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Caribbean Women & Pan Africanism

Bonita Harris

Hello! This is about all any sensible female Caribbean person can say upon meeting such a subject. After that greeting, you wait for it to say something and hope for the best. I waited in vain but it said nothing, not even to friendly women I tried to introduce it to — until I bumped into Mr. McKenzie. Then it began to say all sorts of things.

In Search of Mr. McKenzie is a book written by two black England-born Caribbean women about their quest for their father. Years of investigation by the sisters who were raised in children's homes revealed that Ernest McKenzie-Mavinga was a dedicated activist of the Pan Africanist movement who travelled from his home island, Trinidad, to Britain and perhaps Africa. The Caribbean family he left behind (Trinidadian wife Catherine Eugenia and daughter Lynda, the sole survivor of her mother's nine children) and his abandoned English family (Lithuanian Jewish refugee wife Elsie; her daughter by a previous marriage, Sheila; and their four children - Andrew Arthur Cipriani, Teddy Albert [after Marryshow], Thelma Mary and Jane who renamed herself Isha) knew nothing of each other. Neither family knew of his Pan Africanist work and his comrades in the movement seemed to have been unaware of the existence of the women or the children. In the book there is a photograph of Caribbean delegates at the Fifth Pan African Conference held in Manchester, October 1945, with Ernest McKenzie, Lushington, Gittings, Rojas and George Padmore of Trinidad, D. M. Harper of British Guiana, Ken Hill of Jamaica, and a single woman, Amy Garvey. (Mackenzie-Mavinga and Perkins 1991).

The recorded history of the Pan Africanist movement is adorned with the names of many outstanding Caribbean men. But one has to look wide and deep to find the women. There is one notable exception: the Garveyite wing of Pan Africanism (the only place where masses were to be found, and which perhaps permitted Pan Africanism at that particular point in its past to be described as a "movement") had a mass following of women: women's sections (such as the Women's Universal African Motor Corps and the Black Cross Nurses), a Ladies Division, women on the Board of Management (Eva Aldred, Amy Ashwood,

Gwen Campbell, Connie Phillips, Mrs. A. Peart, and Amy Aldred), and a ship of the Black Star Line named Phyllis Wheatley after the 18th century African-American poet (Cronon 1973).

Information is scarce on the women who would be the natural allies and the round-the-clock secretaries of our leading Pan Africanists, those who would have made it possible through their work in and out of the home for the work of Pan Africanism to go forward. Little is known, for example, of Mrs. Williams, wife of the Caribbean Pan Africanist Henry Sylvester Williams, not even her name; or about Dorothy, diligently colonised by George Padmore to further the cause of Pan Africanism during his lifetime and after, except that they were both European women.

We find Mrs. Blyden by a process of deduction. Hollis Lynch, in his preface to the biography *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan Negro Patriot*, notes that helpful information came from Isa Blyden "who at eighty-five still has vivid recollections of her father." If there is a daughter, there must be a mother. She is found (not in the Index) on page 38 in a discussion of the conflicts between "educated blacks and the mulatto ruling class" in the USA. "Blyden himself had in 1856 married a mulatto - Sarah Yates - the niece of B. P. Yates, a wealthy merchant who was at that time the Vice-President of Liberia. Their relationship turned out to be uncongenial, and Blyden claimed that this was because her loyalty to the mulatto clique took precedence over her loyalty to him as her husband; but at least part of the explanation must lie in the fact that his wife was semi-literate and did not share his intellectual interest, and that Blyden, who became an itinerant without a regular income, was not a good family provider and far from an ideal husband."

In his account of why the Blyden relationship proved uncongenial, Mr. Lynch unwittingly suggests that Pan Africanism is a matter of 'intellectual interest' for a clutch of men and not about the millions of ordinary literate or otherwise competent persons who comprise the masses of Africa and the African Diaspora.

"Not a good family provider and far from an ideal husband" — this seems an apt description of Mr. McKenzie , whose daughters spent the better part of their childhood in the 1940s and 1950s in various children's homes in England, because , according to him, his wife "found it wholly impossible to care for the children," or as he wrote in another letter to the childcare authorities, "She is affecting that she is not feeling healthy enough to take care of them."

"She is affecting!" observed the man of the house. Yet, even from this distance, it does not require much imagination to reconstruct life in bombarded, food and fuel short wartime and post-war Birmingham for a woman, a refugee, a Lithuanian Jew, with five children and a politically active black Caribbean husband who was a herbalist, journalist, public speaker, preacher and frequently away "on business." Although deeply sensitive to racial discrimination and the plight of African people, he was perhaps not unconscious of but not sympathetic to the burdens his wife and children were forced to shoulder. This awful gap between theory and

practice, and the personal and public political realm remain unfortunately all too common among many of our learned male reformers. (It must be noted, in fairness rather than in criticism, that the daughters drew none of these negative inferences from what they learnt of their father's life and work. They were very proud of what he was and he is treated very sympathetically.)

C.L.R James, whom the sisters were able to track down and secure an audience with, remembered him warmly "as a figure of authority who sat and directed while the younger men did the running around." This male type is well known among Caribbean women of all classes and ethnic groups. When infrequently at home, they tyrannise the household, treating children as persons without rights and the mother and other adult females as infantile.

The case of Catherine McKenzie, a teacher's wife, who watched eight of the children she bore die, and brought up her surviving daughter until she was 13 years at which point she herself, as the euphemism goes, "passed away," leaving Lynda in the care of her relatives, speaks volumes about the infant mortality rate and health care for the mass of women in Trinidad at the time.

Before we go much further, a brief word needs to be said on the question of race. Regrettably, people, even scholars, still speak of and treat the Caribbean as if we were all of African descent. An activist friend Vanda Radzik pointed out to a chagrined colleague and brother of ours, Clive Thomas, that even his very good and well illustrated book, *The Poor and the Powerless* (Monthly Review Press) managed to convey this impression. The fact that the publishing company had selected the offending (through the crime of omission) visuals did not save him. It is surely careless of a writer as sensitive to these concerns as we know him to be to leave these matters in the hands of publishers thereby running the risk of having the images nullify the text.

Here, in Guyana, are some of the original Caribbean women of the Amerindian peoples - the Akawaio, Arekuna, Arawak, Warrau, Patamona, Carib, Wai Wai, Makushi and Wapishana. It is a shameful thing that geographical and other barriers still prevent women whose ancestors came from elsewhere from establishing meaningful contact and supportive relations with more indigenous women. Indo-Caribbean women (foreparents from India) are a majority in Guyana and in Trinidad & Tobago, and exist in visible numbers in other parts of our region. There are also other women, including Javanese, Chinese and Europeans in our territories. Pan-oriented ideas and initiatives therefore have to approach us in a way that does not exclude our sisters and does not extract us or distract us from our mission of women's emancipation. And they must engage us with African women as they daily battle under conditions of crushing poverty, domestic violence, desert, war and the exercise of male power in all places.

This paper started out with very modest intentions: an attempt by an activist to find a nexus between Caribbean women and Pan Africanism. It soon became

clear that it was also an opportunity and duty to introduce a number of women who bring to the topic a useful perspective.

The first of these women is Selma James. (For the record, at one time the wife of C.L.R James, another of our leading Caribbean Pan Africanists.) Selma, a lifelong activist in various liberation movements, eventually made her way to that one thing which unites all women: housework. In so doing, she broke new ground for all of us as well as enriched scholarship for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. When the day comes, as it surely will, where waged housework and childcare is as unchallengeable and commonplace as the eight-hour day for paid workers, pensions for the elderly and retired workers and freedom from slavery, we shall have to single out Selma for her pioneering work.

In March 1993, the Wages for Housework Campaign, started by Selma James in Manchester (for those interested in life's little synchronicities, also the site of the famous Fifth Pan African Conference) was twenty-one years old. An important milestone was passed when following the Nairobi meeting ending the UN Decade for Women in 1985, the UN agreed that "The remunerated and, in particular, the unremunerated contributions of women to all aspects and sectors of development should be recognised, and appropriate efforts should be made to measure and reflect these contributions in national accounts and economic statistics and in the Gross National Product. Concrete steps should be taken to quantify the unremunerated contribution of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction and household activities." When Pan Africanists adopt as theirs this campaign to have women's work counted we shall know that there is a place for women in the movement.

The second woman is the economist Peggy Antrobus, who has worked tirelessly in our region and abroad to wake up policy makers to the fact that Caribbean women are the poorest of the poor in the Caribbean. UNICEF, she noted, was the first international agency to call attention to the negative impact of structural adjustment on the poor, particularly on women, children and the elderly. "However, given the fact that it is women who take responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and the sick, it is only fair to acknowledge that it is mainly poor women who bear the weight of these measures."

She had to point out that "throughout the Decade (for women), we spoke of the need for 'integrating women in development' as if they are outside development. What we should have discovered by now is that far from being outside, needing to be integrated, women's labour, both paid and unpaid, is central to the equation - but in a way which is highly exploitative."

Arguing for the recognition of gender as a critical variable in planning she reminds us that "(1) Women make up slightly more than 51 percent of the populations of our countries of the Caribbean; (2) They are the key actors: in agriculture, food production, marketing and processing; as providers of health,

education and other services, both within and outside the formal, monetised sectors; in manufacturing and services in the formal sector of the economy; and in the informal sector, where their activities represent a creative response to the absence of opportunities for earning an income in the formal sectors of the economy; (3) Women represent the majority of the unemployed, and the poor." (Antrobus 1989). This, of course, is also true for women who are the main producers in Africa. In the parts of the continent riven by uncivil wars, the burdens of production and reproduction have to be borne by women and girls on all sides of the conflict while negotiating bullets and minefields, nursing wounded warriors and non-combatants, coping with increased domestic violence, mourning and organising the wherewithal for the funeral rites for the many dead.

The third woman is Andaiye, the Guyanese women's activist and gender researcher. In Guyana, where all the available indicators and quality of life indices demonstrate that Guyanese women and children are far worse off than their Caribbean cousins, she called for the fight against women's over-representation among the ranks of the poor to be treated as "a human right, a political and an economic imperative." For those who find 'pure' bread and butter imperatives more compelling, she emphasised the economic argument: "Reproductive work is critical to the economy because it is work which, at the level of the household, shapes the human resources that are the base of all development." (Colloquium on Poverty organised by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Guyana, March 1993)

A little unacknowledged stumbling block to Pan Africanism, at least where women are concerned, is the matter of how our concerns are mediated, translated and communicated to us. What do we here in the Caribbean know of the concrete lives of African women (and they of us) except that which is informed by our imagination and the television world powers where they penetrate?

Hear Awa Thiam. "For a long time," she explains, "African men delighted in doing down their womenfolk, and indeed they still do. This campaign must cease. The problems faced by African women have always been dodged, played down in their own communities, both by the governments in power and by reactionary or pseudo-revolutionary intellectuals."

She speaks for all of us when she rails, "There is no longer any question of accepting excuses for disregarding these problems, least of all the excuse that is most frequently put forward: that the liberation of Black people in general is far and away more important than the liberation of women. At the risk of repeating ourselves, we say that our wish to stand up as a race, with our own specific characteristics, confronting all other races, does not in any way involve brushing aside the problems of the African woman's deplorable situation. We go beyond the racial problem, since we are taking our stance, not only as Black women, African women, but also as members of the human race without regard for any

ethnic considerations. As far as we are concerned, this human race consists of social classes and two categories of individuals, men and women, whose relationship to each other is that of dominating to dominated." (Awa Thiam 1986).

In January 1993, some male colleagues of ours organised a high-powered seminar "Environment and Development." It was hosted by the University of Guyana and the Office of the President and funded by UNDP. In a five-minute Viewpoint programme on the radio, "Wifing the Environment, In Other Words, Nagging," Jocelyn Dow of the Red Thread women's organisation illustrated the divergence of our views:

"I wish to offend no one in this Viewpoint but would argue that if we are serious about creating a new democratic climate we must debate our differing views publicly. But I want to say that present throughout the day were various notions of environment which I contest. The first is that the 'environment' is something special and divorced from day to day life and activity; which resides in the quality of air, water, quantity of trees, gold, pollution or the number of logs or wildlife you can export and which is controllable by scientific intervention, government authority and the 'big' companies. People spoke of Rio, sustainable development and overarching institutions to control environmentally unfavourable behaviour."

"No one spoke of poverty, structural adjustment and its adversarial relationship to the environment; there was no framework within which we examined our present state, what were the main concerns that needed immediate action, what the new government has inherited that has major environmental consequences, inheritances like Iwokrama, Barama, Demerara Timbers Limited, Omai, Hunt Oil etc., a totally battered health care system, a destroyed educational system and over it all, the policy of structural adjustment. That is what is overarching. It is because of the IMF structural adjustment policies that we have all these big companies with their big capacity to extract our wealth, their big concessions and the small return they give to our economy."

"The discussions seemed devoid of any mention of people. . . whenever the discussion in the workshop I participated in came to the question of a mechanism for environmental policy and monitoring, every imaginable reason why this authority would be better vested in a 'high calibre man,' or a Minister, than in people's organisations was given; reason upon reason was put to limit wide participation ...'do you mean that every time a company wishes to invest in a natural resource, you would have to consult people?' . . . If you mention that women were the primary caretakers of the environment, that provoked facetious comments ... 'perhaps what we need is a group of three wise women and a man!' There was an argument about whether indigenous peoples should have what were described as 'super rights.'"

Then there is Sistren, the Jamaican Theatre Collective, which developed out of the initiative of a group of working class women in 1977. In another kind of

world, their talent and skill in utilising popular methodologies for consciousness raising and organisation building would be remunerated far above the levels presently being awarded university political scientists. After eleven years as Sistren's Artistic Director, Honour Ford Smith sent herself on leave, saying: "Founders need a chance to take structured study leave and grow through exposure to other women's groups, organisations, theatre and general education." (Sistren 1988). This should be a rule for all leaders: mandatory study leave at least once per decade.

In an interview in the same issue of the *Sistren* magazine, she posed and answered instructively a number of questions. About the origins of Sistren she explained: "It came partly about through the opening of the seventies, the crash programme and so on. But another part of it was a vision of women's popular theatre, which came out of feminism, socialism, experimental and political theatre and education. Without this thinking, the organisation would not have been unique. This is often overlooked — the theory behind the work."

On Sistren's biggest achievements she pointed to "The creation and development of a working class popular theatre and an autonomous (stressed in the original) women's organisation over the last eleven years, which has had national impact on working class women in terms of helping to show an alternative to oppression."

On one of Sistren's mistakes she highlighted "The move away from using personal testimony as the basis of work. Instead, we got bogged down in old fashioned processes of administration. We spent so much time in meetings we hardly had enough time to get any work done. The meetings themselves depended on abstract reasoning, debate and argument skills. Since not all of us were able to do that, people became suspicious and bored and agreed to things they didn't always understand. Then when they found out what it really meant, they'd 'unwork."

"Why would personal testimony have helped? It would have helped us to deal with our own creativity; given us a place to express interpersonal problems non-verbally. And because we are women and most women experience political problems in the so-called private area of life it would have made that link between our social structures and our work."

This last statement contains a truth that truly grasped can make all the difference in organising for transformation: Most women experience political problems in the so-called private area of life.

The understanding, experience, methodologies and teachings of Sistren multiplied and applied throughout Africa and the diaspora could do infinitely more to advance Pan Africanism than a million conferences of the type already held and possibly already planned for the future.

Although women have been the backbone and the guts of anti-colonial, national liberation, independence and all freedom movements and the organisations which led or supported them, in no place do any majority of women enjoy even relative freedom. This stark reality is usually relegated to a minor point made in passing by writers, theoreticians and observers of these processes who approach their research without the necessary gender bias. Instead of la luta continua for women, life is the continuing private and public colonisation, deepening impossibly with structural adjustment. We see the mass raping of women in what was once progressive Yugoslavia; skin and bones for what was once Somali women and children; the battering of women on all sides of the Angolan tragedy; the bottom of the Atlantic for fleeing Haitians. Where on the agenda of Pan Africanism are these matters which cannot wait? In what way will they sidetrack the movement? What is the relation of the fathers and the sons and the brothers to the rest of African humanity? What can Pan Africanism as the twenty-first century approaches be about, if not, first and foremost, the fate of women and children?

"We started campaigning for wages for housework, the unpaid labour that most women do every day of their lives ..." Selma James explains, "It was not just a demand for money, but a new political perspective which was especially important for the working class because it deals with power relations which socialists and feminists often didn't see." (James 1992) Pan Africanists often don't see it either.

Look at us! Most of us who have escaped the cruder forms of poverty work at low income jobs in the food, education, health, agriculture, export processing zones, public and other service sectors. (We see the unpaid domestic work women do as the root of all our problems because work done for no pay in the home is responsible for the low pay similar jobs are awarded outside the home.) Where we see women in so-called non- traditional occupations, such as the security services in Guyana, the explanation is to be found in the fact that they are low paying. This world of work is dominated by unreformed men aware of the level of dependency and prepared to exploit it to the fullest. Economic dependency taken with the burdens of domestic labour drive those with spunk and possibilities to migrate at the earliest opportunity. Many Caribbean women dream of migrating to a place where homes have running water, light at the flick of a switch, fuel at the turn of a stove knob, laundry washed and dried at the press of a button, food purchasable around the corner for a proportion of the family's income instead of hunted and gathered — and why should they not? It is after all the last decade of the twentieth century! For us, motherhood is by and large compulsory, children, the getting or aborting, our responsibility. In short, it is not hard to have no time for Pan Africanism, especially when it has nothing to offer us but ongoing argument.

In Guyana, in the Working People's Alliance, one criticism raised against leading women activists described as having "deserted" the "political" struggle was that we had abandoned the fight for power for the fight for empowerment. In the first place we did not abandon the party which we played a large part in helping to shape and build. We kept more than one foot in the door and held one head in key areas (finance, programme, propaganda, decision making) because empowerment requires that women with a gender bias locate themselves in as many places as possible, and the place where political authority may be exercised and political culture transformed would be a place to be. We simply rescheduled our time and energies and extended the scope of our influence. In the second place, the women activists who became women's activists saw their work as highly political, work which had been neglected for too long in the narrow interests of the broader political struggle.

While we lent our not inconsiderable resources to the Working People's Alliance bid for state power at the 1992 elections which were free enough to defeat the attempts of the 25 year-old dictatorship to remain in office but not so free that the WPA was able to win more than two token seats, some of us did utter the heresy that, yes, we were actually more interested in the empowerment of women than the achieving of state power by our party, especially if a choice about where our minds and bodies would be had to be made. I should note here that the WPA, while far from perfect, was remarkably free from the horrible male chauvinism and sectarianism which characterised parties of the left in the Caribbean.

I recommend the reading of former Black Panther Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* for those who want to understand something about the culture of male dominated 'progressive' political organisations and armed struggle units. 'Beautiful,' one of the adjectives used on the jacket in a promotion blurb by Claude Brown (*Manchild in the Promised Land*) to describe the Panthers, is not well chosen. The book also supplies ample clues to an understanding of how and why Winnie Mandela became what she is reported to have become and raises another question: why is not the male institution where she won her spurs and which now spurns her not being called to account?

The organisation which we formed in 1986 while remaining leading members of the Working People's Alliance was Red Thread. (Judging from the ethnic voting patterns in the October 1992 elections most of the 200-plus women in Red Thread would have cast their ballots, not in favour of the main party of the organisers [WPA] but for the incumbents or the opposition party which won.) It was organised across party lines among women in Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese communities and had the following objectives: 1) To organise women to earn money through a process of self-management and collective endeavour; 2) To link income generation and personal development to community develop-

ment; to enhance leadership capacities within communities; 3) To provide appropriate educational and skills training; 4) To increase the participants' self-knowledge and heighten their consciousness of their shared conditions; 5) To facilitate an experience of paid work which involves participants in decision-making and does not depend on subservience of any kind. With the acquisition of a heavy-duty vehicle, we have expanded our work into an Amerindian community not served by the coastal road system.

This may sound very NGOish to persons raised on superior political organisational traditions. We are unapologetically a non-government organisation but we do not make a fetish of it; it is simply a mechanism through which women may move in a very practical way to self-emancipation, which in our time and place was articulated by Walter Rodney as the only real road to freedom for the working people. The seven women who organised Red Thread (Andaiye, Jocelyn Dow, Bonita Harris, Diana Matthews, Danuta Radzik, Vanda Radzik, Karen de Souza) took the organising principle of collective leadership which distinguished the WPA among political parties, a step further. We constituted ourselves into a Resource Unit of the organisation and function in this capacity, rather than as leaders. The membership of the Resource Unit is fluid as women move in and out, depending on the needs or the riches of the period, personal passions and constraints.

Red Thread has become part of a growing network, not yet a 'pan' movement, of Caribbean women of all classes where work goes on, visits are made by groups and individuals, and experiences are shared. This is supported by similar developmental work at home where, for example, an education or health workshop team would make contacts in a community, visit house to house and organise sessions. Recent research on survival strategies by a Red Thread team conducting surveys in a mining town caused grumbling among male trade unionists when they discovered the women (who were from their community, not the university) were being paid for their work! In another community, a sugar worker forbade his wife (a member of the Red Thread research team) from carrying out a survey among male heads of households on the grounds that it would shame him. (She was allowed to work in another community. She already had his consent to carry out interviews with women in her village. He has come a long way in five years.) We have also discovered, not surprisingly, that, for example, women more easily see the link between working to end violence against women and the question of the rights of children; that is, more easily than men making the concrete connections between people's liberation and the status of women.

Think how protective a wide trans-tribal women's network could have been in the former Yugoslavia which boasted traditional male-dominated, well run, well managed, well structured organisations such as parties and armies. Think

how our common survival can be assured in multi-ethnic Third World societies such as Africa when women organise across race and ethnic lines.

Caribbean women may demonstrate sympathy and solidarity with the Pan African ideal, but as it stands today it is not sufficient. The struggle for our economic independence, for the right to be paid for work, must take precedence over all other struggles. This is not merely an expression of choice (which it is too; freedom of choice, ranking high on any list of essential human rights), but also an expression of good sense, since the free-Africa goal of Pan Africanists will never be won unless the unshackling of women, the producers and reproducers of labour power becomes an absolute priority of all organisers, freedom fighters and would-be liberation parties.

How can women be expected to play an effective and genuine role in the wider movements needing their talents and energies when they are hemmed in by life itself? When they are constrained by multiple social oppressions which are not the active concern of pan movements? Imagine a Pan Africanism vibrant with social truth and peopled with free women.

Until then, culturemongerers, tribalists, tyrannisers, famine causers and desert stormers in all their guises will continue their dread works, unstoppable. Directly under the noses of the McKenzie-Mavingas at the offices and secretariats of Pan Africanism are the patriarchal societies of Africa which make a virtue out of oppressing and traumatising women and girls. Although much can be said and needs to be said on the sacrosanct matter of culture, here are just two statements from African women on it.

Medina, a Fulani girl relates: "When I was at the end of my second year in high school, I was told that my grandfather, a marabout wielding absolute power in the family and thought of as 'God-the-father' by a great number of people including my parents, wished to see me. He had so much authority that his children, nephews, disciples, and all those surrounding him, never argued with his decisions. When I arrived at his house, accompanied by my parents, he said, after the formal exchange of greetings and polite formulas: You have always been a good and obedient child. I know that you are also a good pupil. I would like to give you in marriage next Friday (this was a Saturday evening) to your cousin X, who is continuing his studies in Saudi Arabia. You probably don't know him, but he is a good boy and well bred... After the wedding, you will return to Saudi Arabia with him and stay there till he has finished his studies.' I was thunderstruck."

"... so in Black Africa it would seem that males have forced women to become their own torturers, to butcher each other. Women have rationalised excision and infibulation, associating these with prescriptive practices until they become an integral part of their traditional or ritual body of customs. This would partly explain the fact that women themselves take the responsibility for their own mutilation.... The average man or woman in Black Africa does not give much

thought to clitoridectomy and infibulation, any more than to the condition of women generally. Within mass Black African organisations, whether of the right or the left, these matters are avoided, on the grounds that they are not apt to mobilise the interest of the masses. Who decides this? Who decrees it? Men, and the dominating ideology of these organisations which, even when they include some women in their midst, are fundamentally mysogynist." [Awa Thiam, Black Sisters, Speak Out, p. 20, 75, 86]

For those who may feel that 'balance' is missing from this paper, that women too plenty, here is a lengthy extract from C.L.R James, the sweetheart of Pan Africanists. (We also love and respect him.) In his closing thoughts in an address, "Towards the Seventh Pan-African Congress — Past, Present and Future" (1976) he takes us to a book *Child of the Dark* by a Brazilian woman, Carolina Maria de Jesus, "who sat down every night and wrote a diary about the kind of life she was living in the Brazilian ghetto. It got into the hands of a Brazilian reporter ... When the book appeared in Sao Paulo, in less than six months, 90,000 copies were sold. It has sold more than any other Brazilian book since the beginning of Brazil centuries ago. Let me repeat. The book that has had the widest circulation in that huge area is the book by this woman with two years of schooling. That is an example of what can be done by the mass of the population when it is given the opportunity to express its natural ability. Lenin was very much concerned about that. He always said, give the common people a chance, they have the energy, they have the ability, they have the desire to change. But the ordinary society suppresses them and keeps them down. If you free them you get energy, you get initiative, you get forward-looking policy, etc., which can be a tremendous advance in the economic and social development of any country."

This is C.L.R's way of expressing Andaiye's point that "combating women's 'over-representation' among the poor is at once a human right, a political and an economic imperative."

James then goes to George Lamming's *Natives of My Person*, to the discussion among the wives of the men who made the Middle Passage ... "The surgeon's wife asks: 'Why did we follow them here? These men are no good and yet we have followed them out here, why did we do that?' The steward's wife says: 'Yes, why follow them here?' And the lady of the house, who was in charge, says: 'Because we are a future. Because women are a future' ... And the last lines of the book are from the lady of the house, 'A future, I repeat: we are a future they must learn." According to James, Lamming "has been saying in all of his books: that men constitute an elite in relation to women, and women have got a capacity, which men have got to learn."

CLR concludes his reflections: "I believe that all these matters (and many more) could be the material for a Seventh Pan-African Congress. And I believe that it is not only Africans who would be able to understand that tremendous move

forward there posed, but people all over the world and in the advanced countries would understand, with our repudiation of the national state, our repudiation of the elite, our respect for the great mass of the population and the dominant role that it would play in the reconstruction of society, our recognition that our elitism is morally responsible for what is happening to the ordinary man (he means person), our recognition of the capacity they have in them, our recognition of the need to release the enormous energies of the mass of people, in particular in women and the peasants — such a congress could be the Seventh for Pan Africanism but, for that very reason, the First of new worldwide social advance."

Throughout Africa and the diaspora, women birth, bring up and bury much with desperately little — especially, it must be noted, in a place like Angola. This paper has attempted to unearth a small portion of some of this labour to allow it to speak directly to the question of Caribbean women and Pan Africanism. For there to exist a nexus between us and it, especially when its leading spokespersons continue to be male, it will have to come out uncompromisingly, for example, for the disbanding of all the armies and the fiefdoms of Africa, for the turning of weapons into washing machines, and, yes, for wages for all the unremunerated housework, yard work and field work which women do which still remain the basis of all our economies, modern or not. These are not unreasonable demands, and we do not ask for backpay or compensation for injuries sustained in the past.

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