that individual achievement is not valued or recognized. On the contrary, several of the documentaries discussed here pay tribute to exemplary individuals. Significantly, however, such

---

[188] The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following as the primary definition of "Individualism: Self-centred feeling or conduct as a principle; a mode of life in which the individual pursues his own ends or follows out his own ideas; free and independent individual action or thought; egoism."

[189] The OED's primary definition is: "The socialistic theory of the collective ownership or control of all the means of production, and especially of the land, by the whole community or State, i.e. the people collectively, for the benefit of the people as a whole." However, I use the term not as a synonym for socialism, but rather to refer to a social unit in which the individual members see themselves as mutually interdependent, and for whom the needs of the group usually supersede those of the individual when in conflict.

individuals are valorized not because of individual genius, but because they have demonstrated exceptional accomplishment on behalf of one or more collectives -- Aimé Césaire as a champion of black pride, Lazaro Rós as a preserver of a suppressed cultural heritage, Amy Bailey and May Farquharson as proponents of greater social justice, Louise Bennett as promoter of Jamaican Creole, Bessie Coleman as resister of racial and gender-based discrimination, etc.

It would perhaps be more helpful to approach the issue of individualism and collectivism by looking at some specific ways in which the distinction between these tendencies are manifested in the texts discussed here. I will consider the texts in relation to four manifestations: a) the notion of mutual interdependability, b) cinematic isolation of a protagonist, c) social versus psychosexual concerns, and d) diasporic identification and a pan-African sensibility.

Mutual interdependability is represented in *Sugar Cane Alley* in the bonds between the women, in M'Man Tine's insistence on returning to the Black Shack Alley to patronize the village tailor, and in José helping Carmen attain literacy, etc. It is highlighted in *Sweet Sugar Rage* as something to aspire to, as in the case of Iris Armstrong, and as something that has already been effectively utilized by Sistren itself. It is only in Gómez's work, however, that we see an explicit interrogation of collectivism versus individualism, perhaps understandable when one considers that Gómez was a fervent supporter of the socialist revolution. In *One Way or Another* the character of Humberto's indulgence of his personal desires reflects a high degree of self-interest, and shows little regard for the added burden his absence would place on

his fellow workers. Humberto's attitude is depicted as socially regressive. From a pan-African feminist perspective, it is ironic to note that in this film, so celebrated as an example of Third World cinefeminism, there is a conspicuous lack of women depicted as having strong bonds with one another. The depiction of male bonding (however conflicted) is central to the narrative, and male collectivity is embodied in the workers' commentaries, whereas the film depicts only how class differences act as a barrier to female cooperation.

In classical cinematic narrative structure, the use of an **individual protagonist** is commonplace, and its translation onto the screen is usually achieved through early identification through camera movement and framing. This convention has been retained in a number of the films and videos discussed here (for example, *Miss Amy and Miss May*, *Oggun*, *Siméon*).

There are, however, some departures from this pattern. In *Sugar Cane Alley*, as I have already discussed, the opening scene showing the children at play runs contrary to this convention, thereby eliciting the *New York Times*' Vincent Canby's (1984, 17) comment that "the movie begins in a manner that seems peculiarly diffident, as if it didn't know yet what it was to be about. You can't even be sure in these introductory sequences that José is the center of the film." Palcy does not present José as an exceptional individual, but one who benefits from the concerted efforts of others, primarily his grandmother. If the film had been made under a studio mode of production, Palcy would have been pressured to fall in line with Canby's expectations that a protagonist be singled out early, through cinematic techniques that center on him

and his point of view, to ensure identification by the viewer. Instead, Palcy contextualizes the socioeconomic context of José's life early in the film. In *A Dry White Season*, it is the turbulence of black life in the townships that is introduced to us at the beginning of the film, before we meet the protagonist Ben who, in line with Hollywood expectations, is introduced to us less than two minutes into the film.

O'Callaghan (1990) argues that among many Caribbean women writers, the presentation of women in different stages of mental breakdown is a not uncommon theme. Fido (1985) notes that another recurrent theme is the exploration of "the complex interlinking of emotions, spiritual responses and physical involvement" of the female protagonist's rites of passage from girl to woman as lover, mother, wife -- and sexuality is a major area of conflict -- in the closed, secretive and repressive societies of the Caribbean. Intimate disclosure of women's experiences is a difficult but recurring concern for Caribbean women novelists. This examination of the films/videos of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers reveals, however, that such a pattern of psychosexual exploration is not a characteristic feature. These films and videos reveal a more **social**, **rather than psychological**, focus.

The texts examined here suggest that the criticism leveled by Pallister (1997) against Palcy -- that she does not focus sufficiently on female characters alienated by their sociohistorical circumstances -- is essentially accurate. It is also true of her sister filmmakers. The focus on the social, rather than the psychological, is not only apparent in the work of all of the Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers discussed here, but is largely mirrored in the cinematic expression of their African counterparts. This is also

reflected in the virtually complete absence of explorations of mother-daughter relationships, especially as a site of conflict. Although Gómez's *One Way or Another* utilizes a romantic relationship as part of its fictional narrative, the characters are approached as social subjects, i.e., their relationship is explored in relation to social issues, not psychosexual or familial ones. Black women filmmakers in the First World nations, however, reveal a greater degree of concern with autobiographical approaches to psychosexual issues (sexual and familial relationships) and questions of personal identity.[190]

The issue of the norm of individualism vs. collectivism is also relevant with regard to questions of a filmmaker's sense of identity -- culturally, historically and in some instances, politically -- with people of African descent in other parts of the world. A **diasporic outlook**, manifesting itself in a pan-African or pan-Caribbean sensibility is evident in the films or videos of Rolando (especially in *Eyes of the Rainbow*, but also in *My Footsteps in Baraguá*, and in some of the projects that she has in development), and perhaps most explicitly, in the case of Palcy, whose films *A Dry White Season*, *Hassane*, *Ruby Bridges*, as well as projects still in development or in production, such as *Wings Against the Wind*, and her proposed epic film on Toussaint L'Ouverture

---

[190] For example, Ngozi Onwurah's *Coffee-Colored Children* and *The Body Beautiful*, Camille Billops' *Suzanne, Suzanne*, Yvonne Welbon's *Remembering Wei Yi- fang, Remembering Myself*, Ayanna Udongo's *Edges*, among others. I do not mean to suggest that this is true of all Black British or African-American women filmmakers, nor do I mean to suggest that the more personal approaches of these filmmakers is even consistent in all of the work of any individual filmmaker.

reveal her identification with, and allegiance to, a diasporic vision of the struggle "to give the black man [sic] his dignity back on the screen."

Recognition and respect for alternative systems of knowledge

Dayan (1994) notes that those fragments of African religious rituals that form the basis of many Caribbean cultures may have been viewed as the marks of savagery by many historians, "but for the majority of people, these folk or local religions not only gave collective strength, but preserved the histories ignored, denigrated, or exorcised by the standard, 'imperial' histories" (5) and "kept alive the lives and deaths of the ancestors (10)." A respect for alternative (i.e. to those privileged in the West) forms of knowledge, include not only non-literate modes of *expression* of knowledge,[191] but also knowledge that is not necessarily envisaged as such by the West, including forms of knowledge often dismissed as superstition, or as signs of primitiveness because their validity cannot be empirically verified, or knowledge which is assigned subordinate status, such as non-scientific methods of healing.

Cultural modes of resistance include strategies involving the legitimization of certain modes of behavior or thought, or certain forms of knowledge, characterized by the West as "irrational" or "mystical." That which is not easily understood or visible to

---

[191] Jackson (1981, 389) notes that "some lullabies of slave women contained hidden meaning and functioned as freedom and protest songs ...[others] kept the African past alive." Similarly, Nettleford (1993) observes that dance has also been used as a political tool, cloaking defiance of the power structure and concealing the planning of slave rebellions.

the conquering nations also posed a threat, or as Mehta (1996/97, 196) has noted, “phenomena that are immediately visible are easily conquered.” Knowledge is also embedded in dance, body ornamentation, musical expression, drumming, herbal arts and spiritual healing.

In *Oggun* and in *Eyes of the Rainbow*, the religious rituals of drumming, dance and song, as well as the complex mythology of the *orishas* reflect a specific worldview. Dance, song and drumming as communicative strategies, once recognized by colonial authorities, were suppressed or banned. Brea and Millett (1994/5) have documented, for example, the official prohibition of African dancing, "large drums and indecent contortions" in parades and carnivals in early twentieth century Cuba. They also note that “the dances, songs, and beats of the *bomba* had links with the escapes and conspiracies of slaves in the nineteenth century”, and that “oral traditions in the barrio of Los Hoyos narrate the active participation of Blacks and mulattos in the French *tumbas*, and processional groups. These contexts were appropriated to criticize, spread news, and conspire against the Spanish colonial government (39).”[192] In *The Drums Keep Sounding*, Louise Bennett notes that “sometimes at night, the drums sounded like a heart beating. My mama said that they wouldn’t allow drums in town anymore. But at night, from the hills, I could always hear the drums.”

---

[192] The “bomba” is a type of Puerto Rican drum. Los Hoyos is a neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba.

The knowledge embedded in proverbs, riddles, sayings and tales that form the foundation of most oral traditions have been denied the status of "theory"; nevertheless, they frequently theorize about the world and how it functions, as echoed in the self-reflexive Yoruba proverb, “Riddles are the horses of discourse.” In *Sugar Cane Alley*, such elements from the oral tradition are clearly among the most memorable scenes in the film. Depictions of Médouze asking riddles of the eager young José, and passing on knowledge of herbal remedies, reflect an African pedagogical exercise which integrates into the lesson specific worldviews about life and creation.

A respect for alternative systems of knowledge not only includes their acknowledgment as a subject of interest, but also their inclusion as a mode of expression. Arguing that the use of oral tradition is a tactical strategy in the decolonization process, Katrak (1989, 176) notes that the women of Sistren do not simply use these traditions as a form of nostalgia, but as a framework that is appropriate for the concerns they articulate. She notes that Sistren’s use of “testimony” and other elements of oral tradition, including ritual, proverbs and riddles, its workshop method of producing drama (that does not always result in a written script), and its use of Jamaican patois, constitute cultural and linguistic violence to the norms of the (neo)colonizer. However, this is evident to a much smaller extent in the video documentaries than in the plays of Sistren, although dance, song and drama are prominent structural elements.

In Palcy's *Siméon*, the title character is a *sucugnan*. The use of a *sucugnan*, or spirit, as a central character who, in this instance as an elder musician, plays the role of a guiding ancestor, also draws on African cosmologies which view life and death as a continuum, rather than as two mutually exclusive states of being. The film does not explore the concept of a *sucugnan*. Rather, it incorporates the widespread Caribbean cultural acceptance of the existence of such entities into the narrative, constituting a structural device rather than the thematic focus of the film. However, such integration of specifically African systems of knowledge or worldviews does not appear to constitute a recognizable aesthetic in the work of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers, although it is also apparent in the work of African-American filmmakers such as Julie Dash and Zeinabu irene Davis.[193]

Cultural expression as a major forum for political struggle for black women

Caribbean scholars such as Edouard Glissant and Rex Nettleford have argued that cultural repossession can acts as sites of cultural resistance, self-affirmation and empowerment. Nettleford (1993, 98) argues that "it is the exercise of the imagination – manifest in all forms of creative activities, from a dance or a few bars of music to the invention of various forms of worship – that has proved the best guarantee of

[193] However, the films of African women filmmakers fall more in line with the social realist tradition.

survival, from the period of chattel slavery and colonial domination to the conditions of post-colonial geopolitical and economic encirclement."

In the previous section, I discussed cultural modes of resistance that include strategies involving the legitimization of certain modes of behavior or thought, or certain forms of knowledge. However, while African/Diaspora women have long utilized such established cultural media of expression as (written) literature, their forays into the audiovisual media has a much younger history.

Several notable features in the case of the filmmakers discussed here are a) their involvement in other forms of cultural expression – such as music and drama – which they also incorporate into their cinematic endeavors, and b) none of their films/videos can be categorized as pure entertainment. Thus, cultural expression not only draws upon and combines various forms of expression, it reflects neither the "commodity" approach of First Cinema, nor the "art" approach of Second Cinema. Thus, Afro-Caribbean women's cinematic expression generally falls within the sphere of Third Cinema, which explicitly promotes an ideology of using the cultural medium of cinema as a combative tool. However, the categories of First, Second and Third Cinema cannot encompass the variety of modes of production utilized by Palcy, Gómez and Rolando, as I will discuss in the next section.

Contextualization of cultural production and dissemination

In her justification for conducting a purely textual analysis of three women' texts, Gayatri Spivak (1985, 244) states that "the object of my investigation is the

printed book, not its 'author.' To make such a distinction, is of course, to ignore the lessons of deconstruction … my readings here do not seek to undermine the excellence of the individual artist." Spivak's assumption appears to be that investigating the author as well as the text is necessarily aimed at celebrating the individual artist. I hope that it has become clear at this point that it was not the intention, nor the consequence, of this dissertation's approach to valorize the filmmaker's individual creative excellence, i.e. the *auteur* approach.

In presenting the social, economic and cultural context, I have attempted to avoid what Paravisini-Gevert (1997, 4) reminds us is a tendency in academic scholarship, i.e., the “disconnection of the text from the historical materiality of real women’s lives.” Her call, “that as scholars committed to studying Caribbean women we must anchor our work in a profound understanding of the societies we (they) inhabit”, is a refrain in African/Disapora feminisms.[194] This project situates the work of Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers in a broader context in order to illuminate the relationship between the author, the text and the context of production -- whether it is the social, cultural, legal, economic, geopolitical or institutional context of production.

---

[194] See, for example, Tesfagiorgis (1993), Ford-Smith (1988), Paravisini-Gevert (1997), Davies (1986).

Benamou (1995, 258) argues that “among the paradigms that have obscured the cinematic contribution of Latin American women (and their effectiveness) with the film historical record, one can cite the hierarchical notion of film authorship, shared by practitioners and critics alike, that has been skewed in favor of recognition of individual directors. Since its crystallization in the thirties and forties, this hierarchy has not only impeded women’s entry into the ‘industry,’ but has led to the devaluation of the role played by women who, working in lesser capacities, helped to shape what is essentially a collaborative art form.” It might be added that such a hierarchical notion of film authorship also privileges feature film production/distribution and exhibition over the production/distribution and exhibition of short fictional forms and documentaries. Thus, Palcy and Gómez have achieved a greater degree of critical recognition than Rolando and Sistren because they have directed feature films, and in both cases, such feature films have proved easier to obtain than their short films.

The production of film consists of both an economic as well as an ideological component. Within the industrial mode of production in which film is viewed primarily as a commodity, the economic aspects of the process (the cost of production and marketing) is usually proclaimed the primary constituent, to which the ideological (the production of meanings and pleasures) is always subsumed. Such a perspective is itself part of a larger ideological project, one in which a pretense of apoliticalness is essential to a film industry which appeals to the individual viewer/consumer's desire for pleasure.

I argued earlier that the cinematic vision of the Afro-Caribbean women filmmakers discussed here reflects neither the “film as entertainment/commodity” approach of First Cinema, nor the “film as art” approach of Second Cinema. I argued that Afro-Caribbean women’s cinematic expression generally falls within the sphere of Third Cinema with its explicit ideology of using the medium of cinema as a combative tool. Gabriel (1989) has argued that Third World films may characterize one or more of three phases (which he labels as unqualified assimilation, remembrance and combative). Only the third, the combative phase, in which filmmaking is practiced as a public service and in the interests of Third World peoples, constitutes Third Cinema.

With regard to Palcy in particular, attempts to categorize her films, or her modes of production, within the more clearly demarcated framework of Gabriel’s formulation lead us into murky waters. Palcy frequently, but not always, works within the context of industrially-based entertainment cinema, but her films are not pure entertainment, or unqualified assimilation of Hollywood or mainstream conventions and ideologies. While she has made compromises precisely because she frequently works in such a mode of production, her work reveals an underlying vision and focus that would qualify as combative use of the cinematic medium.

What of Rolando and Gómez who work(ed) within a socialist context and yet within different modes of production? Third Cinema’s formulations are particularly inadequate in delineating modes of production outside the context of global capitalism. How does one characterize the work of Gómez who worked within the dominant mode of production within the context of Revolutionary Cuba? We certainly cannot view her

participation in ICAIC as being equivalent to working within the dominant mode of production within the parameters of capitalist modes of production. And can Rolando's film, *Oggun*, produced independently within a socialist mode of production, be characterized as falling within the remembrance phase? Can we not argue that such remembrance is itself a combative act, an act of resistance and self-affirmation?

Aggrey Brown (1995, 52-3), a long-time media scholar and head of CARIMAC, has argued that the Caribbean countries are poised to participate fully in the development of media content in a globalized cultural environment.

> The obvious ascendancy of capitalism in the world at the close of the 20th century and the imminent dominance of the infocom sector in the world economy, are arguments of what can be called the globalization of culture (in the narrow sense). The geography and history of the Caribbean can be used to its strategic advantage to participate fully in the evolution of world culture. More specifically, while the enormous sums required for research, development, production and distribution of infocom hardware will be beyond our collective capacity perhaps permanently, CARICOM does possess the technical skills and creative imagination to participate decisively in the development, production and distribution of visual media software.

Brown also notes, however, that to participate effectively in the evolution of such a global culture, and to fully utilize the potential to earn significant revenues in the process, requires the formulation and implementation of appropriate regional and national infocom policies -- the endorsement of the need to formulate such an Infocom Policy by the mid-1990s by Caricom governments is a hopeful sign that regional alliances and a keen, global vision of the opportunities for the region may allow its filmmakers, poets, playwrights and other artists to demonstrate the full range of the region's creative imagination, and to counter what Nettleford (1993, 93) argues is a continuing tendency of Caribbean societies “to educate and socialise much of [their] population to self-negation.”

Conclusion

In examining what has developed into a substantial corpus of work emerging from filmmakers of the African diaspora, I would argue that in order to establish its specificity against mainstream cinemas (including not only the ubiquitous Hollywood cinema, but also in relation to the avant-garde and the "art" cinema of Europe), the Third Cinema of developing countries, and arguably, against African cinema too, African diaspora filmmaking has drawn upon the cosmologies, rituals, traditions, folklore and spirituality of its African heritage. In doing so, however, it goes beyond being oppositional in the sense of merely reacting to the dominant cinema. It is an affirmative strategy both in terms of its broader interventions in the struggle against the attempted erasure or distortion of African cultural heritage in many parts of the New World in

particular, and in the diaspora generally, but also specifically as an affirmative cinematic intervention at the level of not just ideology or language or aesthetics or technology or mode of production -- but all or many of these. None of the films discussed here could be characterized, to quote Ruby Rich (1995, 17), as either the "testimony of victims or the exoticism of underdevelopment." As I have noted elsewhere, the availability of an --albeit suppressed -- African cultural heritage, a passion for sociopolitical advocacy, a pan-African or pan-Caribbean identification, and a desire to intervene in the epistemological violence so pervasive in the Caribbean motivates much of the filmmakers utilization of the visual media to revision and explore black representation.

Brathwaite (1993, 193-4) notes that "African culture survived in the Caribbean through religion", but he is also careful to point out that religion in African cultures constitutes a whole cultural complex that does not pattern itself as something separate from philosophy or science or art. Thus we can look to, among others, Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, Felix de Rooy's *Ava and Gabriel*, Sara Gómez's *One Way or Anothe*r, Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley*, Gloria Rolando's *Oggun*, Elsie Haas' *La Ronde des Vodun* and Zeinabu irene Davis's *Cycles* and *Mother of the River* for the continued presence of Africanity in diasporic cultural expression, not as something static, but as a dynamic presence that both anchors and inspires such cultural expression. I am not suggesting, however, that such interventions result in a consensus of celebration of all things African in origin. The gendered nature of Gomez's response to two African-derived religions as practiced in Cuba, is observable

in what is a clearly censorious tone in the case of the Abakuá and a virtual silence on the more gender egalitarian Santería, while Alice Walker and Prathibha Parmar's *Warrior Marks* condemns the practice of female circumcision in some parts of Africa.

Nettleford (1993, 92) observes that in Jamaica, and in the Caribbean generally, "many rebellions, both individual and collective, have been lost or won through the exercise of a fecund imagination and the application of a lively intelligence. Such rebellions continue to this day, not necessarily by means of a gun but often through the resourcefulness of artistic creativity -- whether the artists is poet, playwright, painter, potter, musician, actor, or dancer" -- or, I might add, filmmaker.

While the history of the Caribbean is characterized by slavery, colonialism, indentured labor, genocide, economic and sociocultural domination, it is also one of resistance and resilience, of adaptation and survival, of hybridity and creativity – and women have played a significant role in the latter. The cinematic work of Sistren, Gloria Rolando, Sara Gómez and Euzhan Palcy do not only pay tribute to such women, the texts are themselves evidence of such resilience and resistance, as are their creators.

REFERENCES

Abel, Elizabeth. 1993. Black writing, white reading: Race and the politics of feminist interpretation. *Critical Inquiry* 19, no.3: 470-498.

Abrahams, Roger D. 1983. *The man-of-words in the West Indies: Performance and the emergence of Creole culture*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Acker, Ally. 1991. *Reel women: Pioneers of the cinema, 1896 to the present*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.

Afrocubaweb. 1997. http://www.afrocubaweb.com. Accessed October 13, 1997.

Afrocubaweb: *The eyes of the rainbow*. 1997. http://www.afrocubaweb.com/Rainbow.htm#Shakur. Accessed October 13, 1997.

Agosta, Diana and Patricia Keeton. 1994. One way or another: The Havana Film Festival and contemporary Cuban film. *Afterimage* 22, no. 2: 7-11.

Al-Nemi, Hassan. 1995. *The dramatization of fiction. Najib Mahfuz's novels into films*. Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, Bloomington.

Allan, Tuzyline Jita. 1995. *Womanist and feminist aesthetics : A comparative review*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Allen, Jeanne. 1992. Struggling for the ground of television: Political economy and cultural studies. *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 14, no. 1-2:179-196.

Alleyne, Mark D. 1990. Mass media in Barbados. In *Mass media and the Caribbean*, edited by Stuart H. Surlin and Walter C. Soderlund. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Allison, Helen. 1986. *Sistren song: Popular theatre in Jamaica*. [London]: n.p.

Almendros, Nestor. 1988. Lights, camera, communism: What Castro is doing to the Cuban cinema. *The New Republic* 198, no. 9: 28-32.

Anderson, Lisa M. 1997. *Mammies no more: The changing image of black women on stage and screen*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Andrade, Susan Zulema. 1992. *African fictions and feminisms: Making history and remaking traditions*. Ph.D. diss. Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Andrade-Watkins, Claire. 1995. A mirage in the desert? African women directors at FESPACO. In *Cinemas of the Black diaspora: Diversity, dependence, and oppositionality*, edited by Michael T. Martin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Andrews, Nigel. 1984. Suffering for art's sake. *Financial Times*, 11 May.

Anselin, Alain. 1995. West Indians in France. In *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana today*, edited by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Anyidoho, Kofi. 1995. *Transcending boundaries: The diaspora experience in African heritage literatures*. Paper presented at the Red Lion Seminar, Chicago, Illinois organized by the Institute for Advanced Study & Research in the African Humanities, Northwestern University and The Committee on African and African-American Studies at the University of Chicago, May 16,1995.

Attille, Martina and Maureen Blackwood. 1986. Black women and representation. In *Films for women*, edited by Charlotte Brunsdon. London: BFI.

Auguiste, Reece and the Black Audio Film Collective. 1991. Black independents and Third Cinema: The British context. In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen. Reprint. London: BFI. Original edition, 1989 (page references are to reprint edition).

Azevedo, Mario. 1993. *Africana studies: A survey of Africa and the African diaspora*. Durhan, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Azicri, Max. 1989. Women's development through revolutionary mobilization. In *The Cuba reader: The making of a revolutionary society*, edited by Philip Brenner, William M. LeoGrande, Donna Rich, Daniel Siegel. New York: Grove Press.

Bachy, Victor. 1982. *Le cinema au Mali*. Brussels: Editions OCIC.

Badejo, Deidre L. 1989. The goddess Ösun as a paradigm for African feminist criticism. *Sage* 6, no.1:27-32.

Bakari, Imruh. 1997. Memory and identity in Caribbean cinema. *New Formations*, no. 30: 74-83.

Bambara, Toni Cade.1993. Reading the signs, empowering the eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the black independent cinema movement. In *Black American cinema: Aesthetics and spectatorship*, edited by Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge.

Baneshik, Percy. 1989. 'Dry Season' plays So. Africa after all. *Variety*, 1 November.

Bardolph, Jacqueline. 1984. Albert Wendt, a new writer form Samoa. In *A sense of place: Essays in post-colonial literatures*, edited by Britta Olinder. Göteborg, Sweden: Gothenburg University.

Barnard, Timothy. 1993. Death is not true: Form and history in Cuban film. In *Mediating two worlds: Cinematic encounters in the Americas*, edited by John King, Ana Lopez and Manuel Alvarado. London: BFI.

Barnes, Natasha. 1991. Talking it over: Caribbean feminist criticism. [book review]. *VOICES of the African Diaspora* 7, no.2:35.

Barreda, Pedro. 1979. *The Black protagonist in the Cuban novel*. Translated by Page Bancroft. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Bastide, Roger. 1987. *The African religions of Brazil: Toward a sociology of the interpenetration of civilizations*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bateson, Gregory. 1969. The position of humor in human communication. In *Motivation in humor*, edited by Jacob Levine. New York: Atherton Press.

Baxandall, Lee. 1983. Towards and East European cinemarxism? In *Politics, art and commitment in the East European cinema*, edited by David W. Paul. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bayer, Marcel. 1993. *Jamaica: A guide to the people, politics and culture*. London: Latin American Bureau.

Benamou, Catherine. 1994. Cuban cinema: On the threshold of gender. *Frontiers* 15, no. 1: 51-76.

_____. 1995. Notes toward a memography of Latin American women's cinema. *Symposium* 48, no. 4: 257-269.

Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. 1996. *The repeating island: The Caribbean and the postmodern perspective*. 2nd ed. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bernstein, Matthew. 1993. Hollywood's semi-independent production. *Cinema Journal* 32, no. 3: 41-54.

Berrian, Brenda F. 1997. “An-ba-chen’n la” (chained together): The landscape of Kassav’s *zouk*. In *Language, rhythm, & sound: Black popular cultures into the twenty-first century*, edited by Joseph K. Adjaye and Adrianne R. Andrews. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Bilby, Kenneth, and Filomina Chioma Steady. 1981. Black women and survival: A Maroon case. In *The black woman cross-culturally*, edited by Filomina Chioma Steady. Cambridge, MA.: Schenkman Publishing Co., Inc.

Blackwood, Maureen, and June Givanni. 1988. Black film-making in Europe. *Screen* 29, no. 4: 114-118.

Bobo, Jacqueline. 1988. *The Color Purple:* Black women as cultural readers. In *Female spectators: Looking at film and television*, edited by E. Deidre Pribram. London: Verso.

_____. 1993. Reading through the text: The black woman as audience. In *Black American cinema: Aesthetics and spectatorship*, edited by Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge.

Bogle, Donald. 1973. *Toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies and bucks*: *An interpretive history of blacks in American films***.** New York: Viking Press.

Bolívar, Natalia. 1993.The orishas in Cuba. In *AfroCuba: An anthology of Cuban writing on race, politics and culture*, edited by Pedro Peréz Sarduy and Jean Stubbs. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Bordwell, David. 1985. Preface to *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style and mode of production to 1960*, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bordwell, David, and Janet Staiger. 1985. Since 1960: The persistence of a mode of film practice. In *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style and mode of*

production to 1960, by David Borwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. 1993. *Film art: An introduction*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Bourne, Peter. 1987. *Castro: A biography of Fidel Castro*. London: Macmillan.

Brandon, George. 1989/1990. African religious influences in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 7, no. 2 & 3: 201-231.

Brea, Rafael and José Millet. 1994/5. The African presence in the carnivals of Santiago de Cuba. *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 10, no. 1 & 2: 30-49.

Brink, André. 1979. *A dry white season*. New York: William Morrow and Co.

Britt, Donna.1989. Apartheid through an angry lens. *Washington Post*, 26 September.

Brock, Lisa and Otis Cunningham. 1991. Race and the Cuban revolution: A critique of Carlos Moore's "Castro, the Blacks and Africa." *Cuban Studies* 21: 171-185.

Brown, Aggrey. 1979. *Color, class, and politics in Jamaica*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

_____ . 1995. Caribbean cultures and mass communication technology. In *Globalization, communications and Caribbean identity*, edited by Hopeton S. Dunn. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Brown, Lloyd. 1978. *West Indian poetry*. Boston: Twayne.

_____ . 1981. *Women writers in black Africa*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.

_____ . 1990. Effects of the New World Information Order on Caribbean media. In *Mass media and the Caribbean*, edited by Stuart H. Surlin and Walter C. Soderlund. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Brunsdon, Charlotte. ed. 1986. *Films for women*. London: BFI.

Budiak, Liudmila Mikhailovna. 1983. *Kino stran Azii i Afriki*. Moscow: Izd-vo "Znanie."

Burac, Maurice. 1995. The French Antilles and the wider Caribbean. In *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana today,* edited by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Burki, Sahid Javed, and Sebastian Edwards. 1995. Consolidating economic reforms in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Finance & Development* 32, no.1: 6- 9.

Burton, Julianne. 1985. Marginal cinemas and mainstream critical theory. *Screen* 26, nos. 3-4: 2-21.

_____ 1986. *Cinema and social change in Latin America: Conversations with filmmakers*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Burton, Julianne and Gary Crowdus. 1986 (first publ. 1977 in *Black Scholar*). Cuban cinema and the Afro-Cuban heritage [an interview with Sergio Giral]. In *Film*

and politics in the Third World, edited by John D. H. Downing. New York: Praeger.

Burton, Richard D.E. 1995. The French West Indies *à l'heure de l'Europe*: An overview. In *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana today*, edited by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Cagatay, Nilufer, Caren Grown, and Aida Santiago. 1986. Nairobi Women's Conference: Towards a global feminism? *Feminist Studies* 12, no.2: 401-12.

Canby, Vincent. 1984. Film view: Third World truths from '*Sugar Cane Alley'*. *New York Times*. 22 April.

Carbonell, Walterio. 1993. Birth of a national culture. In *AfroCuba: An anthology of Cuban writing on race, politics and culture*, edited by Pedro Peréz Sarduy and Jean Stubbs. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Carby, Hazel V. 1982. White woman listen: black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood. In *The Empire strikes back: Race and racism in seventies Britain*, by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. London: Hutchinson.

_____. 1987. *Reconstructing womanhood : The emergence of the Afro-American woman novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cargill, Morris. 1989. Corruption of language is no cultural heritage. *Sunday Gleaner*. 29 October.

Caribbean handbook, The: 1994/5. St. John's, Antigua: FT Caribbean

Cary, Norman. 1988. Gender and religious leadership in West Indian novels. *Caribbean Quarterly* 35, no. 1&2: 49-57.

Casal, Lourdes. 1989. Race relations in contemporary Cuba. In *The Cuba reader: The making of a revolutionary society*, edited by Philip Brenner, William M. LeoGrande, Donna Rich, Daniel Siegel. New York: Grove Press.

Castellanos, Isabel. 1996. From Ulkumí to Lucumí: A historical overview of religious acculturation in Cuba. In *Santería aesthetics in contemporary Latin American art*, edited by Arturo Lindsay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Center for Cuban Studies. 1992. *Cuba: A view from inside*. New York: Center for Cuban Studies.

Césaire, Aimé. 1971. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* Translated by Emile Snyder. Paris: Presence Africaine.

César, Sylvie. 1994. *"La rue cases-nègres": Du roman au film (étude comparative).* Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan.

Cham, Mbye. 1982. Ousmane Sembene and the aesthetics of oral traditions. *Africana Journal* 13, no. 1/4: 24-40.

_____. 1992. Introduction: Shape and shaping of Caribbean cinema. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

_____. 1996. *African experiences of cinema*. London: BFI.

Cham, Mbye B. and Claire Andrade-Watkins. 1988. *Critical perspectives on black independent cinema*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

(charles), Helen. 1997. The language of womanism: Re-thinking difference. In *Black British feminism: A Reader*, edited by Heidi Safia Mirza. London: Routledge.

Chanan, Michael. 1985. *The Cuban image: Cinema and cultural politics in Cuba*. London: BFI Publishing.

_____. 1997. *Sara Gomez's documentaries*. <mchanan@dial.pipex.com> 15 November.

Chay, Deborah. 1993. Rereading Barbara Smith: Black feminist criticism and the category of experience. *New Literary History* 24, no. 3: 635-652.

Christian, Barbara. 1980. *Black women novelists: The development of a tradition, 1892-1976*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Christian, Barbara. ed. 1985. *Black feminist criticism: Perspectives on Black women writers*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Citron, Michelle. 1988. Women's film production: Going mainstream. In *Female spectators: Looking at film and television*, edited by E. Deidre Pribram. London: Verso.

Clark, Vèvè, A. 1989. "I have made peace with my island": An interview with Maryse Condé. *Callaloo* 12, no.1: 86-133.

Clarke, Colin. 1991. Introduction: Caribbean decolonization-new states and old societies. In *Society and politics in the Caribbean*, edited by Colin Clarke. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Clayton, Jay. 1994. The narrative turn in minority fiction. In *Narrative and culture*, edited by Janice Carlisle and Daniel R. Schwarz. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Cobb, Martha K. 1987. Images of black women in New World literature: A comparative approach. In *Women in Africa and the African diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton-Rushing. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Cobham, Rhonda. 1990. 'A wha kind a pen dis?': The function of ritual frameworks in Sistren's *Bellywoman Bangarang*. *Theatre Research International* 15, no.3: 233-249.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Cooper, Carolyn. 1995. *Noises in the blood: Orality, gender, and the "vulgar" body of Jamaican popular culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Coppin, Addington. 1992. Recent U.S. economic policies and the central Caribbean economies. *The Review of Black Political Economy* 20, no.4: 55-71.

Crahan, Margaret E. 1989. Catholicism in Cuba. *Cuban Studies* 19: 3-24.

Creoles. 1992. *Grolier's Encyclopaedia: On compact disc*. Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.

Cripps, Thomas. 1977. *Slow fade to black: The Negro in American film, 1900-1942*. New York: Oxford.

_____. 1978. *Black film as genre*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Crofts, Stephen.1993. Reconceptualizing national cinema/s. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14, no.3: 49 - 67.

Cuba. 1995. KCWD/Kaleidoscope. ABC-Clio. Lexis/Nexis [database online]. Available from Mead Data Corporation. Inc. February 20.

Cuban GDP declines by 34% since 1989. 1995. Reuters. clari.world.americas.caribbean August 19.

Cuban official takes cautious approach over economy. 1995. Reuters. clari.world.americas.caribbean. August 14.

Cuthbert, Marlene. ed. 1975. *Caribbean women: Communication for development*. Report of workshop held at University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica, June 13-15, 1975. Barbados: Cedar Press.

Dance, Daryl Cumber. 1993. Matriarchs, doves, and nymphos: Prevalent images of black, Indian and white women in Caribbean literature. *Studies in the Literary Imagnation* 26, no. 2: 21-31.

Davies, Carole Boyce. 1986. Introduction. *Ngambika: Studies of women in African Literature.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

_____. 1990. "Woman is a nation...": Women in Caribbean oral literature. In *Out of the kumbla: Caribbean women and literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies & Elaine Savory Fido. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Davies, Carol Boyce, and Ann Adams Graves, eds. 1986. *Ngambika: Studies of women in African Literature.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Davies, Carole Boyce, and Elaine Savory Fido, eds. 1990. *Out of the kumbla: Caribbean women and literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Davis, Zeinabu irene. 1990. The future of black film: The debate continues. *Black Film Review* 5, no.4: 6-8, 28.

Dayan, Joan. 1994. Erzulie: A women's history of Haiti. *Research in African Literatures* 25, 2: 5-31.

de la Fuente, Alejandro. 1995. Race and inequality in Cuba, 1899-1981. *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 1: 131-168.

Dessalles, Pierre. 1996. *Sugar and slavery, family and race: The letters and diary of Pierre Dessalles, planter in Martinique, 1808-1856*, edited and translated by Elborg Forster and Robert Forster. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dessout, Véronique. 1992. My work revolves around memory. *Ecrans d'Afrique* no.2: 92-95.

Di Cenzo, Maria and Susan Bennett. 1992. Women, popular theatre, and social action: Interviews with Cynthia Grant and the Sistren Theatre Collective. *ARIEL: A Review of International Literature* 23, no.1: 73-94.

Diawara, Manthia. 1988. Popular culture and oral traditions in African film. *Film Quarterly* Spring: 6-14.

_____. 1993. Black American cinema; The new realism. In *Black American cinema: Aesthetics and spectatorship*, edited by Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton. 1983. Race, class and gender: Prospects for an all-inclusive sisterhood. *Feminist Studies* 9: 131-50.

D'Lugo, Marvin. 1993. 'Transparent women': Gender and nation in Cuban cinema. In *Mediating two worlds: Cinematic encounters in the Americas*, edited by John King, Ana Lopez and Manuel Alvarado. London: BFI.

Downing, John. ed. 1986. *Film and politics in the Third World*. New York: Praeger.

Drake, St. Clair. 1993. Diaspora studies and Pan-Africanism. In *Global dimensions of the African diaspora*, 2nd ed., edited by Joseph E. Harris. Washington: Howard University Press.

Drewal, Henry John. 1996. Signifyin' saints: Sign, substance, and subversion in Afro-Brazilian art. In *Santería aesthetics in contemporary Latin American art*, edited by Arturo Lindsay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Easton, Nina. 1989. ‘Season’ of compromise pays off for Euzhan Palcy. *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September.

Edmondson, Belinda. 1994. Race, tradition, and the construction of the Caribbean aesthetic. *New Literary History* 25:109-120.

Egejuru Phanuel Akubueze and Ketu H. Katrak. eds. 1997. *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 1963. *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Fido, Elaine. 1985. Woman on woman: How far to disclose? *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs* 11, no. 1: 35-44.

Ford-Smith, Honor. 1985. Sistren: Jamaican women’s theater. In *Cultures in contention*, edited by Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumarie. Seattle: The Real Comet Press.

_____. 1986. Sistren: Exploring women's problems through drama. *Jamaica Journal* 19:2-12.

_____. ed. 1986b. *Lionheart gal: Life stories of Jamaican women*. London: The Women's Press.

_____. 1988 . Una Marson: Black nationalist and feminist writer. *Caribbean Quarterly* 34, no.3 & 4:22 -37.

_____.1989. *Ring ding in a tight corner: A case study of funding and organizational democracy in Sistren, 1977-1988*. Toronto: Women's Program, ICAE.

_____.1989/90. Notes toward a new aesthetic. *MELUS; Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 16, no. 3: 27-34.

Forman, Murray. 1994. "Movin' closer to an independent funk": Black feminist theory, standpoint, and women in Rap. *Women Studies* 23: 35-55.

Foster, Gwendolyn Audrey. 1997. *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian diaspora*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Foster-Marshall, Lillian. 1997. Telephone interview by author. September 10.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. 1982. Placing women's history in history. *New Left Review* 133: 5-29.

Gabriel, Teshome H. 1991a. Towards a critical theory of Third World films. In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen. Reprint. London: BFI. Original edition, 1989 (page references are to reprint edition).

_____. 1991b. Third Cinema as guardian of popular memory: Towards a third aesthetics. In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen. Reprint. London: BFI. Original edition, 1989 (page references are to reprint edition).

Gagnon, Monika. 1991. In light of difference. *cineACTION* 24/25: 60-65.

Garcia Espinosa, Julio. 1983. For an imperfect cinema. *Twenty-five years of the new Latin American cinema*, edited by Michael Chanan. London: BFI Books.

Gerima, Haile. 1989. Triangular cinema, breaking toys, and Dinknesh vs Lucy. In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines & Paul Willemen. London: British Film Institute.

Gershenberg, Irving. 1994. Gender, training and the creation of a managerial elite: Multinationals and other firms in Jamaica. *The Journal of Developing Areas* 28: 313-324.

Gibbons, R. 1993. Cited in Wilson, Gladstone. 1993. Case Study 2: The Sistren theatre collective (Jamaica). In *Alternative media: Linking global and local*, edited by Peter Lewis. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Gibson, Gloria J. 1987. *The cultural significance of music to the black independent filmmaker*. Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, Bloomington.

Gibson-Hudson, Gloria J. 1991a. Through women's eyes: The films of women in Africa and the African diaspora. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 15, no. 2: 79-86.

_____. 1991b. African American literary criticism as a model for the analysis of films by African American women. *Wide Angle* 13, no. 3&4: 44-54.

_____. 1994. Aspects of black feminist cultural ideology in films by black women independent artists. In *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Giddings, Paula. 1984. *When and where I enter: The impact of black women on race and sex in America*. New York: William Morrow and Co.

Giral, Sergio. 1991. Images and icons: Based on an interview by Jean Stubbs, Havana, May 1991. In *AfroCuba: An anthology of Cuban writing on race, politics and culture*, edited by Pedro Peréz Sarduy and Jean Stubbs. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

_____. 1996. Interview by author. Chicago, Illinois. April 20, 1996.

Girgus, Sam B. 1994. Representative men: Unfreezing the male gaze. *College Literature* 21, no. 3: 214-223.

Givanni, June. 1992. Interview with Euzhan Palcy. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Gleason, Judith.1993. Notes on two sacred Afro-Cuban songs in contemporary settings. *Research in African Literatures* 24, no. 3: 113-121**.**

Glissant, Edouard.[1981] 1989. *Caribbean discourse: Selected essays*. Translated by J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

González, Tomás. 1993. Sara, one way or another. In *AfroCuba: An anthology of Cuban writing on race, politics and culture*, edited by Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Gordon, Monica H. 1990. Caribbean expressions: A socio-historical analysis of humor in Caribbean culture. In *Emerging perspectives on the Black diaspora*, edited by Aubrey W. Bonnett and G. Llewellyn Watson. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Gould, Peter and Anne Lyew-Ayee. 1985. Television in the Third World: A high wind on Jamaica. In *Geography: The media and popular culture*, edited by Jacquelin Burgess and John R. Gold. London: Croom Helm.

Green, Cecilia. 1994. Historical and contemporary restructuring and women in production in the Caribbean. In *The Caribbean in the global political economy*, edited by Hilbourne A. Watson. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Greer, Harold. 1989. Baptists in western Cuba: From the Wars of Independence to the Revolution. *Cuban Studies* 19: 61-77.

*Grolier's Encyclopaedia: On compact disc.*1992. Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.

Guttridge, Peter. 1990. Question of right and wrong. *The Times*, 11 January.

Guy-Sheftall. 1993. A black feminist perspective on transforming the academy: The case of Spelman College. In *Theorizing Black feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of black women*, edited by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. Busia. London and New York: Routledge.

Harris, Joseph E. ed. 1993. *Global dimensions of the African diaspora*, 2nd ed. Washington: Howard University Press.

Harvey, Sylvia. 1974. Third World perspectives: Focus on Sarah Maldoror. *Women and Film* 1, no.5-6: 71-75,110.

Hall, Stuart. 1992. Cultural identity and cinematic representation. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

_____. 1995. Negotiating Caribbean identities. *New Left Review* 209 Jan/Feb: 3-14.

Hayward, Jeff. 1991. A matter of vision: Filmmaker beats the odds by turning weaknesses into trump cards. *Chicago Tribune*, March 24.

Hearne, John. 1990. Patois- a barefoot language. *Sunday Gleaner*. 25 November.

Henderson, Stephen. 1980. The heavy blues of Sterling Brown. *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no. 1: 32-44.

Herndon, Gerise. 1993. Gender construction and neocolonialism. *World Literature Today* 67, no. 4: 731-736.

_____. 1996. Auto-ethnographic impulse in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3: 261-266.

Hernton, Calvin C. 1987. *The sexual mountain and black women writers: Adventures in sex, literature and real life*. New York: Doubleday.

Higgins, John. 1992. Documentary realism and film pleasure: Two moments from Euzhan Palcy's *A Dry White Season*. *Literator* 13, no. 3: 101-109.

Hill, Matthew. 1995. *Constructing roots through historical routes: A critical reading of The Black Atlantic*. Paper presented at the University of Chicago African Studies Workshop, June 15-16.

hooks, bell. 1981. *Ain't I a woman? Black women and feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

_____. 1989. Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black. Boston: South End Press.

_____. 1992. *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston: South End Press.

_____. 1994. A call for militant resistance. In *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Hudson-Weems. Clenora.1995. *Africana womanism: Reclaiming ourselves*. 3rd rev. ed. Troy, MI: Bedford Publishers.

Hull, Gloria T, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith. eds. 1982. *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave*. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press.

Internet Movie Database (IMDb), The. 1998. http://us.imdb.com. Accessed March 23.

Jackson, Irene V. 1981. Black women and music: A survey from Africa to the New World. In *The black woman cross-culturally*, edited by Filomina Chioma Steady. Cambridge, MA.: Schenkman Publishing Co., Inc.

Jamaica.1992. *Grolier's Encyclopaedia: On compact disc.* Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.

Jamaica: Foreign labor trends. 1993. Market Reports. In National Trade Data Bank. Lexis/Nexis. [database online]. Available from Mead Data Corp.

Jamaica: Traveling women's theater group puts popular education into practice. 1985. Inter Press Service. March 6.

Jameson, Frederic. 1992. *The geopolitical aesthetic: Cinema and space in the world system*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jayawardena, Kumari. 1986. *Feminism and nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Books.

John, George. 1995. *Caribbean: Children of the region sing one song*. Inter Press Service, Lexis/Nexis [database online] Available for Mead Data Corp. May 29.

Johnson, Yvonne. 1995. *The voices of African American women: The use of narrative and authorial voice in the works of Harriet Jacobs, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker*. New York : P.Lang.

Johnson-Odim, Cheryl. 1991. Common themes, different contexts: Third World women and feminism. In *Third World women and the politics of feminism*, edited by Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo Ann and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Johnston, Claire. 1973. Women's cinema as counter-cinema. In *Notes on women's cinema*, edited by Claire Johnston. London: Society for Education in Film and Television.

Johnston, Sheila. 1990. Interview: Against the stream: Director Euzhan Palcy talks to Sheila Johnston about her film *A Dry White Season*. *The Independent*. 17 January.

Joseph, Gloria, I. 1980. Caribbean women: The impact of race, sex, and class. In *Comparative perspectives of Third World women: The impact of race, sex and class*, edited by Beverly Lindsay. New York: Praeger.

Joseph, Gloria, I., and Jill Lewis. eds. 1981. *Common differences: Conflict in black and white feminists' perspectives.* New York: Anchor.

Kandé, Sylvie. 1994. Renunciation and victory in *Black Shack Alley*. *Research in African Literatures* 25, no. 2: 33-50.

Kaplan, E. Ann. 1983. *Women and film: Both sides of the camera*. New York: Methuen.

_____. 1997. *Looking for the other: Feminism, film, and the imperial gaze*. New York: Routledge.

Katrak, Ketu. 1989. Decolonizing culture: Towards a theory for postcolonial women's texts. *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1: 157-178.

_____. 1990. The Sistren Collective: Women dramatize their lives. *African Commentary* August: 27-29.

Kesteloot, Lilyan. 1995. Césaire, poet and the politician. *Research in African Literatures*, 26 no. 2: 169 – 173.

Kolocotroni, Vassiliki and Olga Taxidou. 1992. *A Dry White Season*: The personal and the political. In *Cinema and fiction: New modes of adapting, 1950-1990*, edited by John Orr and Colin Nicholson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kraft, Scott. 1989. 'Dry White Season' jolts South African audience. *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September.

Kramer, Karen. 1992. The 1990 Images Caraibes festival. In *The AIVF guide to international film and video festivals*, by Kathryn Bowser. New York: Foundation for Independent Video and Film.

Kubayanda, Joseph Bekunuru. 1990. Minority discourse and the African collective: Some examples from Latin American and Caribbean literature. In *The nature and context of minority discourse*, edited by Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kuhn, Annette. 1982. *Women's pictures: Feminism and cinema*. London: Routledge.

Kuhn, Annette and Susan Radstone. eds.1990. *The women's companion to international film*. London: Virago.

Kutzinski, Vera M. 1993. *Sugar's secrets : Race and the erotics of Cuban nationalism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Lamming, George. 1991. The Caribbean then and now. *VOICES of the African diaspora* 7, no.2: 4-6.

Larkin, Alile Sharon. 1988. Black women film-makers defining ourselves : Feminism in our own voice. In *Female spectactors : Looking at film and television*, edited by E. Deidre Pribram. London: Verso.

Leab, Daniel J. 1975. *From Sambo to Superspade : The black experience in motion pictures*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Leaders gather for summit of new Caribbean group. 1995. Reuters. clari.world.americas.caribbean. August 16.

Lent, John A. 1990. *Mass communications in the Caribbean*. Ames, IO: Iowa State University Press.

Lesage, Julia. 1979. *One Way or Another*: Dialectical, revolutionary, feminist. *Jump Cut* no. 20: 20-23.

_____. 1990. Women make media: Three modes of production. In *The social documentary in Latin America*, edited by Julianne Burton. Pittsburgh, PA; University of Pittsburgh Press.

Lewis, Linden. 1994. Restructuring and privatization in the Caribbean. In *The Caribbean in the global political economy*, edited by Hilbourne A. Watson. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Lindsay, Arturo. ed. *Santería aesthetics in contemporary Latin American art*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Linfield, Susan. 1984. *Sugar Cane Alley*: An interview with Euzhan Palcy. *Cineaste* 13, no. 4: 43-44.

Lionnet, Françoise. 1995. *Postcolonial representations: Women, literature, identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Lopez, Ana M. 1990a. At the limits of documentary: Hypertextual transformation and the New Latin American cinema. In *The social documentary in Latin America*, edited by Julianne Burton. Pittsburgh, PA; University of Pittsburgh Press.

_____. 1990b. Parody, underdevelopment, and the New Latin America cinema. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 12: 63-71.

López Springfield, Consuelo. 1997. Introduction: Revisiting Caliban: Implications for Caribbean feminisms. In *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean women in the twentieth century*, edited by Consuelo López Springfield. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Lugones, Maria C. and Elizabeth Spelman. 1983. Have we got a theory for you: Feminist theory, cultural imperialism, and the demand for the woman's voice. *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 6: 573-81.

Luntta, Karl. 1993. *Jamaica handbook*. Chico, CA: Moon Publications.

MacCabe, Colin. 1993. Preface to *The geopolitical aesthetic: Cinema and space in the world system*, by Fredric Jameson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Maingot, Anthony, P. 1992. Race, color, and class in the Caribbean. In *Americas: New interpretive essays*, edited by Alfred Stepan. New York: Oxford University Press.

Manuel, Peter. 1991. Musical pluralism in revolutionary Cuba. In *Essays on Cuban music: North American and Cuban perspectives*, edited by Peter Manuel. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

_____. 1995. *Caribbean currents: Caribbean music from rumba to reggae*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Marks, Herbert. 1980. Voodoo in Haiti. In *Afro-Caribbean religions*, edited by Brian Gates. London: Ward Lock Educational.

Marshall, Victoria. 1992. Filmmaking in Jamaica: "Likkle but tallawah". In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Martínez-Echazabál, Lourdes. 1994. The politics of Afro-Cuban religion in contemporary Cuban cinema. *Afro-Hispanic Review* 13, no.1: 16-22.

Masland, Tony. 1995. Learning to keep the faith. *Newsweek*, 13 March.

Mathurin, Lucille. 1975. *The rebel woman in the British West Indies during slavery*. Kingston, Jamaica: African-Caribbean Publications.

Matibag, Eugenio D. 1994/5. The Yoruba origins of Afro-Cuban culture. *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 10, no. 1 and 2: 50-65.

Mayne, Judith. 1994. Feminist film theory and criticism. In *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

McDowell, Deborah E. 1980. New directions for black feminist criticism. *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no. 4:153-158.

McKenna, Kristine. 1989. Tough, passionate, persuasive. *American Film*, September.

Mealy, Rosemari. 1992. Oggun: Eternally present. *Black Film Review* 7, no. 3: 18-19.

Mehta, Brinda. 1996/7. The shaman woman, resistance and the powers of transformation: A tribute to Ma Cia in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond*. *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 11, no. 3: 193-211.

Mellencamp, Patricia 1994. Making history: Julie Dash. *Frontiers* 15 no.1: 76- 101.

Ménil, Alain. 1992. *Rue cases nègres* or the Antilles from the inside. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Momsen, Janet H. 1993. Introduction. In *Women and change in the Caribbean: A pan-Caribbean perspective*, edited by Janet Momsen. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

Moore, Carlos. 1988. *Castro, the Blacks and Africa*. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA.

Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa. eds. 1983. *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. New York: Kitchen Table Press.

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen* 16, no. 3:6-18.

Murray, Steve. 1993. Black cinematheque is going independent: Euzhan Palcy film is inaugural event. *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution*, 10 September.

Musica Yoruba: The Yoruba people. 1998. http://www.bembe.com/conjunto/yorubapeople.html. Accessed March 13, 1998.

Nettleford, Rex. 1993. *Inward stretch, outward reach: A voice from the Caribbean*. London: McMillan.

New Caribbean/Centam trade bloc nearly ready. 1995. Reuters. clari.world.americas.caribbean August 16.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonizing the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi and London: James Currey.

Niandou, Aissata. 1994. *Marginalized feminist discourses: The black woman's voice in selected works by Calixthe Beyala, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Toni Morrison*. Ph.D. diss. Pennsylvania State University.

Nicholls, David. 1979. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: race, colour and national independence in Haiti*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nixon, Rob. 1991. Cry white season: Apartheid, liberalism, and the American screen. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 90, no. 3: 499-529.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. 1995. Feminism, rebellious women and cultural boundaries. Rereading Flora Nwapa and her compatriots. *Research in African Literatures*, 26, no. 2: 80-114.

_____. 1996. [Book review]. Womanist and feminist aesthetics: A comparative review. *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 2: 229-231.

Noel, Keith. 1988. *Art as protest*. M.A. thesis. University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

O'Callaghan, Evelyn. 1990. Interior schisms dramatised: The treatment of the "mad" woman in the work of some female Caribbean novelists. In *Out of the kumbla:*

Caribbean women and literature, edited by Carole Boyce Davies & Elaine Savory Fido. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

O'Grady, Lorraine. 1992. The cave: On black women directors. *Artforum*, January: 22-24.

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. 1994. *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations.* Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.

Ogunyemi, Chikweny Okonjo. 1985. Womanism: The dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *Signs* 11, no, 1: 63-80.

Okeyo, Achola Pala. 1981. Reflection on development myths. *Africa Report*, March-April.

Orishas, The. 1998. http://www.seanet.com/~efunmoyiwa/ocha.html. Accessed March 12.

Painter, Nell Irvin. 1996. *Sojourner Truth: A life, a symbol*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Palcy, Euzhan. 1997. Interview by author. Evanston, Illinois. April 24.

Pallister, Janis L. 1997. From *La Noire de...* to *Milk & Honey*: Portraits of the alienated African woman. In *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African literature*, edited by Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru and Ketu H. Katrak. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Paranagua, Paulo Antonio. 1988. News from Havana: A restructuring of the Cuban cinema. *Framework*, no. 35: 88-103.

_____. 1990. Pioneers: Women film-makers in Latin America. *Framework*, no. 37: 129-138.

_____. 1992. Letter from Cuba to an unfaithful Europe: The political position of the Cuban cinema. *Framework*, no. 38/39: 5-26.

Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth. 1997. Decolonizing feminism: The home-grown roots of Caribbean women's movements. In *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean women in the twentieth century*, edited by Consuelo López Springfield. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Pastor, Manuel and Andrew Zimbalist. 1995. Cuba's economic conundrum. *NACLA Report on the Americas*. 29, no. 2: 7-12.

Paul, David W. 1983. Introduction: Film art as social commitment. In *Politics, art and commitment in the East European cinema*, edited by David W. Paul. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Peckham, Linda. 1990. Ons stel nie belang nie/we are not interested in: Speaking apartheid. In *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures*, edited by Russell Ferguson ... et al. Cambridge, MA. : MIT Press.

Pfaff, Francoise. 1984. *The cinema of Ousmane Sembene: A pioneer of African film*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

_____.1988. *Twenty five black African filmmakers*. Greenwood Press.

Pick, Zuzana M. 1993. *The New Latin American Cinema: A continental project*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Pineda-Barnet, Enrique. 1997. Personal discussion with author. Evanston, Illinois. October 13.

Pines, Jim, and Paul Willemen. ed.1989. *Questions of Third Cinema*. London: BFI.

Plant, Deborah G. 1994. A report on the Conference on Women in Africa and the African diaspora: Bridges across activism and the academy. *Sage* 8, no.2: 51-52.

Quart, Barbara Koenig. 1988. *Women directors: The emergence of a new cinema*. New York : Praeger.

Quiros, Oscar Enrique. 1993. *The aesthetics of Cuban cinema: The emancipatory role of the arts in the Cuban social whole (Marxism)*. Ph.D. diss. University of Kansas, Kansas City.

Raiskin, Judith L. 1996. *Snow on the cane fields : women's writing and Creole subjectivity.* Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press.

Reca, Inés Cristina. 1992. Social policy and the family in socialist Cuba. In *The Cuban revolution into the 1990s: Cuban perspectives*, edited by Centro de estudios Sobre América. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Reddock, Rhoda. 1989. Alternative visions: Women and the new Caribbean. *Caribbean Quarterly* 35, no. 1 &2: 29-35.

Reid, Mark A. 1991. Dialogic modes of representing Africa(s): Womanist film. *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 1:375-388.

_____. 1992. Two French-Antillean filmmakers: Willy Rameau and Julius Amede Laou. In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. New York: Norton.

Rich, B. Ruby. 1994. In the name of feminist film criticism. In *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

_____. 1995. An/other view of Latin American cinema. In *Feminisms in the cinema*, edited by Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Roberts, George. 1957. *The population of Jamaica.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Rodriguez, Ileana. 1994. *House/garden/nation: Space, gender, and ethnicity in post-colonial Latin American literatures by women*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rolando, Gloria. 1996a. Oggún: Proposal starting from a video. In *Santería aesthetics in contemporary Latin American art*, edited by Arturo Lindsay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

_____. 1996b. Interview by author. Evanston, Illinois. October 14.

Rose, Vattel. 1982. Afro-American literature as a cultural resource for a black cinema aesthetic. In *Black cinema aesthetics: Issues in independent black filmmaking*, edited by Gladstone yearwood. Athens, OH: Center for Afro-American Studies.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. 1996. Hollywood strikes out. *Chicago Reader*, January 5.

Roy-Fequiere, Magali. 1994. Contested territory: Puerto Rican women, Creole identity and intellectual life in the early twentieth century. *Callaloo* 17, no. 3: 916-934.

Sarduy, Pedro Peréz and Jean Stubbs. eds. 1993. *AfroCuba: An anthology of Cuban writing on race, politics and culture*. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Scarboro, Ann Armstrong. 1992. A shift toward the inner voice and *Créolité* in the French Caribbean novel. *Callaloo* 15, no.1: 12-29.

Schwichtenberg, Cathy. 1989. Feminist cultural studies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* June: 202-208.

Scott, Nadine A. T. 1991. *Fine art as an expression of religion in the Jamaican culture: Implications for art education*. Ph.D. diss. Ohio State University, Columbus.

Self-employed traders barred from parts of Havana. 1995. Reuters. clari.world.americas.caribbean. August 17.

Sephocle, Marie-Line. 1990-91. Euzhan Palcy: A filmmaker with a mission. *African Commentary*, December-January, 13-15.

Seven orishas from the Yoruba pantheon. 1997. http://www4.nando.net/prof/caribe/Dictionary.html. Accessed 12 September.

Shelton, Marie. 1993. Condé: The politics of gender and identity. *World Literature Today* 67, no. 4: 717-722.

Skinner, Ewart C. 1990. Mass media in Trinidad and Tobago. In *Mass media and the Caribbean*, edited by Stuart H. Surlin and Walter C. Soderlund. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Smith, Barbara. 1977. *Toward a black feminist criticism*. New York: Out & Out Books.

Solanos, Fernando, and Octavio Getino. 1969/1983. Towards a Third Cinema. Reprinted in *Twenty-five years of the new Latin American cinema*, edited by Michael Chanan. London: BFI Books.

Southgate, Martha. 1989. Women in film. *Essence*, October.

Spelman, Elizabeth. 1988. *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1985. Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1: 243-261.

Statesman's Year-book, The, 1994-1995: Statistical and historical annual of the states of the world for the year 1994-1995, edited by Brian Hunter, London: The Macmillan Press. 1994.

Staiger, Janet. 1983. Individualism versus collectivism. *Screen* 24, no. 4-5: 68-79.

_____. 1985. The package unit system. In *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style and mode of production to 1960*, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press.

Steady, Filomina Chioma. 1987. African feminism: A worldwide perspective. In *Women in Africa and the African diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton-Rushing. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

_____. 1992. African feminism: (Re) Visioning the social order. *The Afrocentric Scholar* 1, no.1:183-194.

_____. 1993. Women and collective action: Female models in transition. In *Theorizing Black feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of black women*, edited by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. Busia. London and New York: Routledge.

Sudarkasa, Niara. 1987. "The status of women" in indigenous African societies. In *Women in Africa and the African diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton-Rushing. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Tate, Claudia. 1988. Reshuffling the deck; or, (re)reading race and gender in black women's writing. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 17, no. 1: 119-131.

Taylor, Clyde. 1988. We don't need another hero: Anti-theses on aesthetics. In *Blackframes: Critical perspectives on Black independent cinema*, edited by Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. 1987. African feminism: A theoretical approach to the history of women in the African diaspora. In *Women in Africa and the African diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton-Rushing. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Tesfagiorgis, Freida High W. 1993. In search of a discourse and critique/s that center the art of black women artists. In *Theorizing Black feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of Black women*. edited by Stanlie M. James, and Abena P. Busia. London and New York: Routledge.

Thomas-Hope, Elizabeth. 1980. The pattern of Caribbean religions. In *Afro-Caribbean religions*, edited by Brian Gates. London: Ward Lock Educational.

Thurlow, Amy. 1992. *Women, media and development: Alternative media programmes by and for women. A case study in Jamaica.* MA thesis. St. Mary's University, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Tuelon, A. 1973. Nanny - maroon chieftainess. *Caribbean Quarterly* 19:20-27.

Turner, Harold. 1980. New religious movements in the Caribbean. In *Afro-Caribbean religions*, edited by Brian Gates. London: Ward Lock Educational.

Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank. 1994. *Black African cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 1993. *Statistical yearbook*. Paris: Unesco.

Valdivia, Angharad, N. 1995. Feminist media studies in a global setting: Beyond binary contradictions and into multicultural spectrum. In *Feminism, multiculturalism and the media: Global diversities*, edited by Angharad N. Valdivia. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

Van Sertima, Ivan. ed.1987. *African presence in early America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. 1969. *Le cinema et l'Afrique.* Paris: Presence africaine.

Walker, Alice. 1983. *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose.* London: The Women's Press.

Wallace, Michele. 1993. Race, gender and psychoanalysis in Forties film: Lost Boundaries, Home of the Brave and The Quiet One. In *Black American cinema: Aesthetics and spectatorship*, edited by Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge.

Warner, Keith. 1985. On adapting a West Indian classic to the cinema: The implications of success. In *Journey across three continents*, edited by Renee Tajima. New York: Third World Newsreel.

Washington, Mary Helen. 1980. Introduction. In *Midnight bird: stories by contemporary Black women writers*, edited by Mary Helen Washington. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books

Watson, G. Llewellyn. 1990. The persistence of culture and folklore in the black diaspora. In *Emerging perspectives on the Black diaspora*, edited by Aubrey W. Bonnett and G. Llewellyn Watson. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Watson, Hilbourne A. 1994. Introduction: The Caribbean and the techno-paradigm shift in global capitalism. In *The Caribbean in the global political economy*, edited by Hilbourne A. Watson. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Weis, Susan L. 1990. White man's movie. *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 January.

Willemen, Paul. 1991. The Third Cinema question: Notes and reflections. In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen. Reprint. London: BFI. Original edition, 1989 (page references are to reprint edition).

Williams, Linda Skelton and Marcia White Jones. 1992. Law reform in the Caribbean: Only the first step in the economic empowerment of women. *Caribbean Studies* 25, no.3-4: 337-354.

Williams, Sherley Anne. 1994. Some implications of womanist theory. In *Within the circle: An anthology of African-American literary criticism from the Harlem*

Renaissance to the present, edited by Angelyn Mitchell. Durham: Duke University Press.

Willis, Susan. 1987. *Specifying: Black women writing the American experience*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wilson, Gladstone. 1993. Case Study 2: The Sistren theatre collective (Jamaica). In *Alternative media: Linking global and local*, edited by Peter Lewis. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Yearwood, Gladstone. 1982. Towards a theory of black cinema aesthetics. In *Black cinema aesthetics: Issues in independent black filmmaking*, edited by Gladstone Yearwood. Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for Afro-American Studies.

Zobel, Joseph. 1980. *Black shack alley: La rue cases nègres*. Translated and introduced by Keith Q. Warner. First published in 1950. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.