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Intimate Partner Violence in the Caribbean: Shifting Caribbean Feminism Towards Alternative
Modernity

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Abstract

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Intimate partner violence (IPV), defined as “any pattern of purposeful behavior through which an intimate tries to control the thoughts, beliefs, or actions of another intimate, or tries to punish the intimate for a real or imagined transgression or for resisting the perpetrator’s control...” is endemic to the Caribbean region. Studies have demonstrated the severity of IPV in the Caribbean, suggesting that, on average, 46% of women have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. Caribbean feminists have centered issues of IPV in their praxis and advocacy for some decades, but their progress has been marginal at best. My project seeks to supplement pre-existing forms of Caribbean feminism, arguing that the terminal goal of a postcolonial Caribbean feminism is indeed misguided, neglecting the roots of colonialist destitution that have cultivated structures that require postcolonial chiseling to flourish. By completing a historical analysis of the movement’s origins, I conclude that Caribbean feminism finds its roots in the struggles of (white) Western women, and thus a direct translation of thought and activism onto Caribbean soil has stunted the movement and its potential for progress. Carceral feminism, specifically, serves as a major point of scrutiny as I examine the efficacy of Trinidad and Tobago’s Domestic Violence Act (1991) as demonstrable of feminist advocacy and its terminal goals. Through a closer examination of such acts and an epistemological insistence of the implementation of a non-Western feminism and philosophy within the region, I propose various starting points for the foundation of a more useful feminism. Employing Lyndon Gill’s conception of erotic subjectivity, I further argue that a return to a recognition of the subject as erotic, as a simultaneously political-sensual-spiritual being, shifts our collective perspective towards the development of a postcolonial episteme, one that may further supplement Caribbean feminism in achieving its goals beyond carcerality. The utility of a non-Western philosophy may be used to deconstruct the ‘universal woman’ imposed by Western feminists and situate Caribbean feminism fully towards a future in which issues such as IPV may be addressed in its entirety.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2020, my maternal grandmother who was born and raised in Georgetown, Guyana had a stroke— her third since 2004. Since I can remember, she has always been weak on her left side, always walking with a slight limp, but this stroke in particular took the biggest toll on her body. She would never admit it, but I suspect she feared that the end of her life was rapidly approaching. Upon visiting her after her discharge from the hospital, she focused on me as we sat at her dining table and said “meh wan you fuh find one good man who nah guh beat yuh, and geh married.” At twenty years old, I imagine she encouraged me to get married so young due to anxieties about missing major milestones in her grandchildren’s lives, but that she felt so compelled to specify “a man who nah guh beat yuh” struck me as odd. Still, I dismissed it. The next year, I went to visit my paternal grandmother, born and raised in San Fernando, Trinidad, for Thanksgiving. In better health, my paternal grandmother echoed the same sentiments: she wanted me to find a man *who would not beat me*. Curious, I asked why she felt it necessary to make that specification. It was then that she told me the grave history of the women in my family: her sisters, nieces, aunts, and even her own brother’s girlfriends were all victims of intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. Men that I called uncles and cousins had physically and emotionally abused their wives and girlfriends, and she cited this as one reason she never married. I was shocked, completely blindsided by the prevalence of violence in my own family. After a series of database inquiries, I discovered that this was not only prevalent in my own family, but endemic to the Caribbean region.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has many definitions, all encompassing some degree of abuse between partners in various types of domestic relationships. For the remainder of my project, I will employ Mansley’s definition when referring to IPV: “intimate partner violence is

any pattern of purposive behavior through which an intimate tries to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of another intimate, or tries to punish the intimate for a real or imagined transgression, or for resisting the perpetrator’s control” (Mansley 2009). Domestic violence, on the other hand, is a broader term used to refer to any domestic dispute whether it is between spouses, unmarried couples, siblings, mother and child, or even landlord and tenant. While I may use ‘intimate partner violence’ and ‘domestic violence’ interchangeably, this is due, in part, to the reference of violence in popular discourse as domestic violence. The conflation of the two terms is employed even in legislature¹, and thus a distinction between the two is often futile. Nonetheless, the matter of significance remains intimate partner violence for this project.

From 2016 to 2019, five CARICOM member states— Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago— conducted national surveys to measure the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their respective countries. Alarming, the average lifetime prevalence of any type of violence including physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse was forty-six percent across all five countries with the highest prevalence in Guyana at fifty-five percent and the lowest in Grenada at thirty-nine percent (UN CARICOM 2019).² The data would suggest, then, that anywhere from one third to one half of all Caribbean women will experience violence at some point in their lives. As a primarily women’s issue³, Caribbean feminists have centered intimate partner violence in their advocacy and praxis, conspicuously staging protests and parliamentary walk-outs with the intentions of bringing awareness to a core issue of women’s existence in the Caribbean.

¹ See, for example, Trinidad and Tobago’s *Domestic Violence Act*. More in chapter two.

² It should be noted that many women will face any combination of types of abuse in their lifetime— not just one.

³ True numbers of violence committed against men by women are elusive and likely under-reported. Still, one magistrate who spent almost a year in one of Trinidad’s busiest courts estimated that about five percent of all cases that came before him were men pressing charges against women.

My project closely examines the roots of Caribbean feminism, paying special attention to their framing of intimate partner violence. A Caribbean feminism became legible in most of the Anglophone Caribbean around the 1970s, with much of its foundation being transferred from Western nations— namely the United States— to the Caribbean.⁴ Anti-IPV campaigns in the late 1980s made intimate violence the topic of jural debate, and scholar Mindie Lazarus-Black identifies a coalescence of local and global influences that thrust debates of gendered violence into the regional limelight. Among the most salient were “nationalist and more recent narratives about the nature of [Caribbean] identity, the unprecedented education of women and their subsequent entry into the professions, a (temporarily) booming economy, and the external and internal influences of the women’s movement” (2001, 387). It is the influence of the women’s movement that deserves the closest scrutiny, and one that remains central to my project. While the women’s movement certainly deserved(s) to celebrate tremendous strides towards progress, Caribbean feminists have neglected to consider the full extent of colonial violence in shaping modern instances of intimate partner violence. A feminist praxis that centers decolonial projects are the most promising avenue for addressing rates of intimate partner violence in the Caribbean, and my project seeks to offer both criticism and supplementation for the current feminist epistemology.

Neglect of decolonial focus stagnates the progress of colonized regions, and as many countries in the Caribbean celebrate but sixty years of independence from British colonial rule, identifying ways in which Western imposition has rooted itself in the episteme of the region, rendering its current epistemology inadequate for addressing issues that have a colonialist history, becomes a generative endeavor. Take, for instance, Trinidad and Tobago’s Sexual Offences Act of 1986. Jacqui M. Alexander in *“Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The*

⁴ More in chapter one.

Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas” asserts that as Trinidad and Tobago worked to resuscitate the country post-coloniality, it simultaneously reconfigured the nation as heterosexual, modeling itself after the very hegemonies that oppressed and abused it for centuries prior and, arguably, into modernity. Trinidad and Tobago’s Sexual Offences Act of 1986 was the nation’s first attempt to impose sexual order in the legacy of colonialism, but in doing so, it imposed injunctions against anal intercourse between men—calling it *buggery*— and allotted a penalty of ten years of imprisonment. While the act was meant to ‘repeal and replace the laws of the country relating to sexual crimes, to the procurement, abduction, and prostitution of persons and to kindred offences,’⁵ pieces of legislation such as this and Trinidad and Tobago’s Domestic Violence Act of 1991 were “crafted within the same lens that punishes those with HIV or women who choose to exercise their erotic autonomy” (Alexander 1994, 6). Heterosexual practices, then, constituted the ‘natural’ only insofar as to criminalize and designate ‘unnatural practices’ and establish those activities which disrupt conjugal relations and families.

While it may be that Trinbagonians, by their own merits, believed in the imposed natural order of male/female relations, the intrinsic entanglement of coloniality and nation-building make it nearly impossible to discern what is and is not a byproduct of coloniality; however, multifarious scholars have traced histories of sexuality and veiled psycho-social-sexual order to Western influences on the Caribbean.⁶ I employ this developing school of thought to justify my attention to decoloniality as an integral aspect of a Caribbean feminist praxis. I am curious about the potentialities of a feminism which decenters Western epistemology and instead cultivates its own form of knowing, centering instead the histories, quotidian experiences, and unique

⁵ This is the verbiage employed in the original Sexual Offences Act of 1986. Quoted in Alexander 1994.

⁶ More in chapter one.

exigencies of Caribbean women. What I am hoping for is a collaboration between Afro-Caribbean philosophy, a blossoming new field of thought, and Caribbean feminist movements which may provide a foundation on which the perils of Caribbean existence may be addressed at its root, not superficially and temporarily mended by legislation.

This particular attentiveness to the metaphysical spaces that (Afro-)Caribbean bodies have occupied and the possibilities of redefinition is experimental and should be taken as supplementation and a suggestion to redefine Caribbean feminism using intimate partner violence as a point of departure. I recognize that the Caribbean is incredibly diverse with a substantial Indo-Caribbean population in particular, and I recognize that an Indo-Caribbean philosophy may in fact be different and require novel frameworks to properly address unique grievances of Indo-Caribbean women. However, due to the commonalities of coloniality and parallel spatial and temporal development between Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean bodies post-emancipation, I believe that, despite racial differences, many propositions within my project may still benefit an Indo-Caribbean movement. Specifically, the centrality of a decolonial project to larger feminist and philosophical praxes would indubitably carve a clearer postcolonial vision. Moreover, this project focuses on violence between heterosexual couples, but violence between lesbian couples, gay couples, trans couples, and nonbinary couples are also a topic worthy of further investigation, unequivocally making palpable various gendered dimensions on intimate partner violence and its relation to coloniality. I instead chose to focus on the ontological and epistemological implications of feminist movements, but a gendered and sexuality-focused approach would also be a fruitful endeavor.

In chapter one, I further establish the urgency of intimate partner violence in the Caribbean and examine the roots of Caribbean feminism to ultimately conclude that the terminal

goal of Caribbean feminism is misguided, neglecting the roots of colonialist destitution that have cultivated structures requiring postcolonial chiseling in order to flourish within a truly liberated state. I employ Lyndon Gill's concept of erotic subjectivity which is indeed indebted to the work of writer, scholar, and activist Audre Lorde. Using both Gill and Lorde's propositions, I argue that what is missing from Caribbean feminist activism, and why collaboration with parliament and law enforcement have failed to holistically address instances of intimate partner violence, is a return to the subject as erotic in dismantling structures of colonial oppression. A return to the subject may be necessary due to the groundwork on which a Caribbean feminism was established. I then trace the lineage of feminism on Caribbean soil to that of Western feminism, particularly that of the United States, and argue that this translation onto the region provides an inadequate framework for addressing pertinent issues. From this, I return to the proposition of erotic subjectivity in which the existence of a relationship between the subject and the erotic understood as political-sensual-spiritual challenges the apolitical, passionless, secular interpretations of ourselves and our current paradigm. I explore what an employment of erotic subjectivity may entail by acknowledging the woman as spiritual and sensual in addition to the already established political dimensions of womanhood, arguing for the utility of religion in a feminist movement as an exemplar.

In chapter two, I closely examine Trinidad and Tobago's Domestic Violence Act of 1991 as a case study of the efficacy of legislation in combating instances of intimate partner violence. I conclude that the act and its following amendments—the first in 1999 and the second in 2020—have seen only marginal success, and that an increasing reliance on punitive and carceral feminism has done more harm than good to the region. Interrogations of the act's written goals and societal ramifications reveal the incompleteness of the act and juridical interventions at

large. The shifts in verbiage between the three versions of the act only prove the increasing reliance on carcerality as an intervention as parliament sought harsher and longer punishments for offenders of the act. Not only are discipline and punishment a legacy of coloniality, but the Caribbean's inability to conceive of an alternative intervention speaks to its inheritance of a colonial legal system. If the Caribbean were to, perhaps, reason outside of the colonial imaginary and instead turn to harm reparation, what becomes possible is a decolonial system in which crime is simultaneously diminished and the Caribbean is able to break free of reforming time and time again pieces of legislation which have proved to be inefficient.

In chapter three, I returned to the concept of erotic subjectivity, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Caribbean feminism, and erotic subjectivity. I intend on being more explicit about erotic subjectivity, working through its utility in undermining imperialist sentiments that have been imposed on the Caribbean since the 15th century. Delving deeper into the necessity and possibilities of a relationship between Afro-Caribbean philosophy and Caribbean feminism, I argue for the deconstruction of the 'universal woman' as perpetuated by Western feminists and critiqued by Sylvia Wynter; the construction of a new model of womanhood that suits the Caribbean woman and addresses her needs by interiorizing an Afro-Caribbean epistemology may thus be necessary to complete the larger postcolonial agenda. I expand on what erotic subjectivity looks like both in theory and in practice using Lyndon Gill's observations of Friends For Life (FFL), a grassroots organization founded in the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic with the purpose of educating gay men about HIV/AIDS prevention. Gill cites this organization as the pinnacle of pragmatic erotic subjectivity, and I argue for the expansion of this practice into the larger field of Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a foundation for a more useful feminism. From this analysis, I turn to the

cultivation of Caribbean art forms, specifically music, as a Caribbean-specific starting point to break away from European philosophy.

Chapter One

Structures of Colonial Domination and How to Escape them

On March 9, 2021, a man violently butchered his wife, Adeina Alleyne, and hanged himself in San Fernando, Trinidad. The couple's children aged seven, two, and three months witnessed the brutal homicide-suicide and ran to the neighbors for assistance. On January 14, 2020, a man brutally stabbed his wife and mother of their three children, Bibi Sabeeda Ally, over allegations of infidelity in West Demerara, Guyana. On May 20, 2019, a Jamaican man stabbed his wife, Mabel Isabel Galeano, in her torso and bashed her head in with a wooden cutting board. These are but three examples of the most brutal outcomes of intimate partner violence in the Caribbean region. Countless stories like the aforementioned litter local news outlets, and the prevalence of intimate partner violence has garnered international attention. A body of work has emerged in response to the cries and deaths of women who are or have been victims of either physical, emotional, financial, or sexual violence from a partner. Caribbean feminists have rallied in defense of these women, staging protests, walkouts, and blackouts in addition to the ever-growing literature exploring the qualms of womanhood in a postcolonial Caribbean. Scholars and activists have centered intimate partner violence in their praxis as it has remained a point of contention between feminists and male leaders who hold that intimate partner violence is a "private matter" or "husband-wife business."

Despite decades of work, their labor has resulted in only marginal improvements in the legal and cultural perception of intimate partner violence. Within three years of the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, only 39% of complaints resulted in a "successful" outcome— a restraining order or other legal ordering of protection (Lazarus-Black 2003, 997). What this suggests is that something is wrong with legal proceedings as they pertain

to domestic violence cases (more on this in chapter 2). Caribbean feminists have dedicated decades to awareness campaigns, unapologetically lobbying in the face of a male-dominated parliament for the recognition of intimate partner violence as a juridical responsibility. Incomplete legal proceedings, then, must be the result of one of two mistranslations: either male-dominated spheres of power, intentionally or unintentionally, skew the goals of feminists in legal implementations, or the terminal goal of feminism is misguided. While there is perhaps some truth to the former, I would argue that the terminal goal of postcolonial Caribbean feminism is indeed misguided, neglecting the roots of colonialist destitution that have cultivated structures that require postcolonial chiseling in order to flourish within a fully postcolonial nation-state.⁷

As with several theoretical frameworks blossoming from the work of Black feminists, this chapter is indebted to the work of Audre Lorde and her canonical piece *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. The conceived interrelation among politics, sensuality, and spirituality which is central to decolonial practices is dependent on Lorde's framing of the erotic as "those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passion of love in its deepest meanings" (Lorde 1978, 56). Following Lorde's insistence on reconceptualizing a political-sensual-spiritual awareness, Lyndon Gill conceives of "erotic subjectivity" which he uses as an epistemological proposition that explores the potential of the relations between subjectivity and "the erotic" as described by Lorde: "erotic subjectivity is at once an interpretive perspective and a mode of consciousness; it is both a way of *reading* and a way of *being* in the world. This analytic frame encourages a

⁷ Peter Ekeh makes a useful distinction between colonization and colonialism: colonization is an event or a period of time in which colonialism, a process or social movement, whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formations resulting from this order. For the sake of this chapter, I will refer to occupation and domination by Western powers as the latter: a social movement which has material implications on the Caribbean region (Verges 2021).

recognition of the fact that systems of colonial... domination depend partly on a tripartite strategy of coercion..." (Gill 2012, 279). Using both Gill and Lorde's erotic propositions, I would argue that what is missing from Caribbean feminists activism, and why collaboration with parliament and law enforcement have failed to holistically address instances of intimate partner violence, is a return to erotic subjectivity in dismantling structures of colonial oppression.

Deeply examining the role of "the erotic" and "erotic subjectivity" illuminates the inadequacy of postcolonial feminist movements in the Caribbean. The inability to envision the political-sensual-spiritual together has weakened the Caribbean feminsit arsenal in its attempts at achieving a postcolonial society. While intimate partner violence may at first glance appear only tangentially related to a decolonial project, several scholars have cited intimate partner violence as a direct legacy of colonial occupation and violence. Imperialism, plantation bondage, and indentured servitude have left deep lacerations on the Caribbean as leaders and activists resuscitate their country amidst the aftermath of European occupation. Patricia Hill Collins argues that intimate partner violence is solidly planted in the history of colonization, and that "...as a result of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems of racial domination, [Black people] share a common experience of oppression. These similarities in material conditions have fostered shared Afrocentric values that permeate the family structure, religious institutions, culture, and community life of [Black people] in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and North America" (Collins 1989, 755). Collins establishes a common lineage throughout the diaspora, arguing for the recognition of a 'common experience of oppression,' but I and other scholars would argue that the unique context of the Caribbean warrants individual consideration. Patricia Mohammed (1994) writes against the literal transfer of ideas onto Caribbean soil and asserts that "differences in gender, class and race relations in the

Caribbean from that of black men and women in the United States where black feminist thought largely originates” render mainstream Black feminist thought inadequate to fully interrogate instances of intimate partner violence in the Caribbean.⁸ Angela Davis describes feminism as “so much more than gender equality... and so much more than gender,” but in the struggles for adequate living conditions, adequate access to resources, and personal liberties that materially improve the human condition, Caribbean feminists have, at least in part, obscured the original vision of a decolonial project. This is not to assert that the body of literature emerging from the region omits discussions of hegemonic Western influence— quite the contrary. Afro-Caribbean and Latinx/a feminists have published expansive works detailing the genealogy of imperialism, enslavement, and indentured servitude, but what has been forgotten or neglected in battles against intimate partner violence is a decolonial feminism whose objective is the obstruction of sexism, racism, capitalism, and imperialism (Vergés 2021). A deeper understanding of the role of Western imperialism in modern instances of violence offers a more capacious understanding of its origins and ways in which interventions can and should be constructed.

Meticulous historical examinations of the origins of feminism in the Caribbean offer an explanation as to why a decolonial project has been forgotten, or at least paused for the time being.⁹ Feminism, in its current state, has no roots in the experiences of Caribbean women. The

⁸ May it also be noted that, in addition to Patricia Mohammed, several other scholars have rigorously engaged with and examined the role of colonial violence in rates of intimate partner violence. James-Sebro (2001) suggested that the Caribbean’s history of enslavement quickly followed by indentureship, the imposition of foreign ideology and values during colonialism, and continuing struggle for freedom during post-independence created a foundation on which the violent struggle between men and women could flourish. Thornton (2015) demonstrates the necessity of understanding intimate partner violence as residual from pre-independent practices of plantation economies, enslavement and indentureship. Torres-Saillant (2006) asserts that plantations were one of the few places where enslaved people interacted with Europeans under strict social rules and practices of violence to ensure a hierarchical paradigm of race, gender, and class to domesticate members of lower orders. Danns and Persaud (1989) also released a study illuminating the ways in which insecurities, frustration, and ego by means of social norms which emphasize a male machismo materialize in response to uncertainties about familial structures and the role of men in social, cultural, and economic mobility as a response to colonial legacies.

⁹ Caribbean feminists have engaged in discourses surrounding the nomenclature of the pro-women movement in the region; some advocate for the emergence of “genderism” or “womanism” as opposed to “feminism.” Both Judith

emergence of a neo-feminist movement, as stated by Patricia Mohammed (1994) and Judith Soares (2006), is intertwined with feminism in the United States. Modeling feminist discourse around the experiences of white, middle class, American women, the 1970s saw an appearance of Euro-feminism in the Caribbean which was structurally created to address the specific ailments and accompanying contexts of American race, class, ethnicity, nationality, culture, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or religious conviction (Soares 2006, 188). The United Nations declared 1975 the International Year of the Woman, and the years immediately prior and following 1975 saw the publication of numerous works by (white) Western feminists.¹⁰ Middle class women in the Caribbean exhausted by their social-political-economic subjugation and simultaneously inspired by the bold refusal of the Western feminist agenda began to articulate their concerns and demands within the same vein that birthed white radical feminism, sparking the re-emergence of the women's movement in the Caribbean. Caribbean feminists relied on their pre-established methodology and language, effectively forming the foundation on what was meant to become the Caribbean feminist movement.

One must only look a mere four decades in the past to recognize the resemblance between Western and Caribbean feminist criticism. Using the responses of Trinidadian women in the 1970s and 1980s as one example, Patricia Mohammed (1989) details the central goals and markers of progress during the early years of feminism. Women's movements concerned themselves with economic equality; equal pay, equal opportunity, and equal treatment in the workplace; juridical protections for women and children; entitlement to equal, compulsory education for both boys and girls; marital liberties including the right to file for divorce without a

Soares (2006) and Patricia Mohammed (2000) make a compelling argument against the blunting force of arbitrary "genderism" as opposed to direct "feminism" or "womanism" for their radical potentials. For my work, I intend on being intentional about the usage of Caribbean "feminism" as opposed to "genderism."

¹⁰ See, for example, the works of Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Sheila Rowbothman, and more.

spouse's consent; division of labor both domestically and in the workforce; and, of course, the dismantling of patriarchal domination. Even when considering the radical women's movements that operated in tandem with the region's Black Power Movements, the resulting group of women, forming the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Women, still advocated for the reintroduction of the 'Woman Question': discrimination in employment, salaries and opportunities for promotion, sexual division of labor in the household, and wages for domestic labor (Pasley 2001).

I want to be clear: it is not my intention to belittle or dismiss the work to which Caribbean feminists have dedicated decades. In 1973, for instance, Jamaica became one of the first countries in the world to establish a Women's Bureau which can largely— almost entirely— be attributed to activism from feminist-oriented organizations and their leaders. The women credited with this feat, Lucille Mathurin-Mair and Mavis Gilmour, presented a paper to Jamaican political parties which argued for the establishment of an agency 'empowered to initiate, promote and review through the relevant Ministries those *urgent needs of girls and women*' (quoted in Reddock 1998, 60 [emphasis mine]). The urgent needs of girls and women, including dilapidated living conditions, consistent threats of violence and abuse, labor discrimination, and a myriad of pressing matters which directly threaten the safety and livelihood of women and girls warranted immediate attention and intellectual engagement to find some alleviation to the very real consequences of gender based discrimination. Indisputable progress in the material conditions of Caribbean women and girls has been made at the hands of regional women's movements despite not making a decolonial agenda explicit; however, the burden of progress still rests on the shoulders of feminists. If anything, for instance, rates of intimate partner violence have appeared

to increase over recent decades.¹¹ My goal, then, is not to minimize progress without a decolonial sentiment, but rather to insist that omission of anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist projects offer but a temporary solution to a permanent issue.

Feminism's stunted growth in the Caribbean and the halting of forward, enduring progress can be attributed, in part, to the disconnection between the "majority of women who suffer ideological and social marginalisation and oppression precisely because they are women" and those leaders which advocate on their behalf (Soares 2006, 188). In other words, centralizing the problems of the middle-class woman as opposed to the working class in an attempt to directly translate discourses onto Caribbean soil ignores the standpoint of the most marginalized women which can and should result in a decolonial project (Harding 1993). The leading feminist organization in the Anglophone Caribbean, Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), is predominantly comprised of the older middle class and offers minimal attention to the concerns of younger working class women or women with disabilities. One CAFRA member puts it:

Feminism, as a movement? It does not exist. Feminism and feminists are too insular. It benefits some, only certain individuals. If, for example, Jane Brown can speak about gender, then Jane Brown speaks about gender forever. There is no attempt to include young women and to entertain new ideas (quoted in Soares 2006, 191).

How could a movement which prides itself on advocating for all women neglect the most vulnerable populations while simultaneously wondering how and why their activism has fallen

¹¹ This statement is based on the increase in visibility of intimate partner violence from coverage in newspapers and other media outlets.

short of its goal? It has become evident that a reworking of Caribbean activism and the framework from which their discourse is birthed has become a necessity for completing the project that began in the 1970s. The contradiction inserted into the consolidated field of Western feminism, and thus Caribbean feminism, that there is an ostensibly universal category of ‘woman’ stratified by the variable race (or class) who all suffer analogous oppressions with differing intersections, ignores the foundation on which diasporic feminism, specifically diasporic feminism in the Caribbean, must be based in order to fully position itself to face the avenue in which colonial expansion and influence into the New World may be exhaustively chiseled into a tool which may benefit the Caribbean woman’s struggle against gender-based violence.¹²

Following this line of thought, the next logical question would be *how* do we refocus our work to accommodate a decolonial project? While there is no one theoretical fail-safe, as mentioned earlier, Lyndon Gill proposes a framework which may provide a promising foundation from which decolonial work may prosper. Epistemological fallacies lie precisely at the center of the feminist movement which has resulted in a misguided praxis. As a response, erotic subjectivity seeks to suture the colonial lacerations imposed upon the Caribbean which have proven to “obscure even the clearest of post-colonial visions.” Erotic subjectivity has been tasked with providing a postcolonial theoretical response to the myriad mechanisms of subjugation that the Caribbean has endured. Proposing the existence of a relationship between the erotic and the subject challenges the “apolitical, passionless, and secular interpretations of how we come to know what we know about ourselves, each other, and our world” (Gill 2012,

¹² Sylvia Wynter takes a similar position, arguing that the insertion of the variable ‘gender’ into the universal theories of Liberal Humanism and Marxism-Leninism bares similarity to the universal theory of feminism itself which lends itself to the enabling mode of epistemology and rationality at the time. I make a similar argument, but I instead focus on the epistemological implications of centering ‘gender’ as a category as it pertains to feminist activism and what it may mean for a decolonial project.

279). This may be what is absent from a feminist praxis: the imposition of Western ideals and values onto the diaspora has marginalized the knowledge produced within and resulting from those interactions that occur on Caribbean soil, minimizing the potential of taking seriously the philosophical products of the Caribbean. In deviation from Gill's original vision for erotic subjectivity, I employ this interlinked political-sensual-spiritual in an effort to replace the 'universal woman' that Wynter (1990) writes against. In other words, I am seeking to expand the conceptualization of the erotic in conjunction with subjecthood first in an attempt to deconstruct Western notions of universal womanhood and second so Caribbean feminist movements may expand so that its coherence is intelligible for women who exist outside of those who have constructed themselves as the prototypical woman.

As a reminder, erotic subjectivity encourages a recognition of the fact that systems of colonial, neocolonial, or imperialist domination depend on coercive strategies based on 1) a politics of ontological racial difference, 2) a hierarchy of spiritual rectitude, and 3) a Victorian sense of (sexual) respectability— *erotic subjugation* (Gill 2012, 280). Erotic subjectivity then becomes tasked with providing a way out, a response to subtle colonial mechanisms of subjugation which render official postcolonial movements in the Caribbean region incomplete due to their colonial-penetrated postcolonial imagination which continue to imagine the political, sensual, and spiritual as separate entities worthy of separate considerations. This is evident in the limitations self-imposed on studies that seek to examine the positionality of women in the Caribbean: are Caribbean women victims of patriarchal society? Are they “reluctant matriarchs”? Put succinctly, *are women victims?* To avoid belittling this line of inquiry, I will not simply write it off as unimportant. It is certainly important, and the short answer is a resounding *yes*; women have been victimized by their male counterparts and the nation-states which they

oversee for centuries.¹³ However, dealing with women as a pawn which comprise an alternative political subjecthood separates the woman as political from the woman as sensual, the woman as spiritual. Documentation of Caribbean women in ‘post-colonial’ societies as both domestically nurturant and economically instrumental consistently alludes to issues within traditional sex-linked divisions of labor that have been translated to the Caribbean from the West (Anderson 1986). Tracing a historical genealogy from the development of said traditional gender roles from slavery to the present prove to be a useful tool in economic analyses of labor which have and continue to strengthen the feminist arsenal in lobbying for economic liberation for women. However, this ignores the underlying ontology and epistemology which rendered our current paradigm possible in the first place. It ignores the utility of the erotic in pinpointing the root of where we are and where we can and should be.

Rhonda Reddock locates the origins of Caribbean feminism in the nineteenth century which were dominated by primarily religious-based women’s organizations in the various denominations affiliated with Christian faith. Organization of women within the church is due, in part, to its ability to provide spiritual solace and community in a broader world order which necessitates and champions labor and physical/emotional violence (1998). Ortega (2017) alludes to the necessity of referring back to the works of older scholars insisting that “one of the primary decolonial woes¹⁴ that I see in current English-speaking academic decolonial interventions is in effect to lose sight of previous important decolonial work” (505); similarly, revisiting the works of original Caribbean feminists and the lives on which the discipline has based itself would be a

¹³ See Anderson, Connell, Baboolal, and Thornton

¹⁴ It should be noted that Ortega’s use of the phrase “decolonial woes” is very specific and intentional. She defines decolonial woes as “an affliction that goes hand in hand with decolonial practices even by scholars of color. Ultimately, the causes of this affliction need more investigation (there is an overdetermination here), but surely we can say that in part it has to do with particular norms connected to macronarratives regarding epistemic and social practices” (509).

fruitful endeavor in which preexisting bodies of literature may be reconsidered or reconfigured to provide the most adequate frameworks for addressing pertinent issues such as intimate partner violence. It is precisely this negation, this unknowing of original work that hinders decolonial progress. A mistreatment and misreading of biblical texts, for example, and the pious women who have carefully crafted decolonial interpretations is precisely the root of a decolonial woe as Ortega would articulate.

True, some religious-based women's organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries functioned as the main mechanism for inculcating Western values of a "woman's place," sexual division of labor, and for the sexual and domestic organization of communities (Reddock 1998, 57). These histories have only reinforced the devaluation of faith in the Caribbean feminist psyche, and rightly so. However, a complete dismissal or negation of the theological voices of women in faith which continue to reverberate throughout the movement is simply dishonest to the feminist movement. The assumption that the church is, by nature, harmful to the feminist movement and thus detrimental to women and women's rights neglects the work that has been done not *in spite of* the church, but *because of* the church. Despite the lack of an organized Caribbean feminist theology as a body of thought, several individual theologians have embraced/continue to embrace feminist lineages of liberation in an attempt to mend the ruptures between secular feminism and theological feminism to propose a spiritual feminism which grounds women in aspects of Christianity, potentially offering alternative routes of understanding the political as spiritual and vice versa (Soares 2006). For instance, the Jamaican Disciples of Christ Reverend Majorie Lewis roots her understanding of biblical texts in a liberatory feminist vein, aligning herself with both God and the women's movement. She understands feminism as being rooted in the notion of a "God of justice, the sisterhood and

kinship displayed by Mary and Elizabeth (St. Luke, Chapter 1) and the spirituality and religious and secular radicalism of the Maroon liberator, Nanny, who confronted British colonialism on behalf of all colonized peoples in the Caribbean” (described by Soares 2006, 193). From this theology, she has coined the term ‘Nannyish T’eology’ which is representative of the Maroon Nanny, the only National Heroine in Jamaica whose picture appears on the \$500 bill.

Women who hold similar sentiments as Rev. Lewis cannot be overlooked or lumped into the same damning categories that caused feminists to dismiss the church and its contributions.¹⁵ They have worked to bridge the gap between the secular and the religious while popularizing a non-Western interpretation of the gospel, a ‘T’eology.’ Critical readings of the Scriptures serve to encourage women to expand their engagement with the Scripture, promoting an interpretation that compels women to liberate themselves from the old, Western paradigm imposed by patriarchal interpretations that condemned women to lives of servility and submission. The lessons that they were trying to teach Caribbean women and secular feminists is that there cannot/ should not be a separation between faith and political action. The creation of an artificial divide between the two have governed feminist movements and their resulting relationships with the spiritual aspects of womanhood or, at the very least, a potential realm of spirituality. Adhering to colonized readings and teachings of the bible have done a great disservice to those, especially those women, who acknowledge the value in scripture, derive strength and creativity from it, and feel compelled to answer a calling to political action on the behalf of women’s suffering.

Christian theology is often cited as a mechanism of colonialism, inundating their enslaved peoples with Christian gospel to facilitate slave servility and concretize their racial

¹⁵ See, to name a few, Sister Theresa Lowe-Chang, ‘Evie’ Vernon, Rev. Hyacinth Boothe, Althea Spencer-Miller, and Ofelia Ortega.

superiority. Radical Black Power movements have hence rejected Christianity and the church, following the European interpretation of biblical texts that have omitted the horrors of slavery and the realities of Blackness. Faith, at its most fundamental, pushed against a decolonial agenda, making decoloniality synonymous with anti-Christianity. However, Afrocentric liberationists “acknowledge the complicity of Christianity with violence and oppression and affirms ways African peoples have used Christian languages and idioms to imagine and perform new ways of being human— ways that undermined and disrupt racial containments” (Clark 2013, 389). Theologies of liberation, the center of an Afrocentric liberationist hermeneutic, understand that Christian faith cannot be adequately understood without considering the historical contexts of freedom. A new dialectic which encourages decolonial interpretation of Christian faith fosters a hermeneutic that centers marginalized perspectives, one that focuses on the liberatory intentions of God ordering Moses to free the Israelites from bondage. Afrocentric liberationists view Jesus Christ not just as the liberator of Jewish peoples, but as the liberator of the outcast and the downtrodden (Clark 2013).

It is from this analysis that a nuanced definition of decolonial arises in which decoloniality must not entail the removal of European influence¹⁶ but rather include rereadings and creolization of European artifacts and legacies as a major mode of continuing the decolonial agenda. In fact, it may be true that complete removal of all European influence is not possible or even favorable for the diaspora; removing histories and contexts that have formed the foundation on which the diaspora rooted itself ignores the creativity of those subjects of colonization and the cultures of the Caribbean as a source of decolonial praxis. What becomes possible once the material inherited from colonial legacies are left to the devices and

¹⁶ While it is true that Christianity in Africa predates its appearance in Europe, what I am referring to here is the utility of Christianity as a destructive, totalizing vehicle of violence against Black and Native Americans during the centuries-long process of colonization (Clark 2013).

interpretations of those colonized subjects are thematic deviations such as that of Nannyish T'eology or Afrocentric liberation from traditional Western values that become tools of liberation.

Throughout the region, whether liberal or fundamentalist, women comprise the majority of the ecclesial population. Despite this, feminists have been reluctant to form any allegiance with Nannyish theologians or other women in the church. A false dichotomy between the secular and the religious has been brewing for decades as secular feminists continuously undermine any possibility of congruence between the two. At a symposium at York University in November 1998, one remarked: 'what can we as feminists expect from fundamentalism? It is backward and has nothing to contribute to our struggle' (quoted in Soares 2006, 194). In response, Verlyn Waterman, a member of a non-denominational church articulated the disconnect that, if corrected, could advance the feminist movement:

Feminists deal only with the political woman as their work and utterances are limited to the political sphere. They therefore ignore the religious/spiritual aspect of women's lives which is necessary for understanding the total woman. Feminism is outside the will of God... feminists try to function independently of the will of God and are therefore disconnected from women who are advocates of the faith and who have an interest in working with other women.

There is no spirituality in feminism.

While working with the Christian God directly is a controversial point and not one that must be debated here, I do think that Waterman rightly points to a weakness in the Caribbean feminist movement: there is no spirituality in feminism. It ignores the woman as a multifaceted being and

instead reduces her to the political, doing the opposite of what Lyndon Gill calls for in his conception of erotic subjectivity. Secular feminists, and Caribbean feminism in general, ignore the spiritual-sensual which is necessary for a decolonial project and, perhaps, a permanent solution to gendered issues such as intimate partner violence.

Thus far, I have highlighted the weaknesses in Caribbean feminism, suggesting that a decolonial project may be necessary to complete the work that the women's movement in the diaspora initiated some decades ago. I have offered an established framework which may prove to be a useful starting point for conceptualizing activism from a non-Western standpoint. While the task at hand may seem daunting, creating a novel field of thought with a direct translation to economic, social, and political activism, a growing field of philosophy may also form a fresh ground of exchange between Afro-Caribbean and Western European epistemology/ontology. Afro-Caribbean philosophy, a relatively new line of scholarly work, begins at the margins of Western philosophy and demonstrates how discourse from the Caribbean region has been socially, politically, and intellectually productive. This philosophy also actively seeks to “shift the geography of reason” by decentralizing Western European thought to the periphery.¹⁷ Afro-Caribbean philosophy engages with questions of decoloniality, among others, and seeks to define Afro-Caribbean thinking, the human condition, and the value of Caribbean experience to understand modes of being. Most importantly for this project, however, it examines the philosophical marginal subfields from the West, interrogating its adequacy for revolutionary Caribbean thought (González de Allen 2012). Feminism is one of those subfields.

Walter Dignolo, a prominent decolonial philosopher, argues for the practice of ‘delinking,’ a practice of thinking independently of Western European frameworks and hence

¹⁷ ‘The periphery’ is a phrase dubbed by Enrique Dussel which describes the positionality of European intellectual property and its tendency to be centralized and accepted as *The form* of intellectual production.

cultivating a new episteme. Afro-Caribbean philosophers have pushed for this mode of thinking in recent decades mainly in the name of shifting the geography of reason towards one that values alterity in knowledge production.¹⁸ Anti-colonial/decolonial intellectual communities vividly demonstrate the harm that the imposition of Western values has on those who seek liberation post-emancipation. Namely, that logic and reason must be translated across oceans in order for an intellectual foundation to be established is simply incorrect and an insult to those thinkers who have written extensively about a decolonial possibility within the African diaspora, and the debasement of Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, and Afro-Latinx philosophy must cease in order for a decolonial project to reach completion (whatever ‘completion’ may entail). Systemic alterations to the geopolitics of knowledge and knowledge production involves shifting how we think, how we think of our thinking, and how we understand our relations with reason itself (González de Allen 2012). It is this supplemental reasoning that justifies the recognition of the political-sensual-spiritual that Gill insists upon in his work, and it is this thinking, this new mode of reading and interacting with the world that may provide a way to fully interrogate, deconstruct, and combat instances of intimate partner violence.

For feminism to be successful, analyzing the coloniality of the French, Spanish, and British must remain central. Vergés concisely articulates the issue that a decolonial feminism often faces: “It is a coloniality that inherits the division of the world that Europe traced in the sixteenth century and that has continually asserted through the sword, the pen, the faith, the whip, torture, threat, law, text, painting, and later, photography and cinema. It is a coloniality that establishes a politics of disposable life, of *humans as waste*” (Vergés 2021, 16). Relying solely

¹⁸ The ‘geography of reason’ primarily functions to counter the notion that people of African descent could not really think or reason in a rigorous way. This still remains an obstacle in legitimizing Afro-Caribbean thinkers (González de Allen 2012).

on political violence, however, does not quite capture the broad scope of issues she enumerates. Not only must we dissolve mechanisms of domination we see, but we must take a phenomenological approach to a decolonial practice which Gill proposes. We must ask ourselves, what do we *not* see? What has been omitted either strategically or unconsciously? What forms of knowledge have been erased either by force or subtle macronarratives that have been imposed? Lastly, we must ask why we have erased ourselves in order to operate with the tools that have been thrust upon us by Western feminists.

Chapter Two

Punitive and Carceral Feminism: A Trinidad and Tobago Case Study

On April 15, 1991, the senate of twin islands Trinidad and Tobago passed the landmark Domestic Violence Act. Passage of the Domestic Violence Act proved to be a pivotal win for the Anglophone Caribbean as Trinidad and Tobago were the first nations to pass any form of legislature in regards to what was previously known as “husband-wife business.”¹⁹ The act came about after decades of feminist activism which worked to thrust issues of gendered violence into the national limelight. A coalescence of global and local factors inter alia activism made the subject of intimate partner violence a hotly contested topic of jural debate prior to the act’s passing. Mindie Lazarus-Black identifies four contributions to the increase in attention to intimate partner violence: (1) nationalist and public narratives that encourage pride in West Indian history, identity, and modernity; (2) the critical expansion of education following independence; (3) “development” fueled by the oil boom; and (4) the global and local women’s movements (Lazarus-Black 2003, 987). At face value, it would appear that the Trindadian women’s movement in tandem with the larger post-independence movements were making enormous strides in redefining West Indian culture, creating by right of law a new social order in which intimate partner violence was penalized. Through the reclamation of legal spaces that were previously legacies of Spanish and, later, British occupation and imposition, the Trinidadian political sphere began to witness an emergence of a neoliberal ideology that could be attributed, in part, to the efforts of Trinidadian and Tobagonian women.

Over three decades after its initial passing, it is worth reflecting on two questions which Lazarus-Black proposed in 2003. First, is it possible to claim that Trinidad’s Domestic Violence

¹⁹ For centuries, the idea that a man could “handle” his women and children however he saw fit remained hegemonic in the Caribbean region. A domestic dispute, in the eyes of the law, was beyond the jurisdiction of the state until the passing of the Domestic Violence Act (Gramsci 1971).

Act of 1991 was “successful”? And second, what does domestic violence law reveal about battered women’s agency and the pragmatics of inclusion²⁰ that ensue when these same women rely on hegemonic institutions of the state, juridical powers in this case, seeking asylum from violence and violent perpetrators? To first ascertain whether the Domestic Violence Act was “successful,” it is imperative to clarify that success by any measure is subjective; my or any other person’s idea of success is no more valid than the other. To be as true to the original intentions of Trindadian and Tobagonian parliament as possible, I return to the preamble of the 1999 amended act which briefly details the problem at hand and its proposed solution. The act begins as follows:

WHEREAS incidents of domestic violence continue to occur with
alarming frequency and deadly consequences:

And whereas it has become necessary to *reflect the community’s
repugnance to domestic violence* in whatever form it may take and
further *influence the community’s attitude* and *support social
change* in respect of this social ill:

And whereas the Government is of the view that one way to
achieve these goals is to *strengthen legislation to ensure a prompt*

²⁰ Mindie Lazarus-Black’s notion of “pragmatics of inclusion” neatly situates Caribbean feminism and the collective struggle feminists have endured in their attempts to force intimate partner violence recognition on a legislative level. Lazarus-Black defines pragmatics of inclusion as “subordinated peoples’ struggle to gain access to and recognition from dominant institutions that often contribute to their everyday oppression. The pragmatics of inclusion direct attention to the un-making of structures of domination through acts of individual and collective resistance” (Lazarus-Black 2001, 389).

*and equitable legal remedy for victims of domestic violence...*²¹

[emphasis mine]

The preamble serves to explicate the purpose and underlying philosophy of the document. In the case of the Domestic Violence Act, parliament makes its intentions clear: the law must reflect the “repugnance of domestic violence” that activists and women alike have become increasingly frustrated with while simultaneously setting a precedent for the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean in attempting to (re)shape the cultural attitudes of the community at large. Interestingly enough, what catches my attention is the final averment. That “one way to achieve [violence mitigation] is to strengthen legislation to ensure a prompt and equitable legal remedy for victims of domestic violence” remains the central point of uncertainty that I wish to contest. Laws and legality rooted in colonialism as a way to achieve any semblance of equity is questionable; laws and legality rooted in colonialism as a way to achieve *prompt* equity is even more so.

The hypothesis that laws are/can be/should be a productive means of achieving progress falls neatly in line with Lazarus-Black’s assertion that “the symbol of law is critical” (2003). The introduction of laws pertaining to intimate partner violence within the judiciary system seeks to establish normative judgements for and by the governed.²² In a sense, efforts to implement legislation seek to (re)impose ideals of acceptability within the larger society. Julius Cohen (1952) offers compelling theoretical backing for Lazarus-Black:

[The law’s] purpose is evaluative and incitive; they are the means
of deciding between competing claims of individuals or groups in

²¹ Cited directly from the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs publication of the 1999 Domestic Violence Act of Trinidad and Tobago.

²² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

society. Unlike the symbols of science, they are not instruments for discovering; rather they are, in the main, instruments for ordering, for creating. Their primary use is not as a means of seeking answers to the mysteries of nature, but rather as one of maintaining or changing human relationships in society. *They are, in brief, value symbols* [emphasis mine].

Whether or not the Domestic Violence Act served as a value symbol is irrefutable: immediately upon its ratification, thousands of women filed for protections under the Domestic Violence Act (Creque 1995) rejoicing in their newfound liberation and juridical protections. By April 1994, three years after its ratification, almost 8,500 applications had been filed. However, since Trinidad and Tobago set a precedent for the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean, it is fair to wonder to what degree the law served the public good and whether or not the law was operationalized as an instrument of domination (Comaroff 2001).

In order to properly assess the beneficence of the Domestic Violence Act, we must first outline parliament's proposed solution. To summarize, the act begins with the aforementioned preamble, and continues by defining all parties and terms that may be of concern to the magistrate.²³ The point of interest, however, includes the mandating of police interference in previously "private matters" and the issuance of protection orders²⁴ for the applicant.²⁵ This is

²³ Importantly, the Domestic Violence Act of 1991 defines "domestic violence" as a prescribed offense committed by a person against a) a spouse of the person; b) a child or dependent of the person or of a spouse of the person; or c) a parent. This definition has been altered with each amendment (1999 and 2020) to expand the scope of who can be persecuted and which acts qualify as domestic violence. More on this later.

²⁴ Protection orders are meant to physically restrain guilty parties from interacting with the applicant in any manner seen fit by the magistrate. This may include rules barring physical contact with the applicant, messaging the applicant or their families, and even prohibiting the guilty party from entering their home that they share with the applicant.

²⁵ To use the Domestic Violence Act's own verbiage, an applicant means a person applying for a protection order. This definition is also subject to modifications with the later amendments to include those being filed for by a third party.

interesting mainly because, returning to the idea of value symbols, the Domestic Violence Act serves to create a new ideology, a new social order in which violence within households is condemned but also in which the private becomes public. There has been a stigma around “airing one’s dirty laundry” in the magistrate court, and this may be why estimates for rates of intimate partner violence in the country often include the caveat that the true numbers are likely higher. One must wonder, then, has the law been successful in attaining a new social order? In short, the answer is no. Rates of intimate partner violence in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean at large remain a high priority issue for feminists.²⁶ Human rights reports covering 2007 describe the problem of intimate partner violence in Trinidad and Tobago as "significant" (Freedom House 2007; US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 5), and the same could be said for the remainder of the Anglophone Caribbean that Trinidad and Tobago were, in theory, supposed to set a precedent for. Make no mistake: rates have certainly decreased since the implementation of the act despite the expansion of what is and should be considered “domestic violence”, “sexual abuse”, “financial abuse”, and more. But when considering pragmatic issues of the court and those who oversee it,²⁷ and when considering the fact that, as of 2019, domestic dispute fatalities have either remained steady or increased slightly depending on semantic preference (Trinidad and Tobago Central Registry on Domestic Violence 2020), then the issue at hand becomes clear: the Domestic Violence Act is not working.

²⁶ While it is true that men file for protections under the Domestic Violence Act against women, albeit at a much lower rate, domestic violence advocacy has remained at the forefront of the women’s movement and their collective struggle for liberation.

²⁷ Lazarus-Black and McCall have published several studies detailing their experiences in the field of the two magisterial courts in Trinidad and Tobago: Pelau and Port-of-Spain In this, they detail the practices, process, and politics that serve to deter women from completing their claims. Pragmatic issues such as crowded courts and overworked staff, unwelcoming security measures, and the very demeanors of the judges who hear the cases affect the outcomes of

The case of Trinidad and Tobago is particularly interesting for several reasons. First, as mentioned before, the twin islands were the first nation to implement a holistic piece of legislature criminalizing intimate partner violence. Second, as an heir to the British common law tradition, and shaped by a history of imperialism, slavery, and later indentured servitude, the roles of the state and lower courts in contributing to post-colonial rectification comes into question. Sunder Rajan (1993) explains that the state functions as both the guarantor of rights while simultaneously perpetrating major injustices. Consequently, women's movements in formerly colonized nations form alliances with the state for protection by enacting a feminist jurisprudence and reflecting their principles in laws while, by necessity, being cautious to resist state powers and coercion. Whether deliberately or not, the courts enact multiple forms of intimidation tactics through coercion or patronization and women who approach the courts in search of protection must resist these pressures to drop their charges (Lazarus-Black 2003). In the magistrates' courts, the vast majority of cases are dropped precisely because the complainant fails to pursue the matter.

A conversation of court rites²⁸ in the Trinidadian legal field appears seeming infertile upon first glance. Why can't we simply address inequities within the acts themselves? Why can't a Domestic Violence Act amendment in 2022 acknowledge treatment of complainants in the courts and in response condemn and criminalize intimidation tactics, making it easier to present the courts with legitimate cases of intimate partner violence? Admittedly, that is one viable course of action. Glutting the courts with additional stipulations to ensure that high quality care and attention are afforded to those who feel compelled to present their cases before a judge is

²⁸ Court rites as defined by Lazarus-Black (2003) are specific events and processes that occur regularly within and around legal arenas.

certainly viable. However, given the region's previous record, it might be time to conceptualize an alternative to perfecting again and again pieces of legislation that have historically been only marginally successful in hopes that the perfect concoction of definitions accompanied by punishments may one day reveal itself. When taking into consideration that court rites often include intimidation tactics and structural barriers to protection orders, that oftentimes cases are dismissed, that "backlash"²⁹ is common, and that cases of intimate partner violence are still a pertinent endemic in the region, it may be time to reassess the efficacy of laws as a symbolic structure.

Returning to the preamble of the 1999 Domestic Violence Act, its opening statement which seeks to "[influence] the community's attitude and [support] social change" must come under scrutiny to assess the act's true potential as a symbolic structure. After its ratification in 1991, as mentioned before, women appeared before courts in the thousands to file charges against abusive partners. Its effect on women's perception of autonomy is irrefutable; however, when considering its ramifications on the Trinidadian community, the story becomes involuted. Dr. Gabrielle Hosein, a gender studies and Caribbean feminisms lecturer at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, identifies two distinct men's movements succeeding the act's passing. First, men formed pro-feminist men's movements that sought to dismantle and transform Caribbean masculinities. They targeted topics such as fatherhood, homophobia, gender hierarchies, emasculation, and overall mobilized to cultivate a masculinity rooted in compassion and gentleness. Hosein recounts:

²⁹ The concept of "backlash" refers to the weaponization of the legal system against the innocent. Oftentimes, this manifests in the form of a woman fabricating domestic violence in order to gain sole use of the matrimonial home. It is my first instinct to reject such claims, but Lazarus-Black documents the charge so frequently in her interviews of judges and magisterial workers in all four jurisdictions in which she works that she eventually had to give some credence to the idea.

... From Jamaica to Trinidad were experiments with pro-feminist men's organising. Anyone active in men's movement-building in 1990s [Trinidad and Tobago] would remember MAVAW, Men Against Violence Against Women. [University of the West Indies] Lecturer Jerome Teelucksingh revived International Men's Day commemorations on November 19... to mobilize men to improve gender relations and promote gender equality, through a focus on men's health, positive male role models and men's contributions to community and family.

It would appear, then, that the act and feminist advocacy were successful. Not only were women so empowered as to speak up against their abusers in court and seek legal protections, but the main perpetrators of violence were initiating a movement in which the very cultural attitudes that, in part, allowed violent practices to persist were experiencing a large-scale metamorphosis into a healthier alternative. MAVAW and other pro-feminist men's organizations, for instance, sought to fulfill their purpose of mentoring young men, reforming the older generations, and re-educating the younger generations. Had this movement retained momentum, I'd be compelled to conclude that the Domestic Violence Act in conjunction with the larger feminist movements had, to some degree, achieved its goal of social renewal. Unfortunately, these organizations have appeared to lose traction with the MAVAW web page not being updated since 1999 and a majority of its members having been silently dissolved in the backlash that men's movements experienced soon after. Upon the beginning of the 21st century, the Anglophone Caribbean experienced a resurgence of men's rights organizations who sought to work antithetically to

feminist movements, reversing the work that women's and pro-feminist men's movements had dedicated decades to. Hosein details in the aftermath:

Unfortunately, the turn of the century witnessed an about-face by campus principals, state bureaucrats, politicians, policy makers and fathers' groups. A language of "balance" began to displace one of equity. A vocal men's rights movement emerged, increasingly attacking rather than collaborating with feminists. A once visible (pro-)feminist men's movement shrank, leaving those men who continued to invest in challenging patriarchal relations feeling isolated, and reproducing the fear, shame, silence that Michael Kimmel describes... This turn ignored women's long solidarity with men's movement-building, and men's solidarities with women's rights in the region.

Without the backing of men's groups and the opportunity for social or cultural reform, the feminists were left to continue their parliamentary work alone. While offenses to the Domestic Violence Act of 1991 did not result in imprisonment, only a protection order, and remains so until the present, breaches of a protection order can result in one of two things: a fine or imprisonment. Upon the act's initial ratification, the punishment for any offense regardless of recurring breaches was "a fine not exceeding five thousand dollars or imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or both." Beginning in the 1999 amendment, the act began to differentiate the number of offenses. On the first conviction, the fine was to "not exceed a fine of nine thousand dollars" and the period of imprisonment was to "not exceed three months" for a first conviction. For a second conviction, the subject who commits the offense is liable to a "fine

not exceeding fifteen thousand dollars or imprisonment for a period not exceeding twenty-four months or both”; and for any subsequent conviction to a period of imprisonment not exceeding five years.” In the 2020 amendment, the subject on their first conviction is liable to “a fine of fifty thousand dollars and to imprisonment for one year”; a second conviction is liable to “a fine of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars and to imprisonment for three years”; and a third conviction for “a fine of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and to imprisonment for five years”.³⁰

What is interesting about the shift in verbiage from the 1999 amendment to the 2020 amendment is the absence of punishment limitations. Both the original and 1999 Domestic Violence Acts enumerate punishments as only a maximum, suggesting that a judge could theoretically sentence a subject to a five hundred dollar fine or imprisonment for one month for a first conviction depending on the severity of the circumstances. The assumed idea is that subjects were meant to suffer the consequences of their actions *only as appropriate in proportion to the crime*. What we see with the 2020 amendment is a subtle but significant difference: by deliberately deleting all words after the word “fine” and substituting the words “of fifty thousand dollars and to imprisonment of one year,” the 2020 amendment effectively mitigates the restriction of punishment of the initial act. No longer is the phrase “not exceeding” included in the bill. What this would suggest is a shift away from collective efforts at bettering the community and addressing the social and cultural ills that may necessitate intimate partner violence; the solution to intimate partner violence is becoming increasingly punitive, relying on carcerality as an intervention.

³⁰ Cited directly from the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs publication of the 1991, 1999, and 2020 Domestic Violence Act of Trinidad and Tobago.

Moreover, the 2020 Domestic Violence Act amendment saw the rewriting and redefining of legal terms for the sake of being more inclusive. The 1999 amendment defines domestic violence as: “physical, sexual, emotional or psychological or financial abuse committed by a person against a spouse, child, or any other person who is a member of the household or dependent.” By 2020, this definition was expanded to include any person who is in a “domestic relationship” with the respondent where the very term was introduced in this same bill. A “domestic relationship” is listed as:

the relationship between a respondent and a person, where the person–

- a) Is, in relation to the respondent–
 - i) a spouse or former spouse;
 - ii) a cohabitant or former cohabitant;
 - iii) a child;
 - iv) a dependant;
 - v) a relative;
 - vi) a person who has agreed to marry the respondent whether or not that agreement has been terminated;
- b) Is or was, in relation to the respondent–
 - i) a person in a visiting relationship; or
 - ii) a person in a dating relationship;
- c) Would be a relative of the respondent, related by marriage, if the respondent and a person referred to in paragraph a)ii) were married to each other;
- d) Is a member of the same household as the respondent or the applicant;

- e) Has a child in common with the respondent; or
- f) Is an adult in a residential institution and the respondent is–
 - i) an owner or, a manager or employee of the institution; or
 - ii) a volunteer or a person engaged in employment at the institution³¹

No longer is intimate partner violence between spouses, children, and members of the household. Broadening the definition of intimate partner violence includes those parties that are engaged but not cohabitating, a person who formerly inhabited the same space as the respondent, landlords, volunteers, those who were in terminated relationships, those who have a child with the respondent, the list continues. One must wonder what the purpose of this expansion is; who is benefited by this amendment? If each amendment has seen an augmentation, addition, or specification of the sorts aforementioned, then it would appear that the purpose of each subsequent amendment, and likely those amendments in the future, serve to convict the most parties possible. Lazarus-Black and McCall found that the most noticeable difference between the 1991 act and the 1999 amendment was that parties in new relationships appeared before the magistrate which only became possible after the act's inclusion of persons to whom the intimate partner violence law applied (Lazarus-Black and McCall 2006). Seeking to convict more and more individuals of intimate partner violence reveals the true nature of the Caribbean feminists' terminal goal: incarcerate and punish the accused by weaponizing the symbol of law.

Histories and contexts which situate discipline and punishment can be traced back to 17th, 18th, and 19th century Europe. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

³¹ Cited directly from the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs publication of the 2020 Domestic Violence Act of Trinidad and Tobago.

chronicles the gruesome beginnings of the French justice system which he insists is rooted in excessive, public displays of torture. He details the decrease in frequency of brutal quarterings and guillotine decapitation in favor of what we experience today as the prison industrial complex, a system that cultivated the rise of a new theory of law and crime, “a new moral or political justification of the right to punish; old laws were abolished, old costumes died out” (Foucault 1977, 7). From the ashes rose a diluted version of physical torment. Instead of inflicting physical suffering on the body of those found guilty of crimes, a more subtle version of suffering, a psychological torture and deprivation took its place in the form of prison systems.³² Tracing our current conceptions of justice back to its origins in Europe during times of colonial expansion into the New World, the legacies of colonialism have permeated even the most well-meaning anti-colonial agendas and their conceptions of what a terminal, scrupulous solution might entail. What this would suggest then is an increasing reliance on carceral solutions for feminist issues. In an attempt to eradicate intimate partner violence, or at least dissuade perpetrators while wielding the sword of juridical powers, Caribbean feminism has aimed to force prosecution and punishment to be more feminist. In reality, it has caused feminism to become synonymous with prosecution and punishment (Gruber 2020), intertwining the overall goals of feminism with that of the very colonial system which has allowed and encouraged their disenfranchisement.

Black American feminists Angela Davis and Beth E. Richie have both pointed out that mainstream feminism assumes that women’s safety and liberation can only be secured through the tools of state violence and oppression, including operationalizing in tandem with the prison

³² Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* details an intellectual history of punishment and justice, tracing lineages of carcerality back to 18th century France. While the Anglophone Caribbean has had only marginal French influence, the wider themes of colonial brutality shifting towards organized systems of oppression can also be translated onto Caribbean soil through their interactions with the Spanish and the British hegemonies.

industrial complex, thus furthering racial and class disparities as unseemly byproducts of the feminist movement.³³ Since Caribbean feminism found its roots in the mainstream American feminist movement as established in chapter one, it would logically follow that the Caribbean feminist movement has adopted the same carceral approach to interventions. As Angela Davis points out, mass incarceration disproportionately affects Black and Brown working class communities. Lazarus-Black and McCall similarly observe that, at least in the lower courts, many domestic disputes that appear before the magistrate are between working class couples (Lazarus-Black and McCall 2006). While Lazarus-Black and McCall attribute this finding to structural variables of poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and young age, it should not escape our collective psyche that the Domestic Violence Act has targeted those who are particularly vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence even if those groups are the most likely to bring charges to the public courts. As Davis and a myriad of other scholars have noticed, incarceration only serves to perpetuate the very inequalities that it seeks to undo. That the Trinidadian parliament felt so compelled as to specify unique punishments for multiple offenses gives credence to the claim that those who breach protection orders often fall into recidivistic tendencies. If treating repeat offenders in harsher manners properly addressed crime, then the very circumstances which necessitate longer sentences or increased fines would theoretically cease to exist, at least for most offenders, after the first breach. Regardless of the exact quantity of offenders who meet the criteria for a second or third breach of protection orders, what I now wish to draw attention to is the *intention* of the act and not the outcomes themselves in contrast to my earlier argument. The intention of the legislature is to punish again and again those who are found guilty of intimate partner violence which has proven over the past three decades to be

³³ See, for example, Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

ineffective. Thus, both pragmatically and in theory, the Domestic Violence Act and each of its amendments fails to address the overarching issue of intimate partner violence.

Thus far, I have positioned Caribbean feminists and their work squarely on top of the legislature that has emerged in response to their activism. I have argued that not only are the laws that come out of their activism inadequate to address the full scope of intimate partner violence, but that a reliance on punitive and carceral feminism reinforces the coloniality that I have previously argued must be decentered and deconstructed in proposed interventions and conversations about intimate partner violence. To avoid confusion, I want to be intentional and explicit about what I am calling for: what I envision for the future of feminism in the Caribbean is a deliberate separation of feminism and the laws, court, and legislation. I am not calling for a complete dismissal and abandonment of, for example, the Domestic Violence Act; instead, I insist on a refocusing, a re-evaluation of the very values and goals of feminism. Should Caribbean feminists continue on the path of punitive and carceral feminism, I fear that the moral panic around gendered crimes will result in cries for justice which usually emerge from a public hungry for even harsher punishments (Gruber 2020).

So what may replace the current feminist agenda? If we cease lobbying for a tighter, more inclusive legislature, what are we left with? Let us return to the very foundation on which the current criminal system of the Anglophone Caribbean is based. As a formerly colonized region, the Caribbean has inherited a legal system based on punishment, a philosophy guided by retribution as a response to crime. Western influence in the Caribbean has blurred the potential for an alternative modernity, planting the region firmly in a paradigm which makes obvious the necessity for laws, criminalization, and prisons. If, however, the region took a different approach to crime, one that seeks harm reparation as opposed to punishment, this may provide a lasting

solution. Thinking outside of the colonial imaginary, what becomes possible is a decolonial system in which crime is simultaneously diminished and the Caribbean is able to break free of the vicious cycle of enacting time and time again legislation with more stringent provisions which often fail. An intervention based on a philosophy of restorative justice may provide an answer. When combined with the Caribbean imaginary, when the hands of Caribbean feminists carefully knead the dough of restoration and shape it into a useful philosophy for the region, then they may find that legislation is unnecessary, that prison sentences are more harmful than helpful, and that a decolonial vision is well within their reach.

Chapter Three

Exploring Erotic Subjectivity: Towards Alternative Modernity in the Anglophone Caribbean

Thus far, I have examined the qualms of Caribbean feminism and identified weaknesses in its philosophy and advocacy. I have examined the products of their advocacy and concluded that their terminal goals are misguided as they make use of the same colonial systems that were implemented as a form of hegemony and discipline. Here, I propose a solution to the questions I proposed at the ending of chapter one: what do we *not* see? What has been omitted either strategically or unconsciously? What forms of knowledge have been erased either by force or subtle macronarratives that have been imposed? Lastly, we must ask why we have erased ourselves in order to operate with the tools that have been thrust upon us by Western feminists. Returning to these questions, this chapter focuses on the matter of subjectivity and its relationship with the erotic. I intend on being more explicit about erotic subjectivity, working through its utility in undermining imperialist sentiments that have been imposed on the Caribbean since the 15th century. My hope is that once the erotic subject is fully actualized, the universal woman may be deconstructed, making way for tangible and lasting solutions to issues of intimate partner violence. To reiterate, intimate partner violence is endemic to the Caribbean. Not only is it a traceable legacy of colonialism, but it is one that Caribbean feminists have made central to their advocacy and for good reason. My primary goal in response to the Caribbean feminists is to propose a new model of ‘woman,’ moving away from the universal woman imposed by colonialists and subtly centered in conversations about womanhood towards one that interiorizes an Afro-Caribbean epistemology as opposed to a Western epistemology. From this, I turn to the cultivation of Caribbean culture as a vehicle of breaking away from European

philosophy. I propose a symbiotic relationship between Caribbean feminists and Afro-Caribbean philosophers which may interrogate the implicit, subterranean existence of colonialism within the Caribbean intelligentsia from which other forms of discursive intellectual production become possible. From this, a new model of feminism and (Afro-)Caribbean philosophy may flourish.

Caribbean philosophy is typically understood as a “a series of distorted dialogues between Europeans and [Amerindians, Afro-Caribbeans, Indo-Caribbeans, and Euro-Caribbeans]” (Henry 1997, 48). In order to legitimize the colonial project that I am proposing, it is necessary to focus on the tangible and potential products of conversation between Afro-Caribbean and the colonial forces which created the contexts in which the Afro-Caribbean identity became distinct. It is my goal that we are compelled to take seriously Caribbean epistemology which will, in turn, refine the Caribbean feminist argumentation. Currently, the Afro-Caribbean philosophy remains fragmented. Henry cites this fragmentation as deriving from the fact that “[Afro-Caribbean] philosophy does not constitute an integrated tradition. It does not exist as a body of thought that has been welded together by substantive exchanges over the meanings of space and time, self and history, being and non-being, right and wrong within our experience as people” (44). In other words, the Afro-Caribbean philosophical field has neglected to recognize the Afro-Caribbean as an erotic subject.³⁴ The tendency for Western thinkers to conceive of philosophy as a purely isolated form of contemplation separable from religion, politics, or science has stunted the development of this blossoming episteme and has ontologically reduced the Caribbean body to a political thing.³⁵ Restricted by the imposed norm

³⁴ While Lyndon Gill (2012) does not make it explicit, I would argue that erotic subjectivity is very much rooted in the quotidian experiences of the subject. The implicit relationship between the political-sensual-spiritual must be rooted in both the subject ontologically and refined through their lived experiences. This may include both self and history, being and non-being, and right or wrong as Henry enumerates.

³⁵ Throughout history, it has been understood that the colonial subject is the protagonist. Here, I argue for a shift toward the opposite: the decolonial subject can and should be the protagonist for a proper decolonial project.

of whiteness and shaped by the needs of other discourses, the existence of a Caribbean philosophy has been under-thematized and robbed of possibilities of autonomous dialogue. A coherent discipline has struggled to fully bloom under the burden of comparison and colonial-imposed domination (Henry 1997).

The creation of hierarchical relationships between the roots of Afro-Caribbean philosophy—Africana philosophy—and European philosophy ensured the dominance of European religion, art, music, or dance. Systematic exclusion of non-Western or non-White philosophy functioned as an integral aspect of the self-creation and self-preservation processes for Western reasoning. Western philosophers are well-known to acknowledge non-Western ideas, yet dismiss them entirely or modify them to elevate or further justify their own supremacy. Take, for instance, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel recognized that India birthed a form of idealism, but dismissed it as an “idealism of the imagination” and not one of thought, effectively infantilizing Indian philosophy as a puerile, dream-like state of consciousness. Because of its close association with Hinduism and its lack of “definite conceptions,” Hegel was hesitant to conceive of Indian idealism as philosophy at all. If he were to be optimistic, it was a pre-European philosophy, refined and made useful by the Western thinkers who articulated “real” philosophy (Henry 1993). Similarly, Hegel gave no further credence to Africana philosophy, neglecting to even recognize the potential of an organized African school of thought. In his account, Africa “is no historical part of the world... what we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical Undeveloped Spirit” (quoted in Henry 1993, 6). This ‘Undeveloped spirit’ was by no means capable of attaining the realization of an existential existence, and thus Africa lacked the intellect that even India possessed. To Hegel,

they lacked the potential of an idealism and an imagination which would continue to produce an objective form of knowledge or an awareness higher than the self.

The banishment of non-Western philosophy to the periphery of epistemology has real consequences for the development of “third world” philosophical traditions. By extending these systematic exclusions across the globe, philosophy became synonymous with Europe, knowledge and rationality became analogous with whiteness. It is this intellectual ingratiating which facilitated the literal transfer of ideas onto Caribbean soil even when translation is inappropriate. Oftentimes, these translations do more harm than good. As previously discussed, the transfer of American feminist ideals into the Caribbean feminist arsenal stagnated the movement’s growth and has stunted progress within a Caribbean context.³⁶ Traditional philosophical dialectics which condemn non-Western modes of thought make this transfer possible and even necessary. In order for a movement to thrive, it requires a philosophical backing; when the philosophical backing is rooted in a tradition which devalues your very existence and denies the possibilities for self actualization and higher thinking, this movement is inherently flawed and in need of revision.

Feminism as a movement found Western soil fertile for rooting itself in its intellectual and philosophical contexts. The theory of feminism in the Western context has inserted the contradiction of the ‘universal’ category of woman and that feminism varied by racial categories into the enabling mode of rationality (Wynter 1990). The purely Western feminist assumption of a universal woman “whose ‘silenced’ ground is the condition of what she defines as an equally universally applicable, ‘patriarchal discourse,’ and the dually Western and post-Western editorial position of a projected ‘womanist/feminist’ critical approach” (Wynter 1990, 93) is precisely at the intersection of philosophy and feminist theory that I wish to supplement with an

³⁶ See chapter one.

Afro-Caribbean philosophy and the novel workings of erotic subjectivity. The philosophical subfield of the West, including feminism, is inadequate for revolutionary decolonial Caribbean thought, and a combination of total deconstruction of the ‘universal woman’ and redirected attention to cultivating a Caribbean-specific episteme may provide a foundation on which a more useful feminism can be constructed.

The following step in identification of a more capacious and Caribbean-conscious philosophy would be a return to the subject as erotic. Stemming from Lorde’s canonical piece *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, an analysis of the subject as erotic, the deliberate acknowledgement of the inherent relationship between the subjects’ sensual, spiritual, and political dimensions and value may provide an alternate form of knowing which will progress the feminist and Afro-Caribbean philosophy towards an alternative modernity.³⁷ Returning to Lyndon Gill’s exploration of erotic subjectivity, the intricate mechanisms of not just recognizing the subject as erotic, but also creating the subject as erotic may be useful. In fact, it was by an in-depth analysis of a grassroots organization, Friends for Life (FFL), that Gill fleshed out his articulation of erotic subjectivity: “in essence, we came to know what [erotic subjectivity] *is* primarily through exploring what it *does*— or how the political-sensual-spiritual manifest and coexist in the psycho-social work that the FFL Chatroom does...” (Gill 2012, 290). Founded in 1997 as a series of HIV/AIDS education and community building workshops for gay men, the FFL Chatroom has served as a mechanism for gay Trinbagonian³⁸ men to assess the specific needs of gay male communities. Its very emergence highlighted the haunting dialectic between life and death which was made hyper-visible in 1997 where Trinidad and Tobago reported the

³⁷ The concept of “alternative modernities” holds that modernity, as a richly multiplicitous concept, unfolds distinctly within different cultures or contexts and that different starting points ultimately end in alternative forms of modernity (Povinelli et al. 2001).

³⁸ “Trinbagonian” will be employed to refer to inhabitants of both twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

highest number of AIDS-related deaths to date. The founder, Eswick Padmore, was inspired to form FFL by the untimely loss of multiple close friends to AIDS complications. Death as inherently political³⁹ compounded with grief formed the foundation on which FFL came to fruition. Moreover, in an interview with principal Chatroom facilitator, Luke Sinnette, he speculates that what keeps the Chatroom active is the people's refusal to let go of liberation (Gill 2012). While Sinnette never specified what he meant by liberation, it is fair to assume that liberation entails freedom from the political and social shackles of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the restrictive norms and legislation that permit their demise time and time again. The liberation that they seek is political liberation.

Following the erotic subjectivity model, intimacy and sensuality have been central to FFL's activism, and a desire to sustain a healthy intimate network has functioned to sustain the Chatroom's longevity (Gill 2012). In part, the Chatroom's ability to host open and unrestrained sexually charged conversations within a culture where most people remain relatively conservative about discussions of sexuality has contributed to its popularity and communal retention. In his discussion with Gill, Sinnette explains:

I think in very many respects we're jarred by the nature of sex and how powerful it is. And so it's kind of scary. And so we try to bridle it in many instances, but bridle it without talk. So, like how you have that concept of being politically correct in the [United] States, you have in Trinidad more of a bridling of sexual words and descriptions by using words that are not so close to the sexual words like "butterfly" instead of "vagina."

³⁹ See Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*

But at the same time [that you are] not speaking it . . . [you are nonetheless] — in quiet intimate spaces — doing that kind of exploring and touching. I don't mean touching with hands, but exploring and touching what is going on with yourself . . . not being sure about how far we should go and how deep. . . . But through it all, not that talking but that *doing* . . . doing it is allowable, but showing it or speaking it is too tough (quoted in Gill 2012, 285).

Because the available language is assumed to restrain direct engagements with sex and sexuality, it is through touch and intimacy that gay Trinbagonian men have been able to engage in meaningful and indirect discourses about sexual behavior. Those who frequent the Chatrooms often addressed topics such as dating; commitment in relationships; the meaning of love; sexual assault; condom usage frequency; and the transmission, symptoms, and treatment of STIs including HIV (Gill 2012). Despite the intentions of the Chatroom's facilitators, sensuality, intimacy, and desire often dominate FFL Chatroom discussions which suggests that the utility of FFL has surpassed its initial purpose of dispersing HIV/AIDS education; it is now a forum on which gay Trinbagonian men are allowed to construct a new dialectic in which a useful vernacular can be employed in an unrestricted space for the benefit of those who have been victims of social vilification. The Chatroom in itself is a vehicle of the decolonization process, and it does so in a way that effectively illustrates that sensuality can be and has been an effective means of bringing about social progress, mitigating the apparent necessity of juridical involvement.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See chapter two.

While intimacy is a favored topic amongst FFL Chatrooms, FFL's commitment to psycho-social holism as an integral aspect to their HIV/AIDS education initiative also focuses ample attention on the spiritual aspects of gay-Trinbagonian existence. Through his analysis, Gill notes: "implicitly addressed through group reflection on the sometimes metaphysical nature of that fellowship or explicitly considered in conversations about religious strictures—usually Christian—and agentive belief, spirituality is consistently summoned in the Chatroom partly because it is such a formidable presence in the lives of so many gay Trinbagonian men" (Gill 2012, 287).⁴¹ Indubitably, gay Christian Trinbagonian men have struggled to reconcile the inconsistencies between their sexuality and their faith; however, most claim to have found some means by which to resolve the dissonance between the two. Those who frequent the chatroom, regardless of whether or not they identify as religious and regardless of how pious they are, do not underestimate the importance of spiritual communion that they obtain from the Chatroom. FFL's principal founder, Padmore, succinctly identifies the axis on which both his religious appetite and his sexuality are addressed simultaneously:

I don't know if to say, "I *am* religious." I don't know if to say I'm not. Now, of course, you have to understand also that—as far as I'm concerned— you don't have to go to church to pray. You can lie down in your bed, kneel down in your house, and God will answer your prayer. I believe that. You don't have to go to church. The church is just a place for the community to come together as one...

⁴¹ According to the 2010 census, Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 64% Christian, making it the dominant religion on the twin islands

. . . We as gay people in growing up try to live to please people. Your mother says *x* and you're doing that. Your friends say *y* and you're trying that. We try to please everybody and in the end we don't please ourselves. I have reached the point where I realize that life is in me. And so, I'm going to live my life. I'm going to try in the process to please God because I don't think we can totally please Him. We are going to fall short, but it is a trying process. We keep trying and we keep praying and we keep asking for forgiveness. But for me it's a trying process and I'm going to keep trying...

And so, I'm going to try to do what I know I have to do and leave it up to Him in the end. . . . Not because you're gay God doesn't love you. He loves all people. . . . And at the end — anyhow you take it — He's going to judge you (quoted in Gill 2012, 287-288).

In his interview with Gill, Padmore acknowledges that it is the *fellowship* that makes a space sacred and holy, not the other way around. It is this communion between the men in the Chatroom that gives their experience a spiritual quality. Rather than occupying a physical space of worship such as a church, mosque, or temple, the Chatroom offers a metaphorical space for spiritual revival and the creation of a new, queered epistemology which centers the knowledge and experiences of gay Trinbagonian men. The formation of political alliances, intimate networks, and spiritual connections is precisely after what Gill has modeled erotic subjectivity and precisely what has been the organization's saving grace for over a decade (Gill 2012).

Thus far, I have laid out the pragmatic foundation on which erotic subjectivity was based to exemplify the efficacy and utility of acknowledging the subject as a political-sensual-spiritual being. What comes into question now is its translation. How can erotic subjectivity be employed outside of a hyper-specific gay Chatroom? How can erotic subjectivity be employed on a cultural scale to address intimate partner violence in a way that not only seeks to uphold the integrity of the subject but also works in tandem with the overall decolonial project of Afro-Caribbean philosophy? While there are multiple ways in which this can be achieved— starting a Chatroom support group for battered women, for example— I believe that the most effective means of developing a decolonial erotic subject is through music. From this, I return to the initial issue of the ‘universal woman’ that was identified by Sylvia Wynter. As she demonstrates by her reading of Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* in *From ‘Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/Silencing the “Demonic” Ground of Caliban’s Woman*, the ontological differentiation between male/female became secondary once the West prioritized the secular over the religious; that is, the major differentiating factor which determined one’s status was no longer one of male/female but one of patriarchal/monarchical or man/savage. This theoretical shift “serves diacritically to draw attention to the insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretative models, both to ‘voice’ the hitherto silenced ground of the experience of ‘native’ Caribbean women and Black American women...” (Wynter 1990, 96). With the largely insufficient existing theoretical frameworks, I propose a return to one of the few purely Caribbean art forms to provide an epistemological starting point for a novel Caribbean-feminist approach to constructions of womanhood, particularly as it pertains to intimate partner violence.

Rhonda Reddock (2004) insists that calypso is a living tradition of male discourse on masculinity, femininity, work, sport, politics, ethnicity, race, nationalism, male and female

sexualities, and social, political and domestic conflict. While calypso music may seem to offer counterpoints to feminist goals through the persistence of violence as a trope, several female calypso artists have sung against violence, poverty, gender inequality, sexual assault, and abuse in intimate relationships (Mahabir 2001), providing evidence of the utility of calypso in decolonial feminist works. Calypsos have a myriad of functions, among them are to ridicule power relations, protest racial and class warfare, and to mirror, reinforce, or challenge gender relations. One of the first female calypsonians, Singing Francine, released ‘Run Away’ in 1979. In this song, she describes the conditions that women at the time were growing increasingly frustrated with:

You went and put gold teeth in she mouth
As allyuh get vex, you coughing it out
You making she shame all over the place
Man, you is a damn disgrace!
Not even to church now, she cannot go
She beg for lil love, you tellin she, “No.”
She frighten like hell to make up a plan
How to get away, how to get away, how to get away from you!

By describing in musical detail the realities of women at the time, she garnered a substantial female audience with thunderous and wild approval at her shows. In chronological order, she details the beginning of an intimate relationship—the courting phase and displays of affection as demonstrated by the male partner purchasing “gold teeth in she mouth.” As the relationship grows ever more dissonant (allyuh get vex), Singing Francine alludes to the violence that women typically experienced in response to a turbulent relationship by suggesting that the man “coughs

out” the woman’s teeth. Now, manipulative tactics take hold as the woman can no longer participate in innocuous social events such as attending church, and she is consistently denied displays of affection by her partner. As the chorus begins, Singing Francine advises women to flee abusive relations with men instead of tolerating them as was expected of women at the time:

Dog does run away, fowl does run away
Lady, cat does run away when you treating dem bad
Hog does run away, cow does run away
What happen to you? Woman, you could run away too!
Get out!

Singing Diane, another female calypsonian, echoed the sentiments of Singing Francine in her song ‘Ah Done Wid Dat,’ bitterly expressing to her partner that she is fed up and intends on leaving him:

Mister, I fed up!
You don intend to stop
Mister man, I leaving!
Don bother me because I happy
You don appreciate
Sorry, now it’s too late
I don want to wait
Leave meh, don touch meh!
You grieve meh, and besiege meh
But dis time, I mek up meh mind

You treatin' meh bad, meh life getting real hard, getting real sad

If I don leave, I will go mad

If I don leave now, it's licks in the morning, in the evening

I can't take it, I tellin' you flat

Ah done wid dat!

It is no coincidence that both performers offered a brutal critique of their current partners, living situations, and gendered expectations. Bringing attention to the sexual and gender-based violence that underscores their existence directly mitigates the age-old cultural attitude surrounding intimate partner violence— intimate partner violence as “private business,” or “husband-wife business.” Disputes between a husband and wife were typically a taboo subject, warranting knowledgeable ignorance when a matter is clearly escalating to physical or sexual abuse. Singing Francine and Singing Diane push against this narrative, challenging the male prerogative of philandering, beatings, exploitation, and disrespect that women so often faced (Mohammed 1991). Interestingly, Explainer's ‘Rasta Chick,’ having been crafted and performed by a man, acknowledges a male awareness of the injustices regularly committed against their women (Mohammed 1991). In crafting ‘Rasta Chick’ from both his perspective and his partner's perspective, the fictitious woman says:

Don't touch meh ras

Mister yuh hand too farce

All ah them brothers just like to feel up, feel up

But I is ah sister who don't like to deal up, deal up

Thus far I have done an analysis of calypso which has originated in and garnered substantial popularity on the twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago. It should be recognized, however, that the spirit of a feminist post-colonial agenda is ever-present in every corner of the Caribbean. In a decolonial rereading of Jamaican dancehall music, for example, Carolyn Cooper says “upward mobility in Jamaica requires the shedding of the old skin of early socialization: mother tongue, mother culture, mother wit— the feminized discourse of voice, identity, and native knowledge” (1995, 3). Dancehall, then, offers a novel avenue of possibilities in which one may flaunt their mother tongue, mother culture, and mother wit without pressure to yield to Western ideals of “proper taste” while seeking and achieving social or economic mobility. Where reggae musicians and DJs are considered ‘noise,’ ‘rambunctious,’ ‘vulgar,’ Western style as the antithesis is ‘refined,’ ‘sophisticated,’ or ‘chic.’ Citing evidence from the early 18th and 19th centuries, Cooper posits histories of survival through subversion where “to transgress is to go beyond the enslaving boundaries that delimit [women’s] person and place” (1995, 29) which can be traced to representations of Black women in slave society. The transgressions of Jamaican dancehall, similar to that of calypso, become an intrinsic act of decoloniality where the European conception of ‘vulgar’ originates from a fear of the ‘coarse texture’ of the feminized body that must be decontaminated and refined to colonial standards. What dancehall, calypso, soca, chutney, and all other Caribbean musical forms share is a common influence of feminist post-colonialism. However, this is not to say that every performance or every song is an act of resistance; might each song be an overt display of anti-colonialist sentiment, I suspect that the responsive audience would shift towards a more academic setting. Rather, when musicality is weaponized as an act of colonial resistance, it must be read and categorized accordingly.

Whether or not calypsonians, reggae performers, or dancehall DJs realize it, their music in itself functions as a means of recognizing erotic subjectivity. As demonstrated by female Calypsonians who have explicitly dealt with women as political subjects, the inherent sensuality and intimacy of Caribbean-influenced music, along with the communion made possible through their performances inherently makes use of their audience as multi-faceted, political-sensual-spiritual beings. Even some four decades after the release of Singing Francine's 'Run Away,' her message and legacy have remained a point of celebration for Caribbean women and even African American women alike.⁴² While this can be said of a myriad of Caribbean art forms, in Caribbean music and dance, "it is doubtful whether such deep patterns of over- and under-identification [with colonial identity] were ever established... In both music and dance, distinct identities from their European counterparts have also been rooted in the affirmation of the African heritage, and the Creole identity" (Henry 1993, 9). Additionally, the creolized languages with strong African elements prominent in Ska, Rock Steady, Reggae, and Calypso have found themselves being compared unfavorably to the European classical style which remains a gold standard to some. However, the bold and rhythmic employment of creolized languages in Caribbean musical forms despite Western marginalization and dismissal remains important for identifying the "spatial allocations to music that were institutionalized by the colonial structures of domination" (Henry 1997, 56) which, in turn, point to the possible utility of Caribbean music as a starting point for a Caribbean epistemology.

While I am not suggesting a total negation of Caribbean feminism, I am suggesting a combination of several possible supplementations for the Caribbean feminist agenda which may

⁴² Interestingly, Singing Francine was featured in an African American blog *Pancocojams* in 2020 which seeks to "showcase the music, dances, language practices, & customs of African Americans and of other people of Black descent throughout the world." That Singing Francine has had such a global impact speaks to her influence both in the Caribbean and internationally.

benefit the movement at large. Occupying new discursive spaces for Caribbean feminists and Afro-Caribbean philosophers while employing a framework in which the subject as erotic is fully actualized may be exactly what both movements need in order to complete the decolonization process. By undoing the Caribbean roots of domination and exclusion that were established during the colonial period, the two discourses of Caribbean feminism and Afro-Caribbean philosophy may flourish, and with them comes images of freedom and resistance that should inspire a large-scale upheaval of tradition to make room for an alternative Caribbean modernity.

Conclusion

Scrutinization of Caribbean feminism and its terminal goals from a decolonial standpoint presents a new perspective on epistemological production which has significant implications for the production of a decolonial Caribbean. I have argued that the current state of feminism in the region is indeed misguided and in need of supplementation or, better yet, overall redefinition. Currently, the archetypal source of state legitimation which has been employed by feminists to achieve their goal of intimate partner violence mitigation has proven to be anchored in a colonial carcerality which succors the movement only slightly. This consolidation of colonial carcerality in the very process of nation-building, the same coloniality which rooted and depended itself on the creation of an inferior Other, has proven to be the product of a philosophy which has refused to acknowledge the potential of non-Western rationality. I have thus argued that feminism as a field of study is, by extension, its own subfield of rationality and as such must operate in tandem with larger postcolonial movements such as the development of Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a theoretical space is actively engaged in completing the decolonization project. Among other things, this involves “shifting the geography of reason” which entails “abandoning the idea that reason is exclusively a Western European practice; rather, it is also found vividly in anti- and postcolonial intellectual cultures and communities in the Caribbean” (Gonzalez de Allen 2012, 400). I have made the argument that a new cognitive inquiry which signals the specificities of a postcolonial mode of being and rationality could not remain effective if Black feminist or Afro-Caribbean feminist lines of inquiry were to remain on the periphery of feminist discourses. Sylvia Wynter has similarly argued that a Black “womanist” discourse which was popularized in the United States is still inadequate for avoiding consumption by the totalizing powers of mainstream (Western) feminism. The decolonial project,

then, must remain central to the Afro-Caribbean woman's pursuit of intellectual liberation (Gonzalez de Allen 2012).

What I have offered the Caribbean is much larger than a remedy to intimate partner violence. What I offer is a remedy to qualms of existence, qualms of a refracted intellect, and qualms of correcting the congruence between coloniality and modernity. I began this project with the intentions of offering an intervention for intimate partner violence, but an intervention operating within the same misconceived feminism and false postcolonial episteme would only serve to perpetuate the same discourses which render feminism stagnant in the first place. What is necessary is a bottom-up approach, one that reworks the field of thought and centers the larger, structural issues of colonialism. My final intervention, then, is one that seeks to uncover the consumptive, inauspicious roots that construct the current Caribbean order. An intervention which seeks to unearth, reconfigure, and replant feminism and feminist advocacy is necessary to properly interrogate the plights of Afro-Caribbean womanhood. I previously mentioned calypso and other Caribbean musical forms as a potential springboard, but I would also recommend a return to Caribbean literature, Caribbean art forms, Caribbean dance. In other words, what can art teach us about ourselves? This is but one possibility, yet it remains ripe for interrogation.

What remains now is the practical matter of implementation. While I have attempted to illustrate a clear visual of what employment of erotic subjectivity in a postcolonial nation-state might entail by referring to Gill's example, the practicalities of implementing this model on a regional scale remains elusive. How might we orient erotic subjectivity towards modernity? What are the possibilities that accompany a recognition of the woman as a political-sensual-spiritual being? Importantly, after we deconstruct the 'universal woman', what are we left with? While the possibilities appear daunting, I would argue that leaning into the

unknown is the beauty in deconstruction/reconstruction. It is the fertile intermingling of the political-sensual-spiritual which allows us to orient erotic subjectivity towards tangible outcomes, permitting creativity outside of carcerality. From this, the appropriate line of questioning now becomes what are the possibilities stemming from a deliberate cultivation of the subject as erotic? How might we be able to use this to reconstruct the Caribbean woman both theoretically and pragmatically? How might we tend to sacred spaces, both physical and figurative, in order to build a proper Afro-Caribbean episteme that would, by extension, uplift and support a new Caribbean feminism?

In the hands of Afro-Caribbean philosophers and feminists, I leave tools for demolition and reconstruction, for transcending the community and the global framing of what the Caribbean can be. I fear that methodological approaches neglecting the groundwork that I have established will interfere with the larger decolonial project, leaving us with what we know now, that which is “almost good enough.” The Caribbean that I have known deserves better; it deserves visibility and care and attention. It deserves a philosophy rooted in and refined by the culture and the people who preserve what has been deemed unworthy of preservation. What I imagine is a future in which the Caribbean is able to stand on its own two feet, existing independently of comparison with the West, and I invite Afro-Caribbean philosophers and feminists to sit with their own imaginations. What are the possibilities of the Caribbean when we cease existing in the periphery of knowledge? What is possible for advocacy and intervention for women who endure abuse time and time again when we turn to our own needs and not those of the West? Only then will we progress towards permanent solutions and a productive rationality.

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