

**“Ever Since I Know Myself...”:
Questions of Self, Gender, and Nation in a Dominican Village**

**By
Robbyn Seller**

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**Department of Anthropology
McGill University**

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ABSTRACT

This goal of this study is to discern the ways in which women's subjectivities have changed through the processes of decolonisation, modernization, and nation building between the 1930s and 2000 in rural Dominica. The relationship between the shifting conditions of colonial and post-colonial life in its material, political, social, and cultural aspects, and the change in the discourses that relate to proper behaviour (moral discourses) are examined. I have explored the ways in which women position themselves with relation to these discourses (which could be called moral discourses), through how they employ them in their representations, and how they negotiate them, engaging them in the creation of what could be called an 'ethics of self.' The research, carried out over a one-year period in the village of La Plaine in Eastern Dominica, involved participant observation in the village; life history interviews with women of three generations; the analysis of skits and pageants; and documentary research involving primary and secondary sources.

Several discursive themes emerged in the analyses: women's use of accounts of the past to critique the present, in what I have called *critical nostalgia*; the change in values epitomized by the notion of respect that formed the basis of local relations and which has begun to disappear with the change in governance and economic relations; the ambivalences involved in gender relations, especially those associated with expectations of women towards men and women's autonomy from men that derive from historical circumstances of colonization and decolonization; and the celebration and discursive dissemination of values that associate femininity with the political entity that Dominica has become. Differences found between women's expressions in both the discourses they engaged with, and in the particular ways they used them to frame their experiences, were related mainly to age and socio-historical changes, but also to socio-economic background.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche vise à discerner les façons dont les subjectivités des femmes en Dominique rurale ont été transformées par les procès de décolonisation, de modernisation et de la création de l'état dominiquais, entre les années 1930 et 2000. La relation entre les conditions de changement matériel, politique, social, et culturel dans les contextes colonial et post-colonial, et les transformations dans les discours normalisateurs sont examinées. J'ai exploré comment les femmes se positionnent face à ces discours, par la manière dont elles les emploient dans leurs récits et autres performances, et comment elles les négocient, les invoquant dans la création de ce qu'on peut appeler un 'éthique de soi'. Cette recherche, effectuée pendant un an dans le village de La Plaine, situé au sud-est de la Dominique, comprenait de l'observation de participant; des récits de vie des femmes d'origine Afro-caribbéennes de trois générations; l'analyse de productions théâtrales et concours de beauté; et la recherche historique.

Plusieurs thèmes discursifs émergent dans l'analyse : L'utilisation par les femmes des récits du passé pour critiquer l'ère contemporaine; le changement des valeurs exemplifié par la notion du respect qui disparaît avec le changement dans les façons de gouverner et les transformations économiques; les ambivalences dans les relations entre homme et femme, surtout celles associées aux expectations qu'ont les femmes envers les hommes et l'importance qu'elles accordent à leur autonomie personnelle, qui entrent en contradiction et qui émergent des circonstances historiques de la colonisation; et la célébration et dissémination discursive des valeurs associées à la convergence de la féminité et la nation. Les divergences entre les expressions des différentes femmes apparaissent à la fois dans les discours invoqués et les façons dont ils sont engagés pour encadrer leur vécu, et sont basées surtout sur les différences d'âge qui concordent avec les changements sociaux-historiques, mais aussi sur l'origine socio-économique.

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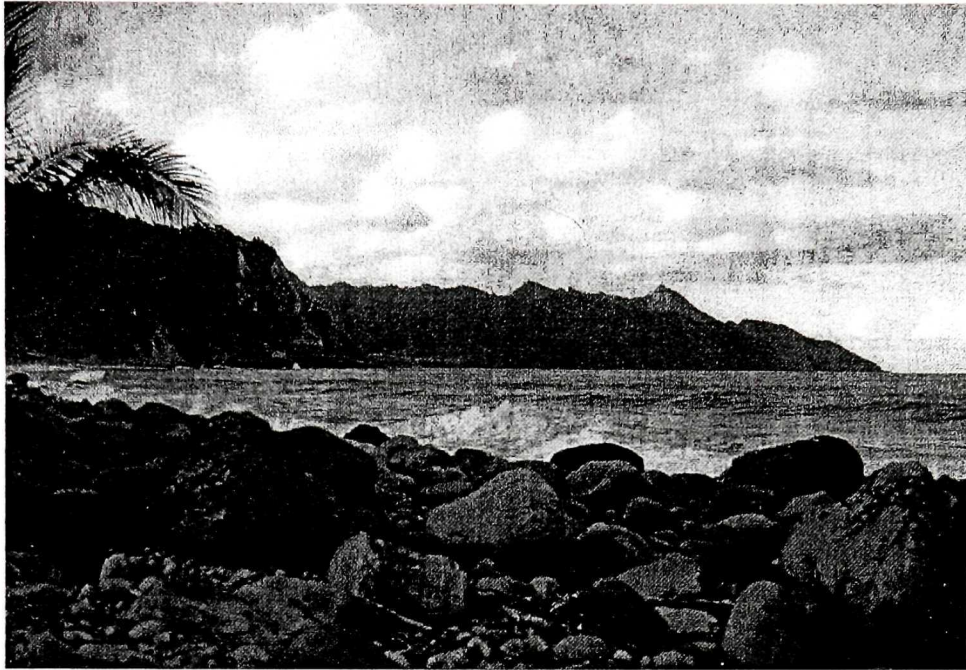
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: POSITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES



View on the Atlantic coastline, near La Plaine, Dominica, 1999.

1.1 Scope and Direction

Dominica is a small volcanic island-state in the Eastern Caribbean, located in the centre of the archipelago sometimes called the Lesser Antilles, or the Leeward and the Windward Islands. The island was colonized by the French and then the British, and remained a British colony until independence in 1978. The rugged terrain with steep mountains, precarious ridges, and deep valleys especially pronounced in the centre and along the eastern seaboard, as well as heavy, torrential rains, have made the development of a viable infrastructure in Dominica difficult, and the transfer of agricultural products and consumer goods within the island a tedious endeavour. Dominica became a colony only in the mid-18th century, much later than most of her neighbours, largely due to the difficult terrain, remaining neutral territory and a last stronghold of the Carib population, as well as a stop-off point for water and wood, still abundant on the island. While

plantation agriculture based on slave labour developed as the main colonial activity in keeping with most other Caribbean colonies, coffee rather than sugar was for a long time the main crop.

Up until the post-WWII period, Dominica's rural areas, especially those on the Eastern side of the island, remained largely isolated from the town and from each other (Trouillot 1988). The Transinsular road, which runs across the island from the capital city, Roseau, on the more clement Caribbean coast to the Atlantic side was only completed in 1956 (Honychurch 1995). A paved road to the village where this study was carried out was only completed in 1964 when many of the present residents were already young adults and others were growing up. Running water, in the form of standpipes, became available in 1973, while electricity only came to the village in 1985, and cable television in the early 1990s, although not everyone has access to all or even to one of these amenities.

These outward indications of 'modernization' reflect a shift in colonial policy towards democratization that was to include the creation of a representative government and universal suffrage, and foster a self-sufficient (and productive) state, and within it, a concern for the well-being of the majority of the population, its producers. This concern involved the promotion of small holder production over plantation agriculture, and a concomitant increase in the regulation of farming, along with social programmes designed to improve health and education, and to promote family life, all the while increasing the amount of control of the state over the individual and fostering a shift in gendered relations.

This shift in governance has been one of the principal motivating forces of on-going social and cultural transformation in Dominica, influenced by international political and economic relations, development agencies, religious groups, and increased migration, as well as access to media and cultural goods that were previously unavailable. Government, from Dominica's early to late colonial phases and now independence has worked differently to regulate, control, and discipline the population. Changes occurring in Dominica thus entail a shift in governmental techniques that operate to manage the population and to create

persons that perform in society within the positions created for them through a process of subjectification (Foucault 1991; Butler 1997).

In general, post-emancipation rural Dominican society (that is, after 1834) developed localized communities within which social relations were created, regulated, and maintained at the family and village level, with only occasional interventions – usually repressive – by the colonial authority. While some changes occurred in the interim, it was only after WWII that a shift in policy put the health and education of the population on the agenda, along with the promotion of smallholder farming of bananas, and the development of a communication and transportation infrastructure. This gradual process of decolonisation and democratization included the establishment of universal suffrage and the creation of village councils, which eventually drew the population into the state political process. At the same time, through education of children and adult programmes, ideas and practices regarding ‘proper’ behaviour with respect to hygiene, family, and gender positions and roles were embedded and embodied. The idea of statehood, a national identity and the feeling of pride in one’s nation were also extended in this way. As strategies of control have shifted, so have the discourses formulated around and through them that sustain and organize these strategies, and that work upon individuals to condition and position them.

Ongoing changes due to the process of decolonisation thus involve not only shifts in material life, education, and healthcare, but are occurring within the very heart of society, in the relations between people through the effects of shifting values and morals that underlie these relations and serve to guide people’s actions. People draw upon moral frameworks to position themselves with respect to one another, to authoritative bodies (institutions, people, discourses), and in their actual displacements upon the social landscape. Changing precepts of right and wrong as desirable and undesirable ways of being thus create differing bases upon which to develop one’s particular life project or pathway, framed at least in part by an idea of what it is to be Dominican. The interest here is in the relation between changing political technologies, such as institutions, discourses, and

techniques of discipline (Foucault 1988), that configure subject positions and create and hone subjects, and their enactment, negotiation, or rejection by people as seen through their interpretations of their own experiences in narrative, in performance, and in my observations of their everyday lives. Therefore, a central thread of this study illustrates how discourse both creates subjects, and is engaged by individuals in their own self-creation, to demonstrate the interplay of regulation and agency, in the changing context.

In this perspective, then, it is of major interest to me how gendered subjects are created within the matrix of discourses that operates upon them, who those gendered subjects are, and how they utilize discourse, especially as seen in their life narratives and performances. While discourse about sexuality and gender roles and positions impels individuals to act according to certain normalizing behavioural expectations, individuals engage with these norms in diverse creative or even resistant fashion. Historically, Afro-Caribbean women in Dominica, as elsewhere in the Caribbean, were subjected to (and by) the conditions of slavery through which both their labour and their sexuality were exploited (Morissey 1989; Bush 1990, 1996; Beckles 1995; see discussion in this study, Chapter 2). At the same time, this context contributed to the creation of spaces, positions, and statuses that corresponded to and underpinned political voice and economic benefits according to skin colour, occupation, and gender. In this perspective, we can understand how Dominica's pre-emancipation colonial history, which involved mostly a plantation economy supported by the slave labour of Africans and their descendents, created a society that was sharply divided by class and colour, distinctions which persisted into the 20th century.¹ Gender relations have continuously been configured within and through these divisions.

¹ 'Race' in the Caribbean was not constructed in the same binary fashion as in the United States. 'Colour' would be a better term to describe the discourses of race in the Caribbean, as one's status was in the past often influenced by one's colour, stemming from the economic and ideological relations of slavery, where plantation owners were often European or of European descent and Africans and their descendents were slaves. In Dominica, there was a large population of 'free-coloured', descended from manumitted children of mixed heritage, some of whom owned land and slaves, and many of whom became merchants, tradespersons, and politicians. Prestige was accorded based on skin colour, both because light-skinned people often had more access to wealth

These divisions have been transformed over time: more recently and currently, the class/colour equivalency is giving way to a middle class comprised of people of all shades of skin colour and socio-economic backgrounds. This can be attributed to the increased accessibility to official markets for small holding farmers, and, especially for women, of access to secondary education that prepares them for office, clerical, and managerial jobs, as well as migration abroad, from where money and goods are returned to those remaining at home. Women's life experiences, and especially the meaning with which they imbue them, are produced both directly and indirectly within and by the context created by colonial and post-colonial relations. Through the transformation of relations between the elite and subordinate groups, economic and political changes, and the institutions and discourses that were produced within and as support to these changes, women's positions, spaces, and statuses have been altered. And it is the meaning and direction that they give to their experience of these transformations that become manifest through their self-representations examined in this study.

The principal aim of this study therefore, is to discern the effects of social, political, and economic transformations upon women's lives by considering their narratives and other self-representations (skits and beauty pageants), set within the recent historical and contemporary contexts in Dominica, that is, between 1930 and 2000. The goal here is not simply to document social and cultural changes that have occurred, but to examine the way in which those transformations have affected women's subjectivities, understood through their various expressions in narrative and performance.

To do so, I examine the historical underpinnings of gender and class relations that emerged out of slavery; the transformations that have occurred in the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts; narratives of women about the past; life narratives of women of three different generations; a skit composed

and resources, and because light skin and European-type features, including smooth hair and a small nose, were considered aesthetically pleasing. Light-skinned Caribbean people, usually of the privileged classes, until the 1970s civil rights movement which had repercussions throughout the Caribbean, or until they migrated to a European country or North America, did not identify themselves as Black (see Hall 2001 for a discussion of his own experience).

and performed by mothers in the village; and beauty pageants through which cultural, national, and feminine ideals are created and performed. I elucidate the relationship between the colonial and post-colonial settings in Dominican society and their expression in women's self-representations within the village context where I carried out my field research to discern these effects. The consequences of change are made evident in the way women model and frame their life accounts and invoke various bodies of discourse. I tease out the discourses women utilize in their relation to certain institutions, bodies of authority, laws, etc., both customary (family and village-centred) and government imposed. This analysis reveals how social relations are structured and conceived at different levels, especially in gender relations and between kin, within the village, the state, and in the international context, and portrays how they intersect and what transformations are occurring. Examining women's narratives also allows me to explore the links between the different levels of authority, the institutions, the discourses, and the practices that enter into constructions of the self. I strive to understand the connections between social and cultural transformations and women's self-representations, especially how 'moral discourses' come to exist, how they are transformed, and how they come to be engaged in self-representations.

Theoretical Directions

By 'moral discourse' I refer to a discursive framework that contains normative precepts upon which action can be based, and through which one's life experiences and relationships can then be expressed and understood, whether in life narratives or in other cultural performances. The term 'discourse' or 'discursive framework' is used here to refer to a particular set of assumptions and beliefs and their venue of expression. Discursive formations are inherently normative, in that they configure perceptions of the world in particular ways, and are linked to structures of authority and their exercise of power. What I call 'moral discourse', however, are those formulations that operate at the level of

individual action and interaction, as prescriptions for behaviour.² I differentiate between ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ on the basis of the first being imposed from the outside, through various means of social control and interactions with the ‘other’, including sanctions from bodies of authority, the threat of witchcraft, or gossip. The ‘ethical’ indicates the individual’s interpretation of how one should act and interact with others, based on the moral discourses that are available and engaged in one’s life trajectory, or at least expressed in one’s interpretation of self through narrative and other forms of self-representation and performance. The self-ethic then becomes a framework through which one can interpret either past events of one’s life or project hypothetical future ones.³

My understanding of the distinction between the ‘moral’ and the ‘ethical’ corresponds somewhat to that made by Ricoeur (1992): ethics, he contends, is characterized by its “teleological perspective” as the “*aim* of an accomplished life” whereas he defines morality as “deontological” in that it is “the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint” (1992: 170). While I agree with Ricoeur in defining the moral

² Mageo (1995) makes an interesting distinction that allows for several levels of consideration of morality and action, dividing the two – the ethical and the moral – into four. The first level is that of “ontological premises about the self” which are “simply cultural versions of what it means to be a person in the sense of definitive attributes, qualities, or functions” (1995: 284). The second level is that of “moral discourse” which converts the ontological premises “to a set of ethical prescriptions” (ibid.: 285) that are upheld through talk which classifies behaviours as good or bad. Interestingly, Mageo states, “through this classificatory activity comes a recognition that censured behaviors are likely to be as widespread as admired behaviors” (ibid.: 286), reminding us that while the meaning and the possibility of ‘proper’ behaviour is being defined, so is the possibility for ‘improper’ behaviour being created and its boundaries delimited. ‘Compartmental discourse’ contextualizes behaviours, so that good and bad behaviours are tied to certain times, places, and interactions: what might be considered bad can be good given the circumstances. ‘Strategic discourse’ involves the individual’s negotiation of ontological premises, moral and compartmental discourses in lived experience. This last level corresponds to what I call ‘ethical’ as it involves agency of the individual, as she engages with the possibilities for behaviour put forth in the social world by the three other levels discussed by Mageo. In the context of this study, I retain a bipartite configuration of ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’: the first term contains culturally and socially configured premises for behaviour, as I consider the premises for right and wrong action and their contextual organization to be interlocked; and the second term contains the individual’s particular appropriation, negotiation, and interpretation of them. Ontological premises, rather than forming a foundational understanding of what it is to be a person, both underlie and emerge from the action of individuals, and in this way are subject to change, as are moral discourses.

³ See Howell’s 1997 edited volume *The Ethnography of Moralities* for discussions of morality in other perspectives in anthropological studies.

as constraint and the ethical as the bearing of these moral constraints on one's life, I see the ethical not necessarily as an aim – a prefigured and consciously construed trajectory – but more as a *tactical* engagement with a normative framework or frameworks that can underlie the creation of a life trajectory, but is not void of contradictions, allowing, at the same time, for the negotiation of normative expectations.⁴ Narrators of life experiences make their interpretation within these normative frameworks or moral discourses, while other sorts of performance, such as skits and pageants, project the discursive framework into possible scenarios. Both, however, work through what can be designated “cultural scripts.” “Cultural scripts” provide “interpretive figures” that serve as a basis for reflection on one's life (Smith 1987b: 47), the production of performances such as the skits examined in this study, or the images of femininity and culture projected through pageants. As such, they are the “figures of verisimilitude or lifelikeness” that “reflect privileged stories and character types that the prevailing culture, through its discourse, names as ‘real’ and therefore ‘readable’” (Smith 1987b: 47). These ‘figures’ are then negotiated in the narrative or performance, and therein lies the creativity and agency in these representations. Cultural scripts provide plausible ways in which moral discourses can be engaged by actors in an ethical enactment of self.

Narrative renditions of the self are understood as the way in which self-understanding is created, at the time of telling, and as interpretations of past, present, and possible experiences rather than iconic representations of a lived past. Accounts are formulated within accepted and expected genres of expressive language, which provide a frame for the narrator, yet these genres are more than simply a convention, and, like ‘cultural scripts’ they can provide a framework for understanding one's experience, and positioning the self with regards to moral discourses (see Bruner 1994). The women I interviewed all configure their lives within a moral/ethical framework or frameworks, positioning themselves

⁴ Here I borrow de Certeau's (1984) distinction between ‘tactical’ and ‘strategic’: the first term is used to refer to spontaneous decisions and actions derived from interaction with the context, mirroring to some extent Lévi-Strauss' ‘*bricolage*’, while the second term denotes a pre-conceived

differently. These frames are imbued with cultural values, and the self is represented in relation to those values, often through events told, or, as is usually the case with the women I interviewed, practices that involve interactions and relationships with other people. Other performances, such as skits, cultural shows, and pageants also provide a framework imbued with values through which one expresses oneself.

This resonates to some extent with Ewing's (1990) discussion of one woman's self-representations, wherein different renditions of self were built around cultural (moral) discourses enacted in her accounts of events involving various relations with others. However, while Ewing holds that narratives of self involve contradictions that are often unconsciously expressed, and that a unitary, whole self is an illusion, I found that the older women I interviewed tended to eliminate contradictions in their elicited and spontaneous life narratives – and contradictions only appeared if questioned. This leads me to surmise that these women had consciously reconstructed their lives through narratives, resolving their contradictions by omitting or reinterpreting events. McAdams (1996: 142) holds that there is a “concern for harmony and reconciliation in the life story” among older people. Middle-aged women hold a different perspective on their lives than older women. Middle-aged women, while they have left their childhood and part of their adult life behind them, still harbour dreams and desires for the future, so that the past can be constantly reinterpreted both in terms of changing circumstances in the person's life and to accommodate the context – both situational and interpersonal – of telling. At the same time, they sometimes express dissatisfaction with their lives, and through the narratives they tell, either express or attempt to resolve these contradictions, telling stories with an “envisioned ending” (McAdams 1996: 142).

Young women for whom the bulk of their lives still lies ahead of them (although they do not necessarily think in those terms) give relatively little thought to the past of their childhood. This becomes apparent when, in contrast to

older and most middle-aged women, the younger women had to be questioned and prodded in order to induce them to speak about their childhood. Older and middle-aged women were more than eager to recount their experiences, as though they had their story ready and waiting for an audience. Younger women's self-narratives, however, contained more contradictory material than those of older women. This could be due to either or both of two things: younger women have not yet sorted out the various strands of their lives, and are undecided in the direction they want to follow; or, younger women have more discrepancies in their lives, and therefore more contradictions appear in their accounts of self. The idea of "possible selves" as different workings over of the past in order to project an appropriate future corresponds to the formulation of some young people's accounts (Bruner 1994: 49).

It is difficult to know if the accounts that older and middle aged persons told me would be different at a later date. Jourdan (1997) interviewed the same woman three times at different periods several years apart, and each time she provided a different framing of certain aspects of her life, due in part to the life circumstances of the interviewer. Jourdan concludes that life narratives are really dependent on the intersubjective context, as well as the particular mood and current experiences of the narrator. Each subsequent narration is a reinterpretation of the same events, presenting them in a vastly different perspective.

The women's self-representations in this study were indeed largely constructed around interactions with others, especially significant others, and the meaning they give to them, whether the 'other' be external, or internal in the imagination (see, for example, G. H. Mead 1934). All the narrators invoked relations with other people in their accounts of themselves, as though they constituted themselves through these relations, and it was these relations that provided them with their characterization of themselves as 'obedient' etc. Crapanzano (1992) maintains that selves are created momentarily (always to be recreated) in interaction, and the characterizations that those interactions impose on us, which are made within cultural expectations and understandings. These

characterizations are arrests in a continual process of recognition and identification. The narrators in my study characterized themselves within a social context of relations and interactions. Following Ewing (1990) these relations are constituted by cultural discourses and expectations, and thus situate the narrator (as self-characterized or represented) within those discourses and expectations. The interactive context, whether it be internal to the narrative, or external to it, in the context of telling, the other, in the accounts of the women I interviewed, always figured.

Ricoeur (1992) has suggested narrative functions to create a continuity of self, attained by a recasting and integration of events, through emplotment and the predication of actions onto actors (subjects). Emplotment links events, as a framework through which things that happen become connected and meaningful. Emplotment creates “concordance” between actors, events, and between actors and events, where previously there existed none (Ricoeur 1992: 147). Emplotment in narrative can be likened to the process that occurs in memory, when events from the past are linked to each other in a mental or verbal representation, whether in language or imagery, as they are gathered into a framework that moulds them and imbues them with meaning. Implicit in this understanding is that identity must be constructed through language in order to acquire the temporality that provides the impression of continuity with the past. For Ricoeur, this temporality is necessary for the construction of identity, as is continuity, and it is made possible through the devices of narrative.

While the notion of emplotment as a way in which to give meaning to one’s actions in relation to cultural frameworks is useful, the selfsameness only exists as long as the plot does not change. Bruner (1994) points out that the tendency for narrators is towards consistency in the story, so that if discrepancies exist, the narrator will separate the threads, and create separate stories. This resonates with Ewing, cited above. However, as Ray (2000) points out, through repeated tellings, the narrative becomes the memory, so that the truth of one’s experience is encapsulated in the story, and discrepancies are minimized,

eliminated from the telling. Much, however, hinges on the context of telling: what events will be revealed to whom, what is the appropriate genre and behaviour at the moment of telling, what the stakes are in providing certain accounts (especially to a researcher).

This said, recurring themes and frames became evident in the accounts of women I interviewed, though their position with relation to them varied through the agency they gave themselves within the narrative, the contradictions they expressed, and their resolution. Several women's accounts expressed a 'turning point', as the key element of their narrative, expressed most often as the salvation from a negative experience (see Bruner 1994). It also became evident that the younger women did not always employ the same framework for their self-narratives. However, I discerned several discursive frameworks through which women represented their experiences, either directly or through the themes and 'emplotment' of their narratives. Older women expressed much concern with the disappearance of relations of respect between adults and children, which apparently were an important aspect of the structure of social relations, obligations, and control, and were fundamental to the subjectivity of individuals. These relations, while hierarchical, were locally based and maintained through the exchange of goods and services, and thus can be called an *economy of respect*. While notions of status were not absent, people were anxious to maintain an appearance of equality rather than of relative wealth. When the economy and techniques of governance changed after WWII, social relations and the discourses which guide individuals' interactions began to shift, so that egalitarian concerns were modified to some extent by the desire to 'improve' one's situation, notably through the acquisition of material goods and education. Both frameworks are interwoven with a notion 'respectability' configured differently in each case. 'Respectability' as a moral framework was first introduced in the context of the Caribbean by Wilson (1973), and was used to refer, quite summarily, to the adherence to what were perceived as dominant, European-derived values that include marriage and chastity for women, economic well-being (which means, at

the least, owning one's home), and education (this framework will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Each of the two frameworks I have elaborated configures respectability differently, placing emphasis on different elements, as status is attained differently in each, and an ethos of egalitarianism that promotes sharing has given way to one of accumulation.

The third framework of importance here is that of *patriarchal ambivalence*, which becomes evident in women's narratives of their relationships. This ambivalence, as will be described in the next chapter, derives from the creation of the kinship system through the relations of dominance and slavery, where, dominant ideas of domesticity and patriarchy were imposed from above, while slave relations placed emphasis on consanguinal relations and individual autonomy. The ambivalence arises in the juxtaposition of the dominant ideology, which promotes marriage and the male-headed family, and actual local practices.

The lives of individual women in relation to the historical, political, social, and cultural contexts in Dominica, as well as the construction of the idea of femininity and sexuality within a context of social and political change and the creation of national identity provide the focus of my work. The over-arching framework through which I carry out my analysis draws heavily upon Foucauldian ideas regarding the historical formation of the subject, intersected and enhanced by feminist and critical approaches that integrate ideas drawn from Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as approaches to narrative and identity such as that of Ricoeur. Because this study enquires about the interface of wider social configurations of institutions and discourses with individual women's lives and perceptions of their experiences and self-creation (agency), my theoretical approach incorporates both notions of a subject formed through 'political technologies' (Foucault 1988) that include, especially, discursive frameworks that support and create institutional and other means to mould individuals, as well as the individual's engagement with and use of these frameworks in moulding the self. Foucault's later work on governance and technologies of the self is particularly useful in the context of this study.

The understanding here is that discursive formations as they intersect with material relations, institutions, and practices at different levels, work both to position people as subjects through their deployment and to provide the fodder for self-creation, in this way simultaneously limiting and underlying agency. In being drawn upon by narrators to formulate their self-representations, discourses provide models of behaviour that are inherently moral, because they provide a template, a model for action, upon which to base their accounts of self. They are at once appropriating and appropriated, reinterpreted and thus employed both in subjectification, as externally induced, and in self-creation.

Foucault's notion of governmentality is pertinent here to understand the ways in which the different types and locations of authority interact and shift, and which discourses do or do not come to bear upon people's self-development and self-representations. Governmentality describes a coming into being of a rational practice of governing, and shift in the political power, from that of the Machiavellian prince whose foremost interest was in maintaining power and dominion,⁵ to that of state as a governing body with concomitant attention to the population (as individuals) as the underlying substance of the state (Foucault 1991). This shift towards an emphasis on population also signalled a shift from emphasis on the patriarchal family as a unit of governance, analogous to that of the state, to a concern with governing the people and relations within the family (1991: 99). This shift in ways of executing authority, and of the conceptualisation of people as subjects, enjoined a shift in 'technologies' through which power operates and the population is controlled. The policing of the population and the discipline of bodies, for example, are linked to this shift and manifested in the concern with statistics that developed in the 19th century as well as growing attention to the welfare of populations (Donzelot 1979; Foucault 1990[1978]; Gauthier 1996).

⁵ This is in some ways analogous to 18th and 19th century imperialism, where the colonial government was interested in the colonies only insofar as they brought economic advantage through production of goods to be consumed in the 'mother' country, even after a post-enlightenment shift in governance had occurred, that brought attention to the well-being of the population, on which the state depended for labour in the newly industrialized era.

In the case of Dominica, the notion of governmentality is a useful tool to understand the transformations that have occurred and that are occurring at this time, and how social, political, and cultural changes affect women's self-representations, as described above. The shift in the role of government towards more democratisation was reflected in a shift in discourses of gender, sexuality, race, economy, politics, citizenship, rights, etc., especially manifest in the creation of social welfare and development, including public health, definitions of labour and establishment of wages, education, family welfare, etc., all traversed by notions of class, race, and gender, and brought in to transform the island from colony into nation, and the quasi-autonomous peasant producers into citizens. The shifting techniques of governance that occurred, in conjunction with a shift in economic patterns through slavery, post-emancipation, late and post-colonial periods, show a decrease in the utilization of force, but an increased involvement of government and non-government agencies in the lives of the population, especially through the development of social programs and the creation of new laws. This also signals an increased involvement of the rural, mainly peasant population in the political life of the island and improvements in certain aspects of their quality of life through the availability of health services and legal protection. At the same time, it has prompted a shift from a community-based organization of social relations and authority derived from age and social position within that locus, due to the quasi-autonomous nature of the community enclaves to a more centralized authority. One of the effects of this is the transfer of ultimate control of the family, perceived as individuals, to the state.

Gender relations, initially honed by slavery, racism, and the cultural past, also underwent a shift, especially in the devaluation of women's agricultural labour and a move to position women more firmly within the domestic sphere, in a process of what has been called 'housewifization' (see Green 1998). The shift from subsistence agriculture among the peasantry, involving the widespread sharing of resources and labour, to a cash-based economy, has seen the social relations and the discourses that traverse, justify, and maintain them. Initially,

local configurations of knowledge, power and control developed to which the colonial state and its representatives and its mechanisms of control were only marginal. The main source of outside control was through the church or local plantation owners, and in the instance of extreme violence, the state was called in. Because of these different configurations of authority and power relations, discourses developed at the local level that integrated some ideas from dominant discourse, but which then reconfigured them within the local framework of social relations and concepts.

Foucault's later work, more concerned with the self and agency, is tied to the notion of governmentality. He outlines four 'technologies' that are utilized in connection to discursive formations. These are: 1. technologies of production, which have to do with economy; 2. technologies of sign systems, which are concerned with the production of symbols, language, and communication; 3. technologies of power, which regard the control of behaviour; and 4. technologies of the self, by which individuals work on themselves, towards a particular ethical goal (1988: 18). Foucault's states his concern is with the latter two: "this contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality" (ibid.: 19). This is the point of departure for my work.

Nikolas Rose (1995, 1996) also engages this aspect of Foucault's work in his own study of the history of the 'person' and the field of psychology, drawing most heavily on the concept of the 'relations to ourselves' or the way in which human beings have come, historically and through the imposition and use of various technologies, to relate to each other and to themselves:

Our relation with ourselves, that is to say, has assumed the form it has because it has been the object of a whole variety of more or less rationalized schemes, which have sought to shape our ways of understanding and enacting our existence as human beings in the name of certain objectives – manliness, femininity, honour, modesty, propriety, civility, discipline, distinction, efficiency, harmony, fulfilment, virtue, pleasure – the list is as diverse and heterogeneous as it is interminable (Rose 1995: 130).

This description of ‘relation to ourselves’, which Rose also terms ‘subjectification’ or the creation of the subject, encompasses both the technologies of power and technologies of the self, iterated by Foucault as described above. Reference is made here to the ethical aim of selfhood – creating a self based on a schema, a discourse, or set of principles, that are both imposed from without, through discourses and practices of control, and drawn upon, in ‘enacting our existence’, consciously, towards certain goals. This resonates with the idea of the ‘moral’ and the ‘ethical’, outlined previously, and is complemented by Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity.

Projected goals

One goal of this project, through its analytic approach, is to incorporate a historical perspective to the examination of current social and cultural forms, viewing them as always in transformation, rather than as already transformed, and individual lives as imbricated within the wider historical context, so that one can be approached through the other. While the relationship of the personal to the political is an underlying concern in anthropology, it has often been limited to the immediate political context of interaction, rather than a more far-reaching and transforming one. Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) have stated the case for a turn towards this wider historical and political context, and their position can be summed up by this statement:

Insofar as global systems and epochal movements always root themselves in the quotidian, then, they are accessible to historical ethnography. In Africa, as elsewhere, the colonial “state” was both a political structure *and* a condition for being; hence the former (its institutional order of governance) might be interrogated through the latter (the routines and habits oriented through and toward it). (1992: 39)

The impact of transformations wrought through colonization and especially the effects of decolonisation and attempts at social and economic development on the experiences and perceptions of women thus become the focus of study, made accessible through their self-expressions. This has relevance from

a comparative perspective, as the effects of decolonisation continue to have an impact throughout the world. This study will complement others in its grasp of the effects of social change and decolonisation on the lives of women, defying a unified notion of modernization as a process. Instead change is seen as emerging from the specific colonial project and context, with commonalities and differences arising through similarities and divergences in colonial strategies and local responses (see Besteman 1999; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Hutchison 1996)

As a study of women's representations of their experiences, this research will also contribute to women's studies generally and Caribbean studies on women more specifically. This enquiry will help further the project of critical and feminist approaches in anthropology by linking the personal to the political, economic, social and historical context of decolonisation, connecting the dots between structural relations and personal experience. In this, it will also contribute to knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the diversity of women's experience worldwide, and add to the widening repertoire of women's voices, from a variety of subject positions. An examination of women's perspectives within the context of decolonisation and rapid social transformation is important because it allows meaning to emerge regarding the implications of social change not only on people's material lives but on their moral lives as well. Studies of gender and women in the Caribbean have emphasized the general rather than the particular aspects of individual experience, or, when they did, have not accentuated a link to the wider context of social, economic, political change and decolonisation (but see for example Chamberlain 1995, 1997; Olwig 1995, Austin-Broos 1997). This is particularly important for the development of socially relevant policies that are culturally sensitive because they will then be more effective.

Within the context of studies carried out on Dominica, this research contributes to a small body of work on gender and the family that includes early studies of conjugal relations (Cannon 1970) and recent work on the family in the form of one study on father absence (Quinlan 1995), as well as studies on: gender

relations (English 1991); gender socialization in a comparative perspective (Chevannes 2001); women and economy, including studies of hucksters (Hanseen 1990; comparative study, Mulakala 1991); women in agriculture (Babb 1988; Crichlow 1994, a comparative study only partly concerned with women); women and marketing education (Lawrence 1994); women and development agencies (Kessel 1997); women and motherhood from a medical anthropology perspective (Krumeich 1994); and gender from comparative historical perspective (Green 1998). Not all of these studies were carried out by anthropologists, and several of them were not devoted to an in-depth study of Dominica but were comparative in nature. None of these studies are devoted to an examination of women's expressions of their experiences in an analysis of subjectivity, although several of them use women's accounts as data and as revealing their attitudes and positions in regards to particular issues and experiences. Krumeich's (1997) treatment of women's narratives of motherhood, in which she includes her own experience, lets the narratives speak for themselves, providing little analysis of the narratives themselves, but using them as data for her discussion of motherhood and health. Kessel's (1997) study of development agencies untangles an underlying discursive framework among local development personnel. Green (1998), on the other hand, uncovers discursive formations of gender and class in their relation to policy and education in a comparative, social historical study of Dominica, Jamaica, and Barbados, but uses no personal accounts against which to juxtapose her data.

In another perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on the self and identity, both within anthropology and other social sciences and in the humanities. Many anthropological projects have been interested in uncovering various conceptualizations of the self, as juxtaposed against a 'Western' self (for example Geertz 1984; Holland et al. 1998; Jacobson-Widding 1983; Shweder and Bourne 1984; see Spiro 1993 for a critical discussion of these concepts), focussing on cultural differences as though culture was a given, while in the humanities recent treatises on identity have mainly been bent towards

understanding of the self as a subject that is both formulated from the social, political, and historical context outside, discursively, and from the inside, through developing a relation with the 'outside'. However, these studies, by people such as Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) do not engage with the accounts of real people. The particularity of the present project is the link made between the wider social context and the individual, with a focus on different types of expression, mainly narrative, using interviews carried out during field research.

1.2 Research location

My interest in doing research in the Caribbean started off as a linguistic one. Dominica presents an intriguing linguistic context, with a French Creole spoken, locally called 'Patwa',⁶ not along with the French lexifier as is usually the case, but with English. However, while visiting the island to scout for a research location, my interest shifted to broader concerns of social and cultural transformations, within a context of recent statehood, decolonisation, and global economic pressures and cultural influences. I became particularly interested in the village of La Plaine, located in the south eastern region of the island, after having spoken with several older local residents, many of whom expressed concern at effects change was having on their village. As mentioned above, motor vehicle transportation to the area was fairly recent, as was participation in the official market economy as agricultural producers. With the understanding that men were the key players in the banana growing industry, and an interest in feminist approaches to anthropological investigation, I decided to probe the not-so-obvious impact of change on women's lives in La Plaine.

⁶ 'Patwa' (from French *patois*) is the local term for the French Creole spoken in Dominica. While the term *patois* is often used in a pejorative sense in French to refer to a poorly spoken or broken French, and recently, Dominican Creole has been given the name 'Kwéyòl' by those promoting the language in relation to national identity, I use 'Patwa' in this study because it is the term used by informants.

The Island: facts and figures

Dominica is a former British colony, independent since 1978. The island is small, measuring approximately 754 square kilometres, sandwiched between the two French *départements*, Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The national population has declined over the past twenty years, from 73,795 in 1981, to 70,925 according to the preliminary results of the 2001 census. Dominica's capital, Roseau, is the town with by far the largest population, with 20,000 residents and is the only really urban area: Berekua (known as Grand Bay) in the southern region is next with 3,900 and Portsmouth to the north of Roseau stands third with a population of 3,600. The rest of the population is spread around the island, mainly near the coastal areas in towns and villages. Life expectancy in Dominica is high, at seventy years for males and seventy-five for females. Fertility rates, while they have declined are still relatively high (4.2 in 1981, compared to 3.0 in 1991; there were 14,903 births between 1991 and 2001), and mortality rates are fairly low (there were 5,581 deaths between 1991 and 2001). This means that the decline in population is largely due to out-migration.

Dominica's government is run by a Westminster-style unicameral cabinet, including the Prime Minister in addition to twenty-one elected representatives and nine nominated members. Presently, there are three political parties in Dominica: the Dominica Labour Party, the Freedom Party, and the United Workers Party. The current government is run by a coalition of the Dominica Labour party (ten seats) and the Freedom Party (two seats).

Literacy in Dominica is widespread, but many of the older population are not literate and there is some functional illiteracy among the younger adults and children. In 1993, the illiteracy rate stood at 23.4 percent. Teachers are not particularly well trained: in 1994-95, 80 percent of primary school teachers held only a school leaving certificate, which means that they did not attend secondary school, while 13 percent had completed their secondary schooling. The rest of the teachers had received some tertiary training. School attendance is compulsory up to age fifteen (UNICEF 1996).

Dominica has sixty-four primary schools, which cover grades one to seven. There are twenty-eight schools in the Junior Secondary Programme (JSP), which enrolls students who did not pass their Common Entrance Exams (CEE) and therefore could not enter the regular secondary schools. The JSP school curriculum covers the equivalent of the first three years of the regular secondary programme, after which the student may transfer to the regular programme if his or her grades are high enough: however, this rarely occurs. Thirteen secondary schools include five public and eight 'assisted' (semi-private) schools (UNICEF 1996). In 1999, 66.1 percent of primary school students writing the CEE were selected for secondary school, an increase from 42.7 percent in 1995 (Goldberg and Bruno 1999). There are three tertiary training facilities in Dominica: the Clifton Dupigny Community College (CDCC); Dominica Teachers' College; and the School of Nursing.⁷ The CDCC has a technical/vocational sector and an academic sector, and since 1980 has been part of the University of the West Indies Outreach programme. Students can begin their university training in the academic programme of the CDCC, and then transfer to one of the University of the West Indies' three locations in Jamaica, Barbados, or Trinidad.

Dominica has a relatively well-developed health-care system, although many people with serious illnesses prefer to be treated overseas if they can afford it, because of the availability of more advanced and sophisticated testing and treatment. Dominica has two hospitals, one in each of the towns of Roseau and Portsmouth, with seven district health centres and forty-four clinics, which provide basic care (UNICEF 1996).

The island has a tropical climate with a high level of rainfall, especially in the mountainous interior and the eastern side. Dominica's economy still relies heavily on agriculture, unlike some other Caribbean countries which have shifted their economic emphasis to off-shore industries and tourism. Bananas are the main export crop but while they comprised 60 percent of total material exports in 2001, they made up only 18% of the GDP. Prices decreased 26 percent between

⁷ There is also an offshore section of an American medical school, Ross University, in Portsmouth.

1992 and 2001, and production declined 26 percent for the years 1997-98, and 4.5 percent and 3 percent for 1999 and 2000 respectively. Plantain, root crops, fruits coconut, coffee and cocoa are also grown, exported mainly within the region to other islands. There has been a slight increase in these products, due to the decline in banana production (IMF Country Report 2001). Dominica promotes eco-tourism to the many natural sites which include several waterfalls, sulfuric hot-springs, and a volcanic lake (called Boiling Lake because it is, literally, boiling) in the central mountain region. Dominica lacks the sandy white beaches of other Caribbean islands, and the mountainous terrain has prevented the building of an airport that can receive large jets. Tourism in Dominica is thus limited and caters mainly to cruise ships which dock for the day. In recent years, offshore financial institutions, data entry, and gambling have increased the white-collar sector, and the communications and utilities sectors are growing.

Fieldwork was carried out mainly in La Plaine, a village on the coast facing the rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean, spread over an area of about ten square kilometres (five kilometres long and two kilometres wide). The La Plaine area has a population of approximately 2,500 (Dominica Statistical Division 2001). La Plaine is actually a municipal region comprising several hamlets that are traversed by three rivers, and interspersed by bushy areas given over mainly to growing bananas or food crops where there are no houses. As the population has increased over the years, hamlets have grown closer together, giving the town its sprawling form.

La Plaine, as a municipal centre and the largest town in the southeastern district, is home to several government concerns. The health centre provides the most complete services for the region. A doctor is present two or three days each week, and a nurse is on duty daily to see and treat patients. Nurses also make house visits on a regular basis, keeping track of household composition and sanitary facilities. There is an emergency room to treat and bandage minor injuries, a dispensary, and an ambulance service to the main hospital in Roseau.

Other government services offered in the village are the police station, magistrates court, an agricultural training centre with rooms, a cafeteria, and conference rooms, and a little outside the village, an agricultural nursery for fruit trees. Offices for Public Works as well as the electricity company and the telephone company (both private corporations) are also located in the village. The local post office is run out of a woman's house. The local school runs both an elementary and a junior secondary programme. The village council has its own office in a building that also houses a pre-school.

In addition to government organizations, international agencies have their presence in this village in several ways. Continuing education programmes, run through the Welfare Department, are funded in part by international agencies such as UNICEF. Several projects have been funded by foreign governments. The agricultural training centre and a pig-raising cooperative carried out in the 1990s were funded by the French government; the construction of a sports complex in 1999 was carried out by the United States Army who also paid local workers to assist; American Peace Corps volunteers have a permanent presence in the village organizing projects such as literacy classes. There is also a high school student summer camp work programme, which carries out small projects in the village each summer deemed appropriate by the village council. The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) has a student sponsorship programme, providing sponsors to pay for school uniforms and supplies for children in need, and several religious organizations and churches have a presence in La Plaine.

The village of La Plaine has six churches. The main religion in Dominica historically and still today is Catholicism. The British colonists were Anglican, but mostly worshipped in Roseau, and on the northeast coast, Methodists from Antigua settled. But generally, until recent years, 95 percent of the population followed the French influence of Catholicism. Since the 1960s, however, several other denominations have set up churches. In La Plaine, there are now two different Pentecostal churches, a Baptist church, a Christian Union church, and a Seventh Day Adventist Church, as well as a Jehovah Witness mission. These

churches have in common the promotion of marriage before child-bearing, and condemn some of the traditional local cultural practices such as Carnival. The following 'walking map' of La Plaine will provide a more detailed picture of the village.

La Plaine: A Walking Map

At school closing on any weekday, the shouts of children filter through the baking village, wafting closer as they spill from the school house at the bottom of the hill on the way to their respective houses, dressed in their crisp school uniforms, some with disobedient shirt-tails, or shoe laces that defy the knots carefully tied that morning. Boys wearing khaki shorts or pants, a blue shirt and khaki tie, girls sporting a blue pleated skirt, blue blouse and tie, with hair neatly twisted and braided, carry school bags bursting with books and supplies. They make their way in various directions, but most of the children climb the slowly ascending asphalt-paved road that leads to the more densely populated village centre, with tracks and secondary, unpaved roads leading off it to various parts of the village, like 'Ghetto', Plaisance, Dix-acres (Dizak), Balizier, Fresh Island. Or, they set out along the main highway in either direction, which leads them to the outlying hamlets, to the south, of La Ronde and La Frenchette, or to the north, of Felicite strung out along the road and Carse O'Gowrie, located further inland up yet another road (see Map 1 below). A sudden torrent of tropical rain may send them scurrying for cover, under protruding verandas, banana leaves, or inside the closest shop.

If you follow these schoolchildren, when you leave the school building, newly built in 1971 with funding from the Canadian government, and head up the road to the village centre, you will pass the Catholic Church, just across from the school and a little higher up (the school was built on land that once belonged to the church). You may meet up with an adult returning from the garden, cutlass in hand, and a load of freshly harvested produce on his or her head. If it is 'fig day', you might encounter a pick-up truck, precariously loaded with neatly packed

boxes of bananas, careening down the road on the way to the port.⁸ You will certainly see one of several small busses, crammed with secondary school students returning in mid-afternoon from Roseau on the leeward side of the island, about an hour's drive. If you come a little later, you might encounter the busses full of returning commuters, most of them women, who work mainly as store and office clerks.

Brightly painted houses, many of them cement block structures of recent construction, built to replace older and less prestigious wooden ones, or to accommodate descendents of the original owners, border the road above the Catholic Church and boast of a new-found economic well-being. Neatly swept yards, attractively planted with colourful decorative vegetation, proudly hug the road. About halfway, a two-story cement structure houses the village council office, as well as a government funded pre-school, and the remnants of a seldom-used library in which the shelves have been pushed aside to accommodate fitness classes provided by a local policeman and attended by a few local women.

A little higher up, Glenda's shop flourishes, especially on Tuesday afternoons, the day of the drawing for the national lottery, when the most lottery tickets are sold. Some women enter to purchase a few items missing for their afternoon or evening meal, men enter to have a drink of 'cask rum', locally distilled, at the little bar at the back, but most come for their tickets. Some of the children shyly enter to purchase 'sweeties' with a little change they may have lining their pockets.

Continuing to the top of the hill, a junction is reached, with one road leading down to Plaisance, and another branching off to 'Ghetto'. Yet another road branches off to 'Dizak'. At this junction are the two Pentecostal Churches, each of a different congregation. If you remain on the main road, it then turns, and leads off to another junction at the village centre, from where another road

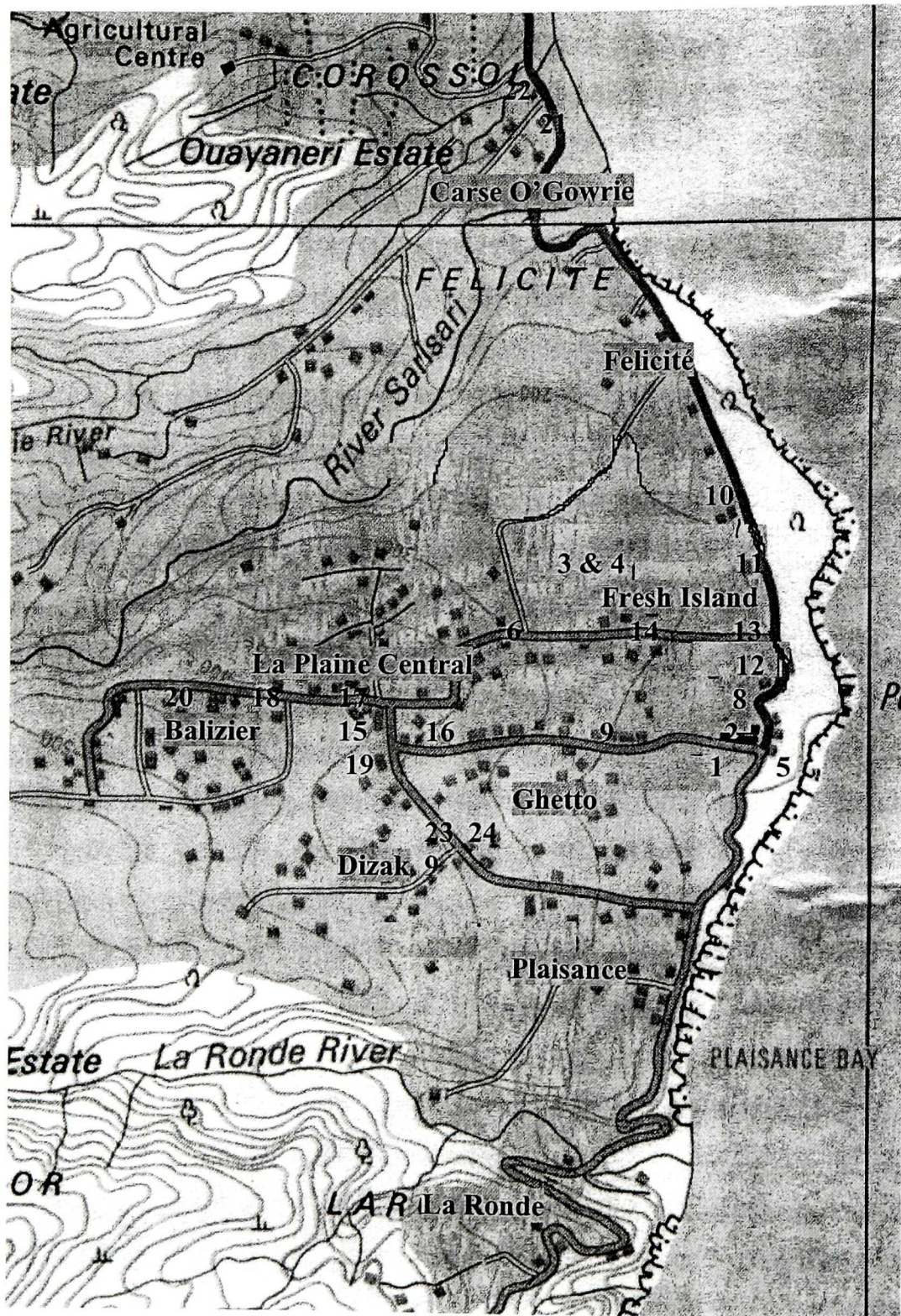
⁸ Bananas are harvested on days designated by the DBMC, the Dominica Banana Marketing Corporation, the sole organization responsible for the regulation of banana farmers so that they meet the requirements of the buyer, and are charged with selling them to the buyer. 'Fig day' or harvest day usually falls on the Thursday and Friday, unless there is a holiday or the boat is delayed and cannot call at the port on the usual day.

ascends through the main village of La Plaine to Balizier, and the other descends through Fresh Island to Felicité and the main highway near the sea. The bus stop shelter is located at this junction, vividly painted with a scene depicting mountains, the national flag and the brightly coloured sisserou parrot, the national bird. There are several commercial establishments located near the junction, including a bar, an ice-cream shop and a restaurant, as well as a standpipe next to two public telephones. A little further up is a supermarket on one side, and another bar on the other, with houses flanking either side. On a Friday or Saturday night, Caribbean music booms from the two huge speakers placed outside the supermarket, competing with the music from the bar across the road, where men are slamming down their dominos in a frenzy to beat their opponents, if not by winning at least by making the most noise. People congregate in the evening at the bus stop and along the road, with the occasional vendor selling barbecued chicken or refreshments. Public meetings are sometimes held there, especially political rallies.

Continuing up the same way, the Christian Union Church is located on the right, and a littler further, yet another bar. You will then come upon a bakery and another shop, to the left. From this main road, several secondary roads lead off in both directions along which houses are scattered, interspersed with banana plots, perhaps some bay or cinnamon trees, plantain, with the odd papaya, breadfruit, mango, coconut, citrus, avocado or other trees intermingled for home use. Most people have a kitchen garden in which they grow herbs, peppers and other vegetables, especially cabbage and tomatoes, for their own use.

If, instead of going upwards from the junction by the bus stop, you head down towards Fresh Island, you will see another bar on the right where, in the evening bingo is the favourite game, and on the left, a large hall with a stage called 'People's Park', partially open air but walled in, where public events, such as dances, calypso contexts and other cultural shows such as beauty contests,

Map 1: La Plaine and Surrounding Hamlets.



Map 1: La Plaine and Surrounding Hamlets (cont'd)

<i>Legend</i>	
1.	Catholic Church
2.	School
3.	Playing Field and Sports Complex,
4.	Agricultural Training Centre.
5.	Post Office
6.	Baptist Church
7.	Christian Union Church
8.	Christian Children's Fund
9.	Village Council/Pre-School
10.	Health Centre
11.	Public Works
12.	Telephone Company
13.	Supermarket
14.	People's Park
15.	Supermarket
16.	Bar
17.	Bar
18.	Bar
19.	Restaurant
20.	Bakery
21.	Bakery
22.	Bay Oil Refinery
23.	Pentecostal Church
24.	Pentecostal Church

Source: Government of Dominica 1988

school events, and religious crusades are often held. A little further down, past more houses and banana gardens, one comes upon another junction with unpaved roads leading off in both directions. The Baptist Church is located at the crossroads.

The road to the right leads into a bushy area containing a few scattered dwellings, mainly located along footpaths branching off from it. The road to the left leads to the Agricultural Training Centre, beside which is a large playing field where games of cricket, soccer, and rounders are played on Sunday afternoons, bringing out crowds of fans and vendors selling 'ice-pops', drinks, and barbecued chicken. The new sports complex, with changing rooms and showers, as well as a paved outdoor basketball court was built while I was there. The training centre is a government-owned facility used to house individuals and groups who come to the village mainly on government business. During my stay, two groups used the facility: the soldiers mentioned above, and a group of American high school students who came as a task force on a summer camp-community service programme.

Back at the junction by the Baptist Church, you continue down the road to the main highway past dwellings spaced a little farther apart than in other areas, interspersed with banana gardens and uncultivated bush. Reaching the highway, you encounter another large supermarket, and on the other side of the road, the office of the telephone company. Turning onto the highway, to the left towards Carse O'Gowrie, one encounters several government buildings on the left, and a few houses, but mostly bush, on the right, going down to the sea. A little further, the health clinic, the main one for the South-eastern region, is situated. You pass by sparse houses, then, crossing the Sarisari River, you arrive at another junction, with a single road leading up from the highway. An abandoned structure that used to be a boxing area for bananas, stands on the side of the sea, with perhaps a cow tied nearby, and on the other is a artisanal bay oil distillery that is still operational, and a bakery. Individuals harvest their bay leaves, and bring them down to the distillery, usually doing the arduous work themselves. Fires must be fed throughout the night, sometimes two nights, until all the leaves have been processed. The single road from the junction leads up through the hamlet of Carse O'Gowrie, with well-maintained houses, many of them fairly recent constructions of cement blocks, dotting both sides. Continuing in the same direction along the

highway, one crosses the Tabieri River, where some people, mainly women and their children, still come to wash their clothes by hand and bathe in the river although many people have running water in their homes or a standpipe nearby, and often have washing machines. A little further down the highway, you cross over a small stream called Bibier and arrive at the local beach of black volcanic sand flanked by cliffs on one side and rocky shores on the other, an area inhabited by several species of crabs and a breeding ground for sea turtles. It is also the site of vibrant parties for the young on special holidays.

Heading back the other way along the highway, from the last junction by the bay oil distillery, continuing back past the supermarket and the telephone company office, one passes several houses, the office of the Christian Children's Fund, and the school, on one side, and on the other, the Post-Office, which is run by a local woman out of her house, a wood-working shop and a mechanic's garage, and then, continuing, past Plaisance one comes to the cemetery on the side of the sea, then to La Ronde and on to the tiny hamlet of La Franchette.

The whole area described above is the municipal region of La Plaine. La Plaine is fairly flat, in relative terms, but coming to La Ronde, the terrain begins to become more convoluted and the road tortuous. Just past the cemetery, on the left (the side of the sea) one begins a steep decline, down to the La Ronde River. Once across, one climbs again on the other side, passing a few houses until one reaches the top. This description of the complete village provides an impression of the expanse and the layout of the village, as well as the services that are found there.

1.3 Research and Methodology

Research involved documents, both historical and contemporary; interviews with officials and community leaders; life history interviews, most of which were tape-recorded; participant observation that comprised participation in household activities and daily village life as well as attending special events, and included casual conversation with men and women of all ages.

Researching Documents

The documentary research is straightforward, and needs little explaining. In order to provide a perspective on the social context and the attitudes and discourses of the past, I looked to colonial documents as well as reports of visitors to the island at different times. Recent reports were used to show transformations that had occurred and the actual state of affairs, inasmuch as they can be measured statistically, and census data were used in a comparative perspective for such areas as women's participation in agriculture, education, and other employment. Newspapers of recent date were examined to show both attitudes and discourses about women, and to glean information regarding current events. Generally, then, the documents provided part of the context for the analysis of my field research data.

When in Dominica, I explored as many sources of documentary information as possible. Although historical archival material was not accessible to the public, the Roseau library allowed me to photocopy some original documents they had on file for reference, and the Government Documentation Centre provided me with copies or issues of various documents and reports. I was able to peruse and copy laws and statutes from the legal library adjoining the main courthouse, and even to examine some court documents. As well, the Statistics Bureau both provided census and survey reports, as well as pulled out statistics from their database at my request. Other documents were procured from various libraries in Canada and the United States.⁹

Interviews with officials

In order to gain understanding regarding the different institutions concerning women in Dominica, I interviewed several key representatives in government and non-governmental organizations. The Ministry for Community Development and Women's Affairs is the umbrella organization for both the

⁹ I would like to thank the McGill University Inter-Library Loans (ILL) section of the McLennan-

Welfare Department, which is concerned mainly with family and child welfare, and the Women's Bureau, which is concerned mainly with women's development and provides access to various funding agencies, educational programmes, and disseminates information, especially through the media regarding women's rights. (When I was in Dominica, a televised series about domestic violence, "Wake-up Call," was showing, produced through the Women's Bureau.) The main non-governmental organization dealing with women's affairs is the Dominica National Council for Women. This organization is active in women's development and works against violence, and is divided into two sectors accordingly. The development sector serves as an umbrella organization for women's groups all across the island, and has a representative in most villages. The anti-violence sector provides counselling for women and couples, as well as information sessions. In addition to these two main bodies, the Family Planning Council holds educational sessions in schools and clinics regarding contraception and safe sex, as well as providing contraception. Another organization, Small Projects Assistance Team (SPAT) provides organizational and some financial assistance for various cultural and development projects, including some geared specifically to women.

Interviews with government organizations were carried out with personnel from the Women's Bureau, the Welfare Department, and with the Honorable Gertrude Roberts, who was then Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs.¹⁰ I also met with the Minister of Education, the Honorable Ronald Green, who was then the government representative for the district in which I carried out my research. Neva Edwards, of the DNCW, accorded me two interviews, and I spoke with personnel at the Family Planning Association and SPAT. For the purposes of this study, these interviews were important to understand the dissemination of ideas regarding women and gender relations,

Redpath Library for their help in procuring documents from other libraries.

¹⁰ Roberts was replaced by a male counterpart in the 2000 election, and the name of the ministry was changed from 'Community Development and Women's Affairs' to 'Community Development and Gender Affairs'.

from the perspective of government officials and NGOs, both of which were influenced by international human rights discourses concerning gender relations and rights, especially because Dominica has ratified both the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Other interviews were carried out with local people involved in village affairs, including a former public health officer who worked in La Plaine in the 1950s, a former nurse, nurses currently working at the local health clinic, a village council representative, church leaders, and the school principal. These interviews provided me with both information about village history, and views (discourses) held by people in fairly authoritative positions within the village. They complemented and helped to contextualize the life history interviews.

Life history interviews

Life history interviews were carried out with fifteen women of various ages: five women were over sixty-five years of age; five were between thirty-five and fifty years; five were between nineteen and thirty. Several of these interviews were carried out over many encounters. Often, I was obliged to reschedule interviews because of unforeseen circumstances on the part of the women interviewed. Some women were not home when I went to a scheduled meeting; others were unable to talk because of the presence of their husbands and finally preferred to come to my home, although some, especially the older women, recounted their story in front of an avid audience of grandchildren.

These interviews were intended to allow women to speak freely about their lives, in order for me to analyse their narratives based on key themes, symbolic frameworks, and the way in which they constructed their stories, as well as to discern moral discourses and to see how they were engaged. For that reason, I tried to avoid controlling the interviews, and intervened as little as possible. I asked the women simply to tell me about their lives, and if they were unclear about what I wanted, I asked them to begin their account with their childhood.

Older women were also requested to speak more generally about life in the past. Some interviews went smoothly and were very easy to conduct, as the women were able to speak freely about their lives with little prompting on my part. Other women, however, appeared less comfortable speaking with me about their lives, and I interjected with questions to encourage them to provide more specific information.

Participant Observation

Fieldwork in La Plaine was carried out over a twelve-month period during 1999 and 2000. When I first arrived in La Plaine with my eight-year old son, we resided with a family in Carse O'Gowrie for about a month. We then moved into a house in the centre of the village, where we resided for three months, after which we moved two more times until finally settling, for the last six months of my stay, in a smaller house, still in the village centre.

My initial acquaintance with the village, therefore, took place through our host family in the first month. Living with a family also allowed me to learn about household relationships, division of labour, and authority relations, as well as some of the local behaviours, customs, and some essential local housekeeping skills. It was Christmas time, and people, both men and women, came and went as they do at that time of year, going from household to household to partake of the Christmas soup and drinks¹¹, and catch up on the latest news. I participated with the family in most of their activities, from going to the banana garden with the son of the older woman, digging tannia and yams, and harvesting, shelling, drying and roasting coffee with the older woman and her daughter, and attended church with each of them (they attended different churches). I was able to observe the familial interactions between three generations including gender and work relations, etc. My son learned to participate in local games. However, the house was far from the centre of the village, where I felt I could meet more people and make myself

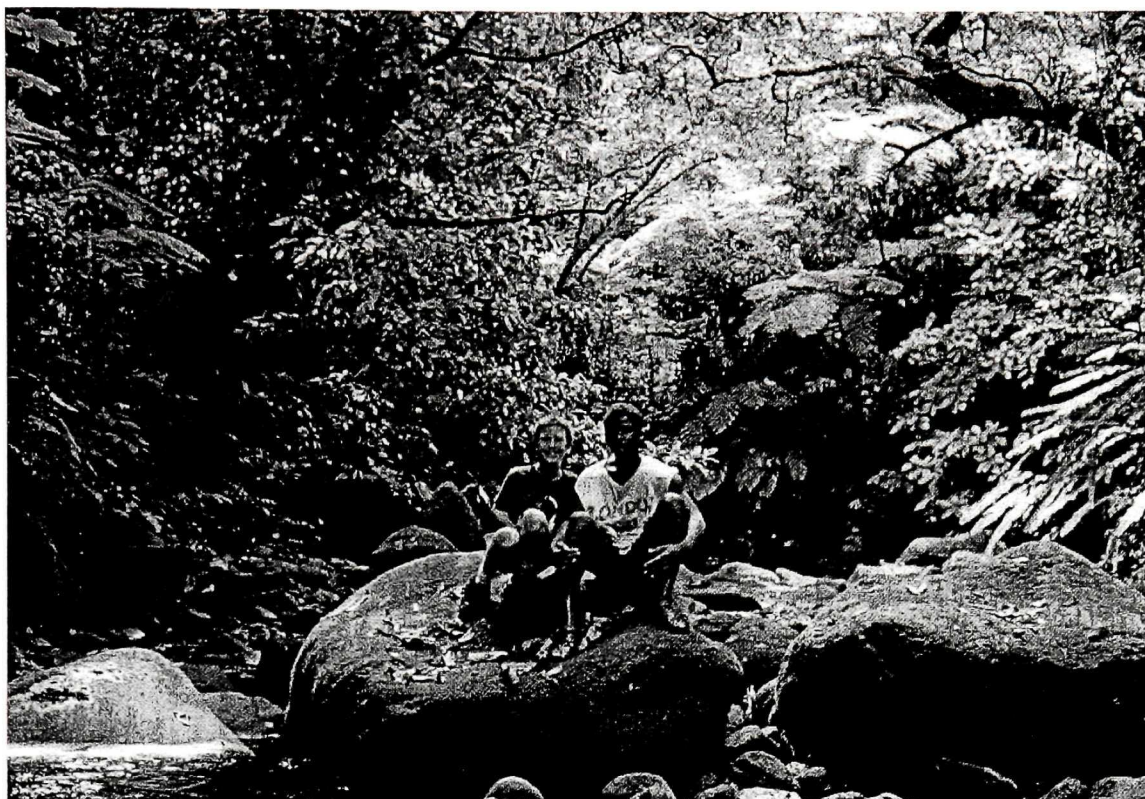
¹¹ At Christmas, a large pot of soup is the traditional fare for visitors, who go from house to house to pay their respects. Alcoholic beverages are also served.

known as a researcher to them. We therefore moved to the centre of La Plaine where we remained for the rest of our stay.

A woman whom I met through one of the host family members was our neighbour at our new residence, and eventually became a close friend. She brought me to visit other village women, her friends, so that I could get to know the village history and make contacts. Living in the central area of the village, with easy access to the main services such as a large supermarket, the bus stop, churches, bars, etc. was beneficial to my research as I could observe people more easily in their everyday public interactions, and was more visible to them. Indeed, some people approached me as I passed through the village centre, and were eager to talk to me.

Gradually, I became friendly with several different women, whom I visited regularly, participating to some extent in their daily lives, and eventually was able to ask them to tell me their life stories. The work of getting to know women well enough to ask them to give me their stories, however, was 'nothing easy' (as local people would say). My initial intention was to attend the various churches, to observe practices and as a venue to meet people, and especially to then be able to use religion as a main variable in my life history interviews. While I went to services in each of the churches except one, I found it difficult to continue to attend several churches as each required a commitment, especially the so-called 'Christian' churches (i.e., non-Catholic). It would have been possible to conduct a study of women from one church, or at the most two, but even then it would be difficult to enlist their trust as a church-goer, when attending two different churches. As well, when I attended, especially the lively Pentecostal services, it was impossible to remain an observant bystander, and I felt uncomfortable participating in some of the aspects of the service; it was difficult to integrate with the congregation without being an adherent to the faith. As well, if I adhered to one church such as one of the Pentecostal Churches, behavioural restrictions would have been applied to me that I felt would hinder my freedom of movement in the village. I therefore decided to become acquainted with research

participants as much as possible outside the church, so that affiliation and faith would not be a hindrance to our relationship.



My son and friend, on a hike up to Sari Sari Falls, La Plaine, 1999.

My son accompanied me for the first eight months of my stay, and attended the local elementary school, which enabled me to meet some of the other mothers. I participated with them in one or two school events, and attended a parenting course given by the Welfare Department in conjunction with UNICEF with several of them. Although I thought that this was an enabling strategy for my research, I met with resistance and suspicion on the part of these women. In fact I had more difficulty getting to know and interacting with many women who were my peers, rather than with very young or older women. As well, whereas men spontaneously greeted me on the street and were quick to strike up conversation, women appeared to be much more reserved. This made my task all the more daunting as I had set out to do life history interviews with women, and felt that I had to develop a certain intimacy with women in order for them to participate in

research where they would tell a stranger about their life experiences. If I could not develop a relationship with the women, it would be difficult to engage in my research as planned.

I discovered that one of the main difficulties I encountered getting to know women stemmed from a difference in communicative conventions and frameworks for interaction. Most initial communication with women did not involve the revelation of personal information. Almost no-one ever asked me what it was I was doing there, although they likely asked each other, as several people thought I was a Peace Corps volunteer because there were already three in the village. It is considered impolite to ask the nature of one's occupation, so positioning myself initially as a researcher was difficult. People did not ask "what do you do": they were much more likely to ask about one's family and place of origin than about one's occupation. As I understood this convention, it made it difficult for to ask women questions about themselves, for fear of offending them.

Even though a variety of standard English was used as the main language of communication (in spite of the fact that most adults also used Patwa), situations were not always transparent: there was a disjuncture, for me, between what was said or done and what was meant, made all the more difficult because, as a native English speaker, I thought I should understand. My interpretation was sometimes, but not always right, and so I developed a deep-seated sensation of uncertainty during the first three months of the research.

My experience is discussed reflexively here because it is through this experience that I came to realize, in retrospect, to what extent the 'self' is one's research tool, and that through this experience of 'self' I would be able to learn the cultural conventions pertaining to interpersonal relations. I will recount a short anecdote to illustrate. As mentioned above, a local woman and neighbour befriended me not long after our arrival. In addition to taking me to meet other people, she would bring me cooked food, almost on a daily basis. Grateful but somewhat embarrassed, I did not know how to reciprocate or what she expected of me. She would bring me a hot lunch almost every day as she brought lunch for

the men working on her house. She would also make requests, which led me to believe that she cultivated my “friendship” for strategic purposes, to get money by working for me, to acquire objects in my possession, or even for me to sponsor her immigration to Canada. Through her expectations, she positioned me structurally in relation to her and in relation to what she perceived as my place, and proceeded to interact with me accordingly. I, on the other hand, arriving with a conception of friendship that involved a kind of conversational introspection and confiding of personal issues, felt disappointed and almost betrayed in that I could not attain that with her, but at the same time, I was aware of my structural advantage – especially my ready access to cash (which, however little, was more than most people there) and my education. It was difficult to reconcile the structural differences in as much as they appeared to interfere with friendship. Gradually, however, as the relationship progressed, and as I developed others, it became evident that the type of exchange that occurred in this relationship was both opportunistic and the expression of amity, as affection and the material are not necessarily incompatible. It was the expression of a cultural mode of sharing – people shared what they had, which was mostly food, and expected to have in return whatever the other was able to provide, be it money, objects, services, or power, in a relation of generalized reciprocity. Friendship developed in conjunction with and because of this sharing over structural differences. The cultural mode that directed this relationship then became familiar and I was able to respond more easily and to direct my interactions with others accordingly. My expectations changed and I was able to develop what have turned out to be long-lasting and deep relationships. As much as was possible, I attempted to return the friendship proffered me through using my resources (not always monetary) to help them: running errands for older people; having women do some paid work for me (that I could very well have done myself); bringing back goods from town; or simply being ‘company’ for a lonely older person who, in return, was delighted to share stories, gossip, and food. While confidences did eventually make their way into my relationships with these women, personal information was by no

means the initial way of getting to know them. This came through transactions of a different kind. I began to develop the relationships necessary for my study. Rather than picking women from a cohort, which would have been a daunting if not impossible task, I gathered life stories from women who chose to interact with me. I was in this way able to overcome many of the difficulties I experienced at first.

Methodological Quandaries

Arising from my fieldwork were two quandaries: the first is an ethical dilemma that involves the politics of research and of representation as discussed by feminist researchers; the other is one of representativity of life stories. I address the ethical question first. On the one hand, feminist research has favoured an approach that is personal, intersubjective, and based on empathy with other women, relying on developing friendships in order to better be able to understand and share other women's experiences. At the same time, critiques of this approach to researching women find this kind of relationship exploitative, questioning the relations of power that position the researcher on the top. Wolf (1996), in her introduction to *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, points out that power is, in fact, at the heart of most feminist dilemmas in fieldwork:

The most central dilemma for contemporary feminists in fieldwork, from which other contradictions are derived, is power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created, and recreated before, during, and after field research. (1996: 2)

She locates three dimensions of power involved in fieldwork relations (ibid.): the first arises from the positionality of the researcher, which includes race, class, nationality, life chances, and urban or rural origins; the second stems from the research process (i.e. definition of the research relation, unequal exchange, exploitation); and the third involves the representation of the subject of research through writing. The underlying premise that appears to cut through various feminisms is a desire to bridge the gap caused by power relations to "seek instead an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and

intersubjectivity” (Stacey 1991:112). According to Oakley (1981), this approach involves, first of all, “empathy and mutuality” achieved through intersubjective dynamics and collaboration. Women doing research with women often seek to emphasize the relationships with their informants, and attempt to develop and understand the human side of field research, rather than to play it down. However, seeing all relations with all informants as “empathetic and mutual” is rather idealistic, to say the least, and has been criticized by feminists for its assumption of a universal “woman” with no consideration for differences based on race, class, history, culture, sexuality, etc. As well, although noble in intention, the development of close relationships cannot erase the hierarchical relation that exists between most researchers and their informants or perhaps more accurately between academia and the “field site.” Intimacy and reciprocity in research may only serve to mask them, giving us access to people’s lives under the aegis of friendship that otherwise would not have been revealed. According to Stacey (1991), this situation can prove to be even more exploitative and deceptive than a more positivistic approach. In addition, collaborative efforts in the field may turn into not so collaborative ethnographies as the researcher leaves to write up her thesis or book and further her career according to academic norms, not those of the people she was working with.

As well, Daphne Patai (1991) points out that people may not want to collaborate or take any active part in the research. Wolf (1996: 20) remarks that reciprocity – that is, with the researcher also confiding in the informant – may be experienced as a burden by the informant. Patai contends that even if informants do collaborate in the research and have some say in what goes into the “final product”, feminists are still contributing to the reproduction of “the very inequalities and hierarchies it seeks to reveal and to transform” by ensuring that “*other* people are the subject of *our* research, almost never the reverse” (Patai 1991: 149).

The people I met and interacted with during my field research showed me in different ways their awareness of the disparities between north and south, light

and dark. Their history is forged out of those inequalities. Their awareness is exemplified by the friendship I described above, where nonetheless a *feeling* of equality was achieved over structural differences through the exchange of benefits that each of us was able to bring to the relationship. This, of course, does not erase the long history of colonial exploitation or present global inequities. While such structural inequalities do still exist, and *I* am writing about *them* and will be the one to benefit most from their participation in my research, I do feel that a certain reciprocity was initiated. Friendships have been established, and relationships maintained either directly or through migrant family members.

That the development of friendships allowed me access to information to which I would not otherwise be privy is certain. However, in order to ask women to participate in this project, a relationship of trust had to be developed, one that would allow them both to speak freely to me, and to know that any information from the interviews, which were taped, could be used for my research. They trusted me to use what they told me in a way that would not be detrimental to them. In other words, the personal life accounts, which make up a large portion of this study, were not provided as confidences to a friend but as information to a researcher whom they trust, and who is also a friend. This still does not erase the inequities, and one could ask why examine women's life accounts if it could be considered at all exploitative? Why not just stay home? This is a question I hope the study itself will answer.

One solution to the dilemma of structural inequalities and exploitation of the research subject is to 'give something back'. Indeed, I was posed the following question by one woman – "what is this [research] going to get for us?" – a question that I hope to be able to answer concretely in the future. In the meantime, while this research may not have any immediate return, the insights these women have shared (although perhaps skewed now through my interpretations) will contribute to understanding of Dominican and other Caribbean women's lived experiences and how they negotiate their lives. It may

also lay the groundwork for further projects that aim more concretely to ameliorate their situations.

The second dilemma is that raised by using individual life accounts in ethnography. Crapanzano (1984) has critiqued the use of life history as a methodology, complaining that in many cases the individual's life is held to be representative or typical of some aspect of social or cultural reality. For Crapanzano, the idea of "typicality" denotes a skewed vision of society as homogeneous. As well, Crapanzano queries whether consistencies in accounts do not simply reveal a discursive pattern, a "gloss," and holds they may be actually "more revealing of a cultural orientation or psychological disposition than that of the actual occurrence of any event." Additionally, Crapanzano points out that life stories are often lacking analysis, but provide ethnographic contextualization that situates the subject in a social and cultural setting. Crapanzano also argues that "the life history [...] is the result of a complex of self-constituting negotiations" that occur minimally between the ethnographer and the informant, and thus the anthropologist should not underestimate his/her role in the production of the account, first of all in instigating the person to talk about his/her life, which may be unusual or unsettling, especially when faced by a stranger (although it may have just the opposite effect!), the orientation and topics covered along with the form the account takes (does the interviewer cut the person off, ask lots of questions, guide topics of discussion?), and afterward in the transcribing, translating, and editing process, where the account is turned into a printed document that adopts standards and conventions of presentation that do not belong to the research subject's milieu.

These are important considerations when dealing with life accounts in the context of anthropological study. While I concur with most of Crapanzano's critiques, I do not think that a life narrative is simply a gloss, but that it can provide a window to the symbolic mediation and shaping of lived reality, and vice versa. Rather than attempting to make the account representative of the society or of the factuality of particular events, my goal is to grasp how the cultural and

social context has shaped the way in which Dominican women's life experiences understood by them, in a hermeneutic examination that goes back and forth between the self-account and the context, so that greater understanding of each comes through the other. Moral discourses, symbolic frameworks, important events and relationships are revealed in both their commonalities and divergences through women's life accounts, which allow us to glimpse, if not fully understand, the patterns and complexities of women's life experiences, and the matrix of discourses that help to shape them. Of course, as Crapanzano and others have pointed out, life stories are really a dialogue constructed in the interaction between the researcher and the informant. Information received through interaction with others is always in dialogue, and there will always be a part of the researcher in his or her research. One problem here is that the informant might tell researchers what he or she believes they want to hear. Other contextual influences on the account may be even more important: what is happening in the informant's life at the moment of telling, who else is present at the time of the telling, etc. The relationship with the researcher will also influence the account, as discussed above, and so will what the informant feels is at stake by recounting or omitting certain details. In addition, the researcher selects what will or will not be included in the final report, and how the stories will be interpreted and analyzed, effectively rewriting them to fit his or her own agenda. These are valid concerns and must be taken into account, but are inevitable not only in life story research, but in any research that involves interpersonal relations (especially participant observation). The solution is not to try to produce a 'real' account, but to acknowledge the inevitability of the subjective mediation of the researcher.

1.4 The Chapters

This study comprises eight chapters, three of which present introductory material, including this introduction, a review of literature pertaining to women in the Caribbean, and a historical overview of Dominica. These chapters provide the contextual frame for this study, in order to situate it both within the themes and

issues of writings on women in the Caribbean, and within the specific historical context. Chapter 2, “Women in the Caribbean: An Overview,” consists of a synopsis of theoretical debates, issues, and approaches to gender, the family and women in the Caribbean. This chapter is divided into two sections which correspond to thematic fields that are also somewhat periodic. These analyses provide the background from which I draw to both frame and contrast my analysis of women’s narratives and performances in Dominica. Chapter 3, “Contextualizing the Past,” provides the colonial historical background of Dominica from a perspective of transformation and development of a national, as contrasted to a colonial, field. This chapter comprises four sections: the first section is a description of the region of the Caribbean in order to situate similarities and differences within the region; the remaining sections present the history of Dominica, broken down into three periods including pre-Emancipation, post-Emancipation up to WWII, and WWII to the present. This chapter serves to contextualize the historical shifts in governance and discourses, as a foundation for the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 4, “ ‘Things was Badly Off...’: Nostalgia, Morality, and Shifting Subjectivities” the theme shifts from the historical context of change to women’s perspectives on the changes that have occurred in the village of La Plaine since the 1930s, during their lifetimes. Through their narratives, these women link the material and infrastructural transformations they have experienced to shifts in patterns of behaviour that they see as imbued with fundamental social values of respect and egalitarianism. In the first section, I use the notion of *critical nostalgia* to describe the stance adopted by women in their accounts, as they depict the past in terms of the present and future as they critique the changes that have occurred. In the second section, I examine their critiques in order to discern the moral discourses upon which they base them. Significant here is the importance they place on the disappearance of ‘respect’, which they hold as fundamental to social relations, especially those between adults and children, in defining responsibility and personal boundaries. The disappearance of respect

signals a shift in the relations that pertain between adults and children. The third section in this chapter examines the conditions of change of these fundamental relations, and the ‘political technologies’ employed, including interventions at the local level by school principals and through a parenting seminar.

Where Chapter 4 provides a broad perspective on the effects of transformations in governance, in Chapter 5, “ ‘I the Sister, I the Mother, I the Eldest...’: Generations of Gendered Becomings,” the focus moves to personal narratives of childhood of three generations of women, divided into three sections accordingly. The narratives are explored in an analysis of their experiences, teasing out the themes and underlying discursive frameworks they use in their accounts. The problem of shifting structures of authority, described in the previous chapter, are emphasized as they are played out in the lives of the different generations of children. Through these narratives, it becomes evident that a major framework through which many of the women begin their self-descriptions is that of becoming responsible and the kinds of gendered tasks they carried out. Similarities and differences in women’s experiences are emphasized, as are changes in the way in which they interpret their relations to adults. This supports the ideas proposed in Chapter 4, regarding the shifting structures of authority. In a fourth section, the impact of a changing economy and increased education on transformations in class and race relations, as well as gendered roles and spaces are also examined.

Chapter 6, entitled “Sexuality: Body, Language, History,” moves from childhood experiences to teen years, the coming of age and sexuality. Here I examine sexuality from three perspectives, in three sections. First, I explore the ambivalence involved in the coming of the age of young girls, drawing on one narrative that centres on the narrator’s experience of her body as an object of the gaze of others. In the second section, I examine the normalizing effects of local categories of deviance, referring to three individual cases. In the third section, I carry out a historical analysis of the development of gender relations and sexuality that aims to explain the *ambivalence of patriarchy* present today in relations

between men and women. This chapter creates a bridge between the narratives of childhood and those of women's relationships in adulthood.

Chapter 7, "The Labour of Love: Relationships, Self, and Empowerment" is an examination of women's narratives about their relationships with men, to demonstrate, as in Chapter 5, the discursive, morally imbued frameworks within which they both interpret their experiences and create their lives, through the projection of a self-ethic. Here the question of the *ambivalence of patriarchy* is addressed through women's accounts of their dealings with their partners. These women's narratives speak of turmoil and empowerment, but on what does this empowerment rest? It appears that one major paradox for women emerges from their expectations that men should fulfill the 'male breadwinner' role, men's apparent desire to control women's sexuality, and the desire for autonomy by both men and women.

Chapter 8, "Performing Femininity, Embodying the Nation," brings to the fore the question of national identity and representations of women. Change in lifestyles, values, and expectations are explored in previous chapters in relation to decolonisation and democratization, which underlie the making of the nation. Here, the question of cultural identity, the celebration and discursive dissemination of values that associate femininity with the political entity that Dominica has become, are addressed in a perusal of two kinds of beauty pageant, one that celebrates cultural identity as tradition through gendered performances, including dress, song, and movement, and the other, an international-style beauty pageant that connects beauty, modernity, and national identity through the physical allure, the movement, and the talents of young women. Here important symbols such as land, race, and language are explored in their relation to projections of femininity and nation.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN IN THE CARIBBEAN: AN OVERVIEW

A considerable body of work has been written regarding women in the Caribbean, especially concerning the family, gender relations and ideologies, and women's status. Several trends exist within this body of research, trends which have evolved theoretically as epistemological interests and concerns have percent changed over time in keeping with particular disciplines in the social sciences. I include here an overview of some of these trends in order elucidate the different approaches and issues in this field and to draw out the relevant threads as they pertain to my study. Note that this overview is limited mainly to studies that concern Anglophone Afro-Caribbean populations.

The approaches have been divided into two segments that roughly correspond to particular time frames. The first segment focuses on research carried out on the family and households from 1939 onwards, although some studies included in this section are fairly recent. The second segment corresponds to the development of concern with women's status internationally, commencing in the late 1970s through the 1980s, and more recent work, much of which has taken a critical turn with regards to earlier research. Most of these studies have been carried out by sociologists or anthropologists.

2.1 Conjugal Unions, Family, and Household

Interest in gender relations in the English-speaking Caribbean began with queries about the family, spurred by a concern with social conditions in the Caribbean, after the outbreak of labour riots in the 1930s which elicited various enquiries by the British colonial government. These enquiries culminated in 1938-1939 with the West India Royal Commission which examined the state of poverty throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, and made recommendations that called for improving social conditions including education, health, working conditions, and the general welfare of the population. The family, or its perceived

lack, as seen by the following excerpt of the report of the Royal Commission, was thought to be at the root of health and welfare problems:

It is the promiscuous union which creates a grave danger to the social stability of the West Indies...This lack of family life has a bearing on every aspect of social conditions in the West Indies and its effects from a health standpoint are particularly serious. (Royal Commission 1945: 220)

This initial attention given the family (especially families of the lower strata, Afro-Caribbean population) in the Caribbean was spurred by concerns with creating a viable society, one that could stand on its own. The underlying premise was that family organization was “loose” and this had repercussions in the wider social fabric, which was also seen as disorganized (Simey 1946: 18). This perspective emerged from observations of the relative paucity of legal marriage among the Afro-Caribbean population and assumptions about the nuclear family that saw it as the normal and morally correct form, and the perception that high rates of “illegitimate” children were unhealthy for society.

While studies of the family in the Caribbean were initially motivated by a perception of social disorganization, they actually worked to reveal the complexity of social organization that did exist, including gender relations, kinship and parenting, as well as the ways in which people operationalized these relations, through networks of support both within and outside the household.

Early approaches to the family saw Afro-Caribbean forms, first of all, as a deviation from the nuclear model, and secondly, as centred on the mother-child dyad as the minimum familial form, with the household as the basic measure. Social scientists, beginning with Malinowski (1913, cited in Collier et al. 1997), helped to instill this view of “The Family” as a universal aspect of human societies, based on the universal need for nurturance, and characterized by a “bounded set of people”; “a definite physical space”; and “family love” (Collier et al. 1997: 72-73). The home as a space that housed “The Family” as a set of relations developed as “a ‘moral’ unit, a way of organizing and thinking about human relationships in a world in which the domestic is perceived to be in opposition to a politics shaped outside the home” (ibid.: 76). This family as

originally described by Malinowski comprised the heterosexual conjugal couple; later, while anthropologists questioned the inclusion of the father universally, they retained the other aspects of the family as laid out by Malinowski, positing the mother-child dyad as the basic and universal family unit (*ibid.*: 73). In the Caribbean, problems arise when attempting to explain conjugality and family forms in terms of either of these models which do not take historical and cultural specificities into account. The variations in living arrangements and conjugal patterns are such that the only constant that appears to emerge is the mother-child dyad, but at the same time, children do not always reside with their birth mothers, but may live with other female kin on the mother or father's side, with the father, or with non-kin, and may move between different residential arrangements (Powell 1986; Senior 1991; Hodge 2002). The various conjugal patterns still prevalent in the Caribbean have been found to include "visiting" unions, where partners live apart, "consensual" or common-law unions where they live together without being legally married, and legal marriage. Marriage is usually associated with the attainment of a certain status, and involves, especially for the male, acquiring material means to both own a house and, ideally, support his wife so she does not have to work outside the home (Smith 1988). Many people experience all three types of union in their lifetimes; others marry young, and others never. One woman may have children with several different fathers, within different types of relation, and men may have several children with different women, sometimes simultaneously. A man may be married to one woman and have visiting unions with others.¹

¹ While different islands and even villages have prevalences for different types of union (Clarke 1957) all types are found in both the ex-British colonies (Clarke 1957 for Jamaica; Smith 1956 for Guyana; Cannon 1971 for Dominica; Powell 1986, for WICP study) and the French Antilles (Slater 1977 for Martinique; Dagenais 1993 for Guadeloupe). For example, the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) surveys found that just under 40 percent of women in conjugal unions were married (39.9 percent for Barbados, 36.0 percent for Antigua, 38.1 percent for St. Vincent); numbers of women in common-law unions and visiting unions made up over another third (common-law: 11.8 percent for Barbados, 11.0 percent for Antigua, 19.4 percent for St. Vincent; visiting: 22.0 percent for Barbados, 27.7 percent for Antigua, 18.5 percent for St. Vincent). Women who were single made up the remaining numbers, most of whom had been in unions at one time (Powell 1986: 86). In Dominica, 27.4 percent of women 15 and over were married at the time of the 1981 census (English 1991: 199). As well, genealogies examined by Alexander (1977)

Several perspectives have been employed to explain the “Caribbean family,” and can be grouped largely as “cultural/historicist,” “structural-functionalist,” and “adaptive-strategist” (Barrow 1996). These three categories cannot be said to be exclusive one of the other, and thus overlap in some authors’ work, but they serve, for the purpose here, to distinguish perspectives on the family in the Caribbean.²

Cultural-Historicist Approach

The first current looks to historical causes to explain present relations. This can be divided into two main groups: those who emphasize the role of the African past in the formation of social relations and cultural configurations in West Indian societies and those who think that the relations of slavery were more important in determining present forms. A third group considers both to be relevant in the formation of Caribbean society and culture. Mintz and Price (1985) have appropriately commented that because of the partiality of any one slave’s cultural knowledge and the mixing of slaves from different regions of Africa, as well as the context of repression in which they lived, social and cultural forms had to be reinvented, adapting old knowledge and new to the situation at hand.

The historical approach was first broached by Frazier, who held that slavery completely destroyed African culture, and a slave thus “tended to take over the attitudes and sentiments of his master” (Frazier 1966[1939]: 27, cited in Barrow 1996: 6). This was contested by M. Herskovits and F. Herskovits, in their anthropological study carried out in Toco, a village in Trinidad. The Herskovitses traced Caribbean conjugal forms to Africa; they saw in the prevalence and social acceptability of both legal and common-law marital unions two types of marriage that are also found in the Caribbean (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947). A third author, Henriques (1973[1949]), believed that although African polygamy may have exerted some influence on slave family organization, the effects of slavery

and Smith (1988) have shown all types of union to exist in all social strata.

²Christine Barrow (1996) has recently published a comprehensive volume outlining the major approaches to the family in the Caribbean.

which reorganized familial relations were by far the dominant factors in the development of family forms (Barrow 1996: 7).

These queries into the origin of Caribbean family forms have been followed more recently by social historians studying the slave family. Bush (1990: 92) has stressed the importance of both the African background and the relations of slavery in the development of slave society and family forms.³ Others, such as Beckles (1995: 130), like Henriques, have contended that slavery and colonial hegemony are at the root of family forms in the Caribbean. In this view, the predominance of the mother-child dyad over nuclear family relations is due to the effects of colonial policy whereby slave status was passed through the mother: if the mother was a slave, then the child was born a slave, and usually inherited his or her mother's work status as well. Goveia (1965: 237, cited in Morissey 1989: 86) states that the criterion of ownership of slave progeniture is behind the creation of the female-centred family. As well, men and women from different plantations could not live together, and had to travel by night to visit each other; slave families could be separated by sale; and in the English Caribbean, marriage between slaves was prohibited (Bush 1990: 108-109). According to M.G. Smith (1960), slavery inhibited the development of the same institutions as the ruling class to such an extent that he proposes that a "pluralist" society developed, wherein each sector, with its own institutions, only marginally interacted with the others: while attempting to account for differences between elite and lower classes, this view does not account for a system of values that linked them in hierarchical relations.

Higman (1996[1973]), in his study of Jamaican slaves, suggests that the importance of the mother-child dyad over conjugal relations characterized female house slaves who had children by either married or transient whites and so could not form conjugal unions, while field slaves were more likely to be living together

³ Citing Forde's (1956) study of the Ashanti in West Africa, who found that "between 40 and 50 percent of the population lived in matrilineal households under female heads and only about a third of all married women resided with their husbands, the remainder living chiefly with matrilineal kin," Bush holds that African matrilineal family organization of some groups from which slaves were drawn may have affected Caribbean family organization.

in a nuclear family. Craton (1997a) concurs with data from a study in the Bahamas. Both showed that over 50 percent of households contained a conjugal couple. They concur as well in stating that Africans were at least as likely as creole slaves to form nuclear families (ibid.: 252), thus shedding doubt on the notion that “promiscuity” and non-nuclear family forms were necessarily African-derived. As well, Higman found that most women with children of mixed parentage had no mate living with them.⁴ Higman’s and Craton’s attempts to show the prevalence of conjugal couples can be understood, at least partly, as a response to stereotypes of Caribbean promiscuity and lack of family organization. This historical research, more than just proving that slaves had nuclear families, shows that household composition in late slavery involved several possibilities then as it does now, influenced by multiple cultural and situational factors. It also shows the development of a dual marriage system as proposed by R.T. Smith (1987, 1988), wherein both legal and non-legal unions exist within the matrix of relations of class.

Smith (1987, 1988), in a historicist perspective (but within a functionalist framework), posits that “marriage” types in the Caribbean form part of one system, the dual marriage system, created through the relations of gender and class in slavery. His thesis states that male colonialists would marry a woman of their own colour and status, but would have “outside” sexual unions with slaves⁵

⁴ In other locations, nuclear families were not as prevalent. For example in Trinidad in 1813, under 25 percent of households contained conjugal couples, while clearly 50 percent contained single males or females (Craton 1997a: 251). Here the age of the plantations could have been a strong factor in determining the type of households prevalent, as the plantation economy only developed in Trinidad in the late 18th century, and slaves may not have had time to form unions, nor to develop extensive and kinship links.

⁵ According to Geggus (1996: 265), sexual relations in Saint-Domingue between slave women and white men ranged from sadistic rape to marriage. Some have contended that slave women found advantage in acquiescing to the sexual demands of white men (Bush 1990: 1; 1996: 194), seeing it as an honour because it mirrored practices in African society where slavery led to incorporation to the master’s lineage (as in the Danish West Indies, Olwig 1995: 32). Others pursued white men in order to acquire economic advantages (Morrissey 1989: 147), or to better status and to “whiten” children, as Beckles remarks for Barbados (Beckles 1996: 117). In Bridgetown, masters sometimes rented out their slave women as concubines and prostitutes to make money to pay debts, and some women may have used money from prostitution to pay for their manumission (Morrissey 1989: 66). For some slave women, concubinage eventually led to manumission for the woman and her children born of that relationship. In St-Domingue this was frequently the case

and, if unmarried, live-in concubines chosen from among the slaves and free-coloured⁶ women (Smith 1987). Women, in this view, benefited socially and economically from their unions with white men, and produced children of higher status than themselves because lighter in colour. Among slaves, marriage was rare, because slaves needed permission from the slave master to marry. Therefore, marriage was the affair of the upper echelon of society, and those (men) who were married would not hesitate to have other sexual unions with women of lower status, mostly slaves. Thus, contrary to popular (and much scholarly) belief in the 19th century and more recently, Smith wanted to show that illegitimacy did not only occur among the lower classes (Smith 1988: 105). Smith posits, contrary to M.G. Smith's pluralist society, a single, complex social configuration characterized by dual marriage and supported by ideologies of class and race that integrates "alternate forms appropriate to different class and racial groups, or to certain inter-class and inter-racial relations" (Smith 1987: 164).

A problem in attempting to understand conjugal relations and family formations arises when family is equated with household due to the extreme variation that exists in household composition. In many areas, "households" may comprise several adjacent dwellings, housing various kin in a "yard," or the same set-up may house strangers who rent the dwellings from the owner, especially in

(Geggus 1996: 265), and the French slave laws of 1685, the *Code Noir*, called for the manumission of children produced by unions between masters and slaves (Morrissey 1989: 67). In the British West Indies, rates of manumission varied for these women and their children (Beckles 1989: 135, cited in Barrow 1996: 245; Morrissey 1989: 66-67; Robertson 1996). Higman suggests that concubines and their coloured offspring, especially girls, were often freed in the West Indies (1984, in Morrissey 1989: 67), although their concubinage may have been the result of coercion (Robertson 1996: 25). Even though slave women may have agreed to sexual relations with white men, and have even found advantage in it, they did not have much choice in the matter, and usually risked severe punishment if they refused. According to Bush, women were doubly exploited, "expected to fulfill both sexual as well as economic duties" (1990: 11). This point was rendered in a stronger version in a later piece: "Power over the black woman's body in its productive capacity as an asexual labour machine was thus combined with sexual power to control both production and reproduction on slave plantations" (Bush 1996: 194). Slave women were thus subjects of oppression because they were controlled as women both through the division of labour and sexual control, as a "class" in the sense that they were exploited for their labour, and because of race ideology: a triple oppression according to Bush (1990: 8).

⁶ 'Free coloured' is a term used to refer to manumitted slaves and their offspring, who, if born after their mother was freed, were born free. Most often, manumitted slaves were the offspring of mixed parentage.

urban settings (Sistren 1987). As Craton (1997a) has stated, slave quarters were often built in “yards” so that while an individual dwelling may have contained only one person or childless siblings, it may have been adjacent to one or more other dwellings containing parents or relatives, and all may have worked the same provision grounds, and shared the same cooking facilities. Yards have been described as “clusters of houses and outbuildings around central activity areas, interspersed with economic plants and animals and inhabited by people linked through kinship and friendship” (Pulsipher 1993a: 51). Yards have persisted in the Caribbean as a way of organizing residence (Clarke 1957; Mintz 1974; Smith 1988; Pulsipher 1993a) and while in some areas, larger, single concrete houses are replacing several smaller dwellings, residential patterns are not necessarily shifting towards the nuclear family.

As well, household composition is fluid, changing over the years as children leave, have their own children, as spouses change, or as other relatives or foster children move in and out. Households are not always financially independent units either, as even those who contribute to the household economy do not necessarily live there, although many are children who have moved away or migrated to work elsewhere. Some may have “baby fathers” who have never lived in the house, but who contribute to their children’s upkeep, or siblings that help out another sibling. A given household, rather than being equivalent to those who reside there, could thus be described as the hub of a series of (usually) kin-based links, some of which serve to maintain it on a regular basis.

This brings us to the consideration of the historical underpinnings of kin relations, again seen through the lens of those for whom African traditions were the source of social relations, and those who saw the conditions of slavery as their fundamental aspect. Some scholars have argued that slavery resulted in “social death,” meaning the destruction of one’s social identity (Patterson 1982). Slaves were effectively torn away from family and kin, and placed purposely in groups of mixed origin, so that social ties had to be recreated. Mintz and Price (1992[1976]: 43, cited in Besson 1995: 187) hold that the recreation of kin ties

began in the middle passage, with slaves developing “shipmate” bonds that were so strong they endured over generations.

Newly arrived slaves were usually taken in by Creole slaves (slaves born in the Caribbean) in a sort of paternal relation that both “seasoned” them for their lives as slaves, following the intention of the owners, and introduced them to a social network already established among the creole slaves (Mintz 1974). Kin groups existed on plantations, but also between plantations. Beckles has remarked that slaves frequently requested permission to visit spouses and relatives on other plantations, and advertisements for runaway slaves that posit their possible whereabouts mention mothers, wives, and other kin that could be harbouring the runaway in other locations (Beckles 1996[1989]: 325), showing that kin links of a given individual were not always confined to the plantation on which they lived.

Besson (1995) has identified kin affiliations in Trelawny, Jamaica as having developed in conjunction with a land tenure system developed out of previous slave holdings or provision grounds which came to be known as “family land.” According to her, kin relations in this area have developed as bilateral and of non-restricted cognatic descent, so that all descendants have equal access to “family land” which was kept as a unit and not parceled out to individual inheritors, nor left to one heir. At the same time, anyone is free to come and go as they please. In conceptualizing kinship in these terms one can also account for the wide range of kin found in households because without restrictive residential or inheritance rules, a variety of kin can enlist one’s aid, or be called upon for help, and thus facilitate the development of non-prescriptive, individual-centred, networks of exchange (cf. Gussler 1980). Even though kin disperse through migration, the existence of “family land” creates both a lasting symbol of belonging and heritage, the means of livelihood for some, and the knowledge that one always has a place to go to in times of scarcity or trouble (Clarke 1957).

Structural-Functionalist Approach

The second perspective, the structural-functionalist approach, exemplified by the early work of R.T. Smith (1956), Edith Clarke (1957), and Mariam Slater (1977), denied the importance of history (in contrast with Smith's later work, e.g. 1987, 1988, cited previously) in the formation of Caribbean family patterns, and chose to focus instead on the family as part of a larger functioning social structure, seeking through comparative studies to delineate regular patterns that could be applied throughout the Caribbean (Barrow 1996: 13). For Clarke, "it is in conditions as we find them today that we shall most profitably look for the explanation of the 'unstable' features of family life to which such prominence is being given" (Clarke 1957: 21).

Clarke's (1957) research examined three communities of peasants and agricultural labourers in Jamaica, in which she found the prevalences of different family patterns were linked both to differences in community organization and to differences in class structure of each locality. She found that the rate of legal marriage increased with the social and economic standing of the families.⁷ Clarke concluded that for legal marriage to take place, several conditions had to be met. The man had to have the means to own a house, pay for a lavish feast, and be able to support his wife. In concubinage, a woman was expected to contribute to the household economy, to work outside and on the land, but marriage supposedly was to "release the woman from the anxiety and drudgery of earning her living, to transform her 'from a common woman to a lady'" (Clarke 1957: 78).

In this view, marriage was a status symbol more than a moral stance, made possible only if one had the economic means. Marriage and monogamy thus

⁷ For example, in Orange Grove, where most people were prosperous landowners, the community was highly organized through both kin and free associations. Here, marriage was the predominant form of conjugal union, and people were highly reluctant to discuss the topic of extramarital relations or "outside" children. Sugartown, on the other hand, was essentially an estate town, and the population poor, migratory and thus not strongly organized either by kin nor association. Marital unions were at their lowest of the three towns here. Mocca had a highly interrelated and non-mobile population of poor peasants who eaked out a living from small garden plots. Here, however, the rate of marriage was slightly higher than in Sugartown.

appear to be part of a wider set of ordered patterns of which marriage is only one, when it occurs, and in many cases, only one stage.

Marriage occurs, therefore, as a latter stage in an association begun in concubinage and is an indication that the economic conditions regarded as obligatory have been fulfilled, and that the contracting parties have approved one another sufficiently to risk the change in status and responsibilities which marriage implies.” (Clarke 1957: 84)

While Clarke’s analysis shows that marriage is associated with economic security usually acquired later in life, R. T. Smith (1956) found that variations in households among lower class African descendants appear to be part of a cycle wherein households become increasingly female-centred or matrifocal, whether or not a mate is present. Smith delineates three stages in the household cycle: 1. When they are young, men and women take lovers, often having several mates and several children before finding a suitable longterm mate; 2. The nuclear family where a woman and her mate live together, legally married or not; 3. As the woman becomes more economically independent of her mate, the family becomes extended to include the mother’s kin, often three or even four generations (Smith 1956). Matrifocality stresses the mother-child relationship whether or not a mate was present, and, according to Smith, increases as the economic power of men decrease, causing them to be increasingly marginalized. This was, in Smith’s view, especially true in the case of lower-class Afro-Caribbean families. In middle class families where marriage was the norm, males were less marginal because of their “status-conferring” function (Smith 1996[1973]: 45).

In this view, households are female-centred and men marginal, their role in parenting minimal. In focussing on the absence of men researchers have often omitted the relations of men other than the conjugal partner with women and children. They also based their analyses on the assumption that the family, perceived as nuclear, should be co-extensive with household, and that sexual unions and childcare should necessarily take place there. However, the variations of kin present in households, shown to be both historically and contemporarily

relevant, reveals a certain fluidity or flexibility in household composition. This, along with the relative marginality of *affinal* males to the household are more an indication of kin relations which stress consanguinity than a strict measure of economy.

In querying cultural practices, gender relations, and morality among Afro-Caribbean people in Providencia, an anthropologist, Wilson (1973), developed the paradigm of respectability / reputation through which to explain women's and men's differing behaviours. Wilson's distinction was articulated as a general duality in West Indian culture based on the distinction between 'respectability' as the adherence to a Euro-American and Christian configuration of values that included marriage, the nuclear family, and domesticity, as well as economic success and diligence in work, and 'reputation,' which for Wilson involved African-centred egalitarian practices and male interactions through which they could resist the hegemony of respectability. This distinction reasserts the stereotypes of 'male' and 'female,' showing them to be two distinct domains adhering to separate configurations of values. Women, in this view, are integrated to the domestic realm, which involves kinship and from which men are marginalized, operating in a more 'public' realm among peers, constructed mainly through relations of friendship. Only when men are older or have a certain status, do they reintegrate the domestic arena through marriage, or when they need something do they call on more well-to-do kin.

Wilson's insights have rightly been critiqued for the omission of women from resistance and from the public realm in general (Bush 1990; Besson 1993). The gendered distinction Wilson makes is based on what he perceives to be African and European value systems: this perspective ignores the extent to which 'respectability' is a container-term which can hold different contents, both for different people and at different historical times. 'Respectability' has been examined by Olwig (1993b) and Austin-Broos (1997) in relation to moral regimes imposed through different churches. Olwig describes how 'respectability' as a status marker has been interpreted by lower and middle class people through their

experience with the Methodist Church in Nevis historically. While she does not focus on gender in her analysis, she demonstrates how the church and values associated with it have been appropriated differently by the different social strata. Austin-Broos observes differences based on gender and class in two Pentecostal Churches in Jamaica, coming to the conclusion that women of the lower strata have a greater role in the Church (while the congregations of both are majoritarily women), and that lower strata women have appropriated the moral doctrine (respectability) of the Church and hold it in contrast to the middle class mores. These two studies add further dimensions to the concept of 'respectability' as developed by Wilson, showing that while European mores may be at the root of a moral framework, it is appropriated and reinterpreted differently in diverse contexts.

In my work with women in Dominica, I have found that aspects of what could be called 'respectability' (which was not verbalized as such by informants) existed first, not in distinction from 'reputation' as particularized gendered patterns of behaviour, but as intertwined with some of the elements that Wilson (1973) has classified as 'reputation': rather than an ascription to dominant mores, women's respectability was dependent on their ability to fulfill responsibilities towards others, to share with them, to show themselves to 'be on a level' with others (and not below them), as part of a system of statuses that was nonetheless inherently egalitarian. This interdependence has changed, as sharing became less important economically, and 'respectability' came to be associated with dominant ideas regarding the family and material gain. These ideas will be expanded in Chapter 4.

Adaptive-Strategist Approach

A third view was announced by T.S. Simey; for him, male marginality to the mother-child complex has little to do with the past, either African roots or the relations of slavery, but is based on adaptations to present circumstances: "African origins and the institution of slavery in itself are of little importance

today compared with the processes of selection, rejection, and invention, which *still* operate” (Simey 1946: 47). Simey’s approach underwrites the position towards family structure taken by Rodman (1971), who reintroduced agency and flexibility into analysis by interpreting the variability of family formations in the Caribbean as promoting personal choice. In Rodman’s (1971) perspective there were four elements in lower-class Caribbean kinship relationships that facilitated agency: individualism, as lack of strong kinship ties; personalism in that kinship relations were based on interaction; replaceability, because people could be interchanged in particular roles; and permissiveness, that is, several patterns of behaviour were available (ibid.).

The element of choice led Rodman to employ the notion of “adaptive response,” by which he meant the adaptation of the individual to his or her particular situation, a perspective for which he has been critiqued because it isolates the individual from social and cultural constraints. For other scholars, however, this flexibility provided a springboard from which to grasp how the variation in Caribbean patterns of marriage and kinship, and household composition “constitute culturally appropriate adaptive responses and strategies for survival” (Barrow 1996: 68).

The adaptive response approach is conceived of essentially as practical responses to economic conditions, and scholars thus generally seek in their analyses an economic rationale for the social behaviour of men and women. For example, in Dirks and Kerns’ (1976) work in the British Virgin Islands, a correlation was outlined between conjugal patterns and employment opportunities; where more employment was available for men, marriage was more prevalent (Barrow 1996: 70). Marriage patterns thus were seen to follow patterns of economic stability, but, while the link between economic success and marriage is emphasized, the *meaning* marriage holds as a status marker is not.

Other facets of familial life are seen as adaptive strategies as well. Gordon (1987) holds that child-shifting, described by Senior (1991: 12) as “informal adoptions of children into households of strangers as well as kin,” is a “responsive

strategy”(Gordon 1987: 442, cited in Barrow 1996: 71) that places children in the care of those who can provide for them, thus contributing to “balancing and managing dependency in relation to resources” (Barrow 1996: 71). The development and maintenance of kinship networks on St-Kitts, examined by Gussler (1980), are seen as a strategy to build economic support (Barrow 1996: 71), as are kin networks and migration practices on Nevis (Olwig 1993b). While these perspectives rightly underline the importance and strength of broad-based, bilateral kin networks and the relative weakness of conjugal ties, by purporting individualism and opportunism, they do not acknowledge the importance of Caribbean kinship relations which stress consanguineal over affinal ties. While a husband or mate and his blood relatives will remain “in-laws” for the woman, her children by that man will develop consanguinal ties with his family. Because of the child’s relationship with the father and his kin, the mother then may retain a relationship with them even if she is no longer involved with the father. Marriage is tied to notions of status and “respectability” but is not necessary for the continuation of kinship relations.

Extensive kin networks are seen by Gussler (1980) and Olwig (1993a) as being fostered for economic support; while kin networks do provide economic support, the strict economic aspect of this analysis can be criticized because it leaves out the historical, social, and cultural processes involved in the development of kinship ties, the meanings produced and the affective ties that result. Rather than one’s kin network being developed strictly as a response to a need, the possibility for kinship networks to be developed through various types of exchanges appears to be inherent to the kin structure inasmuch as its flexibility will permit. Networks of relations are important to women’s livelihood and support of children and complement and enhance their own economic activity working, selling, farming, etc. As well, networks of women’s daily interaction in such activities as cooperative gardening, selling produce to higglers or going to the market are integral to the communication system, as Berleant-Schiller and Maurer (1993) have pointed out for Dominica. Women exchange news which can

travel across the island as produce changes hands and women group together at the market, doing laundry, or plaiting hair.

Family members or others will often be enlisted to look after children on a daily basis while mothers work or full-time until they can afford to support the child or while they migrate to work elsewhere (Senior 1991). As well, women may remain living within the household of an older family member, or with other close family, well after their first child is born, which is often while they are still in their teens (Barrow 1986a: 157). Once a woman is in a union and has a child, she expects some support from the father of the child, which may not always be forthcoming given his other obligations or if the relationship breaks off (Barrow 1986a: 162; Sistren 1987; Senior 1991). Older women also expect remittances from adult children who are working or who have migrated abroad. Parents or other kin may help to finance and facilitate the migration by putting the young person in contact with other relatives living in the place of destination, and expect appreciation to be shown through remittances and gifts on Nevis (Olwig 1993a:159). The sense of obligation to succeed is so strong in some cases that the migrant is ashamed to return if they have nothing or little to show for their time spent abroad (Olwig 1993a: 158)

Both women and men migrate from Nevis to work or to study. Olwig (1993a: 152) remarks that sex-specific migration depends on the type of work availability both within the region being left and the region to which they migrate. For example, the construction of the Panama canal at the beginning of the century drew especially male migrants, so that in 1921, the male proportion of the population had dropped to 40 percent. More recently, however, both men and women from Nevis are migrating abroad to work in tourism and industry, and between 1970 and 1980, women accounted for 55 percent of total migrations.

As Olwig points out, women, even when they do not migrate, are involved nonetheless in the migration of others, as family members, especially children, leave to find work they could not have on the tiny island of Nevis. Children, often helped by those at home in the initial stages of their migration, are expected to

send back remittances (Olwig 1993a: 163). As well, daughters may leave small children behind with parents or other relatives when they migrate.

Networks are important at all levels of West Indian women's lives. Networking is a source of support for women and their children; it is also a source of solidarity and belonging which, for migrants abroad, helps to link them to the homeland and a source of identity; providing support can give a sense of self-worth as one fulfills obligations and at the same time, for men, helps to establish their economic status, especially in the eyes of those they are supporting. For those returned migrants, the gifts expected and given are proof of achievement and again, help to establish one's prestige.

Parenthood

Emerging from these perspectives on the family is the question of parenthood. Becoming a parent for both men and women is seen as the proof of one's adulthood; for men it is the materialization of masculinity and virility, for women, the expression of womanhood (Smith 1988: 136). However, having children, as previously stated, is not necessarily coextensive with the conjugal union, except for middle and elite classes, although many people think it is better to be married for the children's sake (Olwig 1985). As R.T. Smith (1988: 136) succinctly remarks, "parenthood is an attribute of each parent separately, and not an expression of the relation between them." Nor is parenting always undertaken by the biological parent, and so *having* children is not always coextensive with *raising* them. The flexibility of kinship is seen in the "adoption" by families of children that may or may not be related in some way. This pattern, called "child-shifting," is also perceived by some as an adaptive strategy or response that allows for the optimum care of children (Gordon 1987: 427, in Barrow 1996: 71). However, when asked, economic reasons are not the only reasons children will be taken into other homes; while for the mother, passing a child to a relative or even a stranger may allow her to work, for the person taking the child in, there may be a real affective bond or the child may "fill a place in the household, " keeping a

lonely person, especially a childless woman, company (Senior 1991: 14-15). Children thus do not always grow up with both or either of their biological parents, as they could be shifted to another household or left with a grandmother or aunt as the mother went off to work, nor were they always alone with parents in the household as other relatives were often present.

Men, following Smith's definition of matrifocality (1996) are marginal to the "domestic sphere" and all that occurs there, including the education of children. According to Rubenstein (1980), in St. Vincent, men are said to "mind" children, that is, provide for them financially (in Dominica, the term is "maintain"), while women "care" for the children, that is, physically take care of their needs and education. In instances where the father is not legally married to the mother, he will usually accept paternity if he is sure the child is his, and with these, the social obligation of providing some support for the child. This type of arrangement can be seen in other islands as well (Barrow 1986a; Safa 1986; Lazarus-Black 1991). The type of support varies, but in Antigua, Lazarus-Black reports that it "may take the form of cash, gifts, food, clothing, school supplies, or services provided by either the man or members of his family." As well, a woman expects the man to respect her, meaning to acknowledge her and the child publicly, and not to disparage them in conversation (Lazarus-Black 1991). In some cases, if the father ceases to have sexual relations with the mother, he may stop providing for the child. Women may take a man to court for maintenance if he and his kin fall back on the obligations of support and respect (*ibid.*). Because men often father several children with different women, child maintenance can create quite a strain on their economic capacity; as well, many men also contribute money to their maternal household, especially if they still sleep or have meals there, adding even more to the economic drain (Brown et al. 1997).

The picture this paints is one of "matrifocality" as defined above, with men as marginal to the parenting process, as providers and not caregivers, and children raised in a nexus of female ties, whether the principal caregiver is the mother or someone else. However, this view stresses the absence of men from the

caregiving process, and downplays both the support and the care from men towards children of their “birth” family. Studies have often depicted men as participating very little or not at all in household maintenance and childcare, suggesting a strong gendered distinction between “domestic” and “public” domains, and stereotypes still project this image of gendered domains (Barrow 1986b), at the same time supporting Smith’s matrifocality analysis. Powell’s (1986) analysis of data from the WICP project (discussed below) shows that in married and common-law couples, women make most of the decisions regarding children, and are more often or equally the decision makers for other household matters as well. Actual care of children was shown to fall mostly on women, and to represent the greatest portion of their familial responsibilities (1986: 120-121).

However, from another perspective, Lazarus-Black (1995) holds that parenting roles and behaviours are culturally constructed, and take form and meaning within the kinship and gender relations that prevail. Because the behaviour of fathers does not correspond to the ideal of fatherhood in a nuclear family, does not mean that “fathering” is *deficient*; it means that the role and expectations with regard to the father are different and it must be understood within the matrix of gender, kinship, and class relations in which they are embedded. For Lazarus-Black, fathering is an “event” that is “marked” in relation to mothering, as highly visible special occasions or gifts that are out of the realm of the everyday. Mothering, on the other hand, involves the repetitive, everyday activities involved in nurturing, which, in its constancy, is taken for granted and rendered invisible.

Nonetheless, that women are usually the primary caregivers does not negate participation of men in the education and rearing of children -- their own or others, a facet that has been generally ignored in research. A recent study carried out by Brown et al. (1997) addresses lacunae regarding the role of the father in children’s lives. Their study shows that men’s perceptions of their role as fathers includes “not only the undisputed role of financial provider, but also counseling and communicating with their children, and generally being a role

model” (Brown et al. 1997: 93). As well, the majority of men who participated in their study actively participated with children “in tidying, playing, and reasoning... and helping regularly with homework” whether or not they lived with the mother (ibid.). Where mothers and fathers were no longer together, however, the father’s involvement diminished, especially if the mother had another mate.

These data do not address the role of stepfathers, or of other significant males, such as uncles and grandfathers, in children’s lives, or if “fathering” is carried out by someone other than the biological father, in the same way as “mothering” may be carried out by others. Pulsipher (1993b) remarks that

by focussing on absent fathers, [researchers] have missed the fact that these same men, whom they define as absent, are devoted uncles, male cousins, brothers and grandfathers who tend the children of their female consanguineous kin, nurturing and teaching them a host of useful skills. When the children grow up, these men finance trips or business investments for them, and then are themselves cared for by their charges in their old age (ibid.: 120).

While biological fathers may be marginalized from the care of their children, this research shows that there is male participation in children’s lives, mainly from consanguinal relatives (see also Barrow 1998). This supports R.T. Smith’s (1996[1982]; 1988) contention that extended consanguinal ties are stronger than conjugal ties, but weakens the matrifocality hypothesis by underscoring the presence of males who *do* take part in childcare. However, it also reveals that the ‘place’ of the father is often filled by others.

The various perspectives on conjugality, the family, and kinship discussed above have contributed valuable insights to an understanding of the complexities English-speaking Afro-Caribbean society, and taken together they provide a window on the various frameworks within which women negotiate their lives in Dominica. The historical approach is important to understanding the emergence of Caribbean society and culture from the relations that were created during the years of colonial domination. By acknowledging the roots of Afro-Caribbean culture in both African and European mores, but especially the reinterpretation of elements from both, within the new situation characterized by social relations of

inequality, one can come to understand, as did Smith (1987) the intertwining of class, race and gender in the development of Caribbean social relations, values, and attitudes, including those that pertain to the family (although Smith downplays the influence of African elements). By recognizing the importance of practices of the dominant classes in creating social relations, Smith also brings to consideration the position of these practices within a system of values, taken up by Wilson (1973) and others with regards to the theme of 'respectability', discussed above.

The structural-functionalist approach recognizes the integration of these different strands by looking at the configuration of social relations and practices as a system, from a synchronic perspective. While this approach to social groups and practices has been criticized for viewing societies as closed, static, homogeneous and ahistorical, it also rightly acknowledges that although Caribbean society was created out of social and cultural differences and relations of domination, the different systems of values that may have contributed to the formation of Caribbean society and culture have combined, and that they work together within the system of inequality that developed.

Both structural-functionist and adaptive strategist views link conjugal and family forms to economic conditions that vary with access to stable work, and a financial security that increases with age. Marriage is thus analyzed as having value within a system of statuses (linked to economic status), but also as a stage within the life course, which reveals the importance of both a hierarchy configured within the wider social and economic relations of the colony/nation, and that set within local hierarchical relations in which status is largely derived from accrual of respect that comes with age. The two are not totally disconnected, as economic success often accompanies age, but according to some Dominican informants, maturity is also important for a marriage to work (see Chapter 7).

In another perspective, all of these approaches highlight the relative absence of the 'father' in the familial organization, articulated perhaps most clearly through Smith's (1956) concept of the 'matrifocal' family, defined above.

The importance of the consanguineal family is recognized, but the role of males (brothers, sons, godfathers, uncles) other than the absent father are not emphasized in this literature (see Barrow 1998). These authors also recognize the variable forms of conjugal union, and their link to a system of values in which the family with father-presence is imbued with higher symbolic value than other forms.

I draw on these elements, that is, the importance of consanguinal relations in people's daily interactions, and the simultaneous importance given to the place of the father, to underline an idea of *ambivalent patriarchy* that is expressed in women's accounts of their relationships with men, to be discussed more fully in Chapters 6 and 7. Briefly, by *ambivalent patriarchy*, I refer to the simultaneous desire for the presence of the husband/father, through the recognition and deploring of his absence, illustrated by naming others in his stead ('she' was the father) (see Clarke 1957; Lamming 1991), and for autonomy from him, within the consanguinal family. Ambivalence, following Bhabha 1994, ensues from the relations of colonialism, wherein the dominant ideology and practices are both internalized and refused. The ambivalence of patriarchy is both the desire for and the refusal of patriarchal relations, and is expressed in the narratives of some of the women regarding their expectations of men in familial and conjugal relations and the contradictions they experience when their expectations are not met. This ambivalence is not necessarily the stance of all, as 'patriarchy' is supported by Christian and official discourses and many people adhere to this model as the appropriate one, but ambivalence nonetheless pervades many of the narratives. As well, the idea of ambivalence does not deny the continued existence of male domination in political and economic sectors, as will be seen in the next section, nor the desire to control women's sexuality.

2.2 Women's Status, Gender Ideology, and Feminist Critique

Much recent research has focussed on the role of women in the wider society, taking into account the relation between their productive and reproductive roles. This interest grew alongside international concern with the status of women beginning in the 1970s, that saw many of the Caribbean countries ratify the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, drafted in 1979. The same period saw the creation of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) at the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies (1978), a Women's Desk within the CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Secretariat, and within the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the creation of the Women and Development Programme (Rheddock 1998). In 1985, the Caribbean Feminist Research Association (CAFRA) was created, which headed a series of projects directed to investigate women's status in the Caribbean, across linguistic and ethnic boundaries (Rheddock 1998: 63).

Concern with women at this time focussed largely on several key categories with regards to access to resources and political voice, including education, employment, access to land and capital, decision-making, and involvement in the community and politics, and generally, the extent to which society is or is not male-dominated. As well, several recent researchers have turned their interests to the colonial past, including slavery, to understand the conditions and gendered relations upon which present-day society is built. Studies have focussed on both the material and the ideological aspects of gender relations, tracing the shifts in gender relations at a state level through education, labour, and to a lesser extent, political voice.

The focus on women in the Caribbean has elicited an interest in masculinity as well as a reflexive turn vis-à-vis earlier approaches that viewed 'woman' as a category without taking into account differences based on race, class, or ethnicity and women's differential experiences. As well, the perceived progress of women due to educational levels that sometimes exceed those of their

male counterparts, and their increased participation in the labour force has been interpreted by some scholars as the sign of increasing male marginalization in the economy, a position that has elicited much critique from Caribbean feminist writers. These various approaches are considered below.

Women's Status

One of the major projects that emerged from the interest in women's status was the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP). This project, in the early 1980s, carried out research on all aspects of women's lives, including their roles in labour, the stereotypes produced around gender and gender relations, and identities. Other groups, such as Sistren, a Jamaican women's collective founded in 1977 with the mandate of creating participatory theatrical productions, have worked towards women's self-development (Ford-Smith 1997). As well, the interest of some social historians turned to women's roles in the slave society and the colonial construction of race and gender as they were linked to women's status: certain tendencies regarding the management and use of slaves can be attributed to metropolitan ideas concerning gender roles and relations.

Women have always been an important part of the labour force in the Caribbean, as slaves and afterwards as agricultural and domestic workers. Division of labour on plantations was fairly standard throughout the Caribbean, following a racialized and gendered stratification. Under the slave regimes, unequal status was allotted to the different jobs carried out by men and women. Lowest status was accorded to field work, and both men and women worked in the fields, planting, weeding, and cutting cane and other crops. Men were chosen to undertake more skilled, and thus higher status, occupations such as those involved in processing the crops, or maintenance of plantation buildings and moveable property such as carpentry, blacksmith, etc., as well as slave driver in the field and overseer in the boiler room. Occupations such as artisan and overseer were of higher status than that of tradesman. For women, domestic work was the usual alternative to field work, and procured a somewhat higher status though

most tasks were not considered skilled, and thus were not as prestigious as the skilled occupations of men. Usual domestic chores were cleaning, washing, cooking, caring for children, etc. The occupations of “nurse, head of nursery, and occasionally animal keeper” were considered semi-skilled but did not confer status as they were carried out only by elderly women who could not carry out other more arduous tasks (although it could be argued that these women gained status, at least among the slaves, because of age). Skilled and status conferring tasks carried out by women were cooking, sewing, and housekeeping. Housekeepers, according to Beckles (1996: 113) “were the only females invested with authority in household matters” but generally, women’s work brought them less status than men’s. In the French Caribbean, more women than men worked in the fields (Moitt 1995, 1996). In Saint-Domingue, over 60 percent of field workers were women in the 1770s and 1780s, while mostly men were employed in specialized tasks, both in the domestic arena and on the plantation. Even men mainly filled the position of cook, following French tradition, although frequently the housekeeper was a woman and, at the same time, the master’s mistress (Geggus 1996: 260-261). In the urban setting in Saint-Domingue, women worked mostly as domestics, often being hired out by their owners to others who did not own slaves, or carried on trade for their masters, sometimes going door to door selling wares (Moitt 1996). On smaller plantations generally, women often carried out both field and domestic chores (Robertson 1996: 23). Where they did not, domestic slaves feared being sent to the field as punishment (Morrissey 1989: 66).

Creole women born into slavery were generally preferred as domestics, while their newly arrived African counterparts were usually relegated to the fields. Among men, higher status positions usually were accorded to creole slaves as well. The status of domestic, however, did not always accrue to the children of domestics, as girls especially could be sent to the fields (Morrissey 1989: 66).

In the Danish West Indies, children born of sexual unions between whites and slave women were often employed as domestics or trained as artisans (Olwig 1995: 32) and thus obtained higher status. In some cases, especially in the French

Caribbean, these children were manumitted and even inherited land and riches from their fathers. These free coloureds, while they did not have the social or legal status of whites, were not enslaved and were able to hold and transact property, including slaves. In the French Antilles, manumission of children born of encounters between slave women and European men was frequent (Morrissey 1989: 67; Geggus 1996). Many free coloureds owned property and carried out commerce of various sorts, while some even owned slaves, either for their own use, or as profitable business transactions. The free coloured women of Cap-Français in Saint-Domingue, while they often worked as housekeepers for white men, and were perhaps involved in prostitution, carried out several types of commercial dealings in their positions as shopkeepers, grease dealers, and greengrocers, worked in the marketplace, and carried out property transactions, including real estate, objects, and slaves (Socolow 1996). In 18th century Barbados, women owned and operated inns (Kerr 1995: 197). In Dominica, a fairly large population became part of the plantocracy, owning and running mostly small coffee plantations (Trouillot 1988), and, while women's roles there have not been widely researched in a historical perspective, one contemporary observer noted free coloured women were usually employed as "pastry-cooks and hucksters" and were able to attire themselves elegantly (Atwood 1971[1791]: 220).

From these examples, it becomes evident that status differentiations with relation to work were configured on the basis of a certain proximity to Europeans -- both physical, by working close to or in the colonial house, and behaviourally, by effecting tasks that followed colonial gender roles. This closeness was obtained both through mixed parentage and creole birth, which brought at least partial acculturation, and in the former case, lighter skin colour as well, thus situating African-born slaves at the bottom of the hierarchical scale. This creation of status hierarchies through work was tied both to race and gender ideologies, and to sexual practices of colonists.

While women in the Caribbean typically had high levels of economic activity, high levels of male migration in the early part of the century caused women to increasingly enter the workforce, “the closure of many migration outlets coupled with economic recession, forced men and women into direct competition for jobs” (Momsen 1993a: 234) As well, labour riots throughout the Caribbean in the 1930s instigated the formation of trade unions and the reorganization of the labour force, and women were thus increasingly marginalized as the gendered distribution of work and wages favoured men’s labour (ibid.). At the same time, in some areas, mechanization of agriculture and other types of work that reduced the need for manual labour caused women, rather than men, to be displaced. These trends can be directly connected to prevailing gender ideologies regarding men’s work and woman’s place in the domestic sphere. For instance, Reddock and Huggins (1997) point out that in Trinidad, the education system inculcated values in girls that drew them away from agriculture and into what was seen as more feminine occupations. Labour on the plantations had grown more gender-distinctive, favouring men in salary and work status, so that while women had always worked just as hard as men, they were slowly being excluded from wage work in agriculture. The same is true for Dominica, according to Green (1998). Studies show that a large part of women’s work is rendered invisible because it is not carried out for monetary return; women may be engaged in childcare, housework, subsistence gardening, or farming with other family members and informal exchanges of services and goods. As well, while women work outside the home, they often are engaged in seasonal, part-time, or temporary work which they may choose not to report because of the small income (Massiah 1986: 183).

In some areas, especially the larger regions such as Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica, large numbers of indentured labourers from India, China, Europe and Africa were brought in to replace slaves on the plantations and to optimize production, indicating that ex-slaves were reluctant to continue to labour on the plantations under the conditions proposed. But in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries, large numbers, especially of men, emigrated from the Caribbean to Latin America, Cuba, and the United States to work on projects and plantations there, notably the Panama Canal (Senior 1991: 108). Between the years of 1891 and 1921, large numbers of women filled the ranks of the gainfully employed,⁸ mostly in “unskilled” agricultural and domestic labour, but also in heavy manual labour, working on the docks loading and unloading freight, as well as breaking and carrying rocks and other heavy building materials (Senior 1991: 107, 109). However, while women were doing the same work as men, they were not paid equitably (ibid.: 110).

In the period after WWII, General Worker Rates (GWR)⁹ for women were in decline up until the 1970s, when they generally began to increase.¹⁰ These trends in workforce size can be attributed to economic transformations within the region and globally, but also to cultural and ideological underpinnings. The apparent upturn in female workforce numbers in the 1970s has been explained for Barbados by the increasing employment in tourism and light manufacturing (Momsen 1993b:123, see also McKay 1993 for Jamaica). Barrow (1986a) elucidated a trend in Barbados of occupational changes that reflect a move from “traditional” occupations to “modern” ones, generally “characterized by higher occupational status” (ibid.: 134), urbanization of employment, a decline in agricultural workers, as well as production and related workers, while women remained concentrated in the service sector, especially as domestics and

⁸ Over 60 percent of the paid workforce was women in Barbados throughout this time, while women made up close to 60 percent in Dominica and Montserrat in 1891 at the beginning of this period, and in St. Kitts, St. Vincent, and Grenada in 1921 (Senior 1991: 124; Momsen 1993b: 123).

⁹ “General Worker Rates” refers to the number of females and males working over the age of 15, as a percentage of the total number of female and male persons over 15 (Senior 1991: 111).

¹⁰ For example, in Grenada, it was 69.8 percent in 1921, 43.8 percent in 1946, 37.1 percent in 1960, 35.5 percent in 1970, and increased slightly to 36.9 percent in 1980. In Barbados and Montserrat, the trend was the same, with a low in 1970 in Barbados of 39.4 percent, increasing to 47.7 percent in 1980, and from 33.1 percent to 42.3 percent in Montserrat (Senior 1991: 111). The same trend has occurred in the French Département of Guadeloupe, as the female workforce increased from 40.7 percent according to the 1974 census, to 47.8 percent in 1982 (Dagenais 1993: 89). Not so for Jamaica, however. In the 1921 census, the GWR for women was 64.7 percent; in 1946 it had fallen to 33.9 percent, with a slight increase in 1960 to 43.3 percent, only to fall again in 1970 to 25.6 percent and in 1980 to 22.7 percent.

increasingly associated with the tourist industry. The “Clerical and Sales Workers” category has seen an increase, where more women are going towards formal positions as sales clerks in shops, moving away from working as self-employed hawkers and street-vendors. As well, export processing zones in Barbados have moved towards data-processing over production industries, and thus more semi-skilled clerical workers are employed there: between 1970 and 1993, the number of women in clerical work has more than doubled from 13.4 percent to 27.4 percent of the female workforce, while only a 4 percent increase was seen in men, to 9.9 percent (Coppin 1995: 111). There has also been a substantial increase in women in professional and technical areas (5 percent between 1970 and 1993 to 14.6 percent of the female workforce) which, however, matches the increase by males, of whom 16.1 percent were professionals in 1993 (*ibid.*). These changes are accompanied by increasing education levels for women; in the 1970s, the number of women with some secondary education in Barbados increased from 15 percent to 71 percent. As well, birth rates have decreased, due in part to family planning programmes (*ibid.*: 107) while state and private daycare services have expanded so that childcare has become less of a preoccupation (Barrow 1986a: 134), although women have long shared childcare with relatives and others. In Dominica, the same trend in increasing educational levels and workforce participation in particular sectors can be seen, except that the general participation of women in the workforce has continued to decline (see Table 5 in Chapter 3 below).

The WICP investigators have revealed strong intergenerational differences in economic activity for women (*ibid.*: 136), indicating, for Massiah (1986) changes in economic activity over the life course and according to educational level: women with primary education only were concentrated in service sectors and agriculture in Barbados and St. Vincent, and in service and production sectors in Antigua; women with secondary education were most numerous in clerical employment, while those with tertiary training became professionals, especially teachers and nurses. The same can be noted for Guadeloupe in the French

Caribbean (Dagenais 1993). However, others (Momsen 1993 a, b) have indicated that this variation in activity according to age may be connected to economic development in the areas in which it takes place; where tourism and/or light production has increased, women have moved away from agriculture. Workers in the light “export-oriented” electronics industry in St. Lucia, for example, are mostly young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-seven (Momsen 1993b: 135; Coppin 1995: 115). In other areas, such as Barbados (Coppin 1995: 106), and Jamaica (Safa and Antrobus 1992: 52) a decrease in employment of young adults can be attributed in part to an increase in length of time spent in school. In Montserrat, different age groups are associated with different jobs due to availability of different types of jobs and higher education rates (Momsen 1993b). Older women, who are most numerous in agriculture, usually have less education. In Nevis, on the other hand, where tourism and industry are not as highly developed, jobs are less available to both men and women, and younger women are more involved in agriculture as men migrate abroad to find work (Momsen 1993b: 131). However, other factors may be important in age-related employment; for example, success in such “traditional” activities as marketing and higglering, associated with older women, depend on years of developing extensive networks of connections, which accrue mainly to women who have had the time and experience to develop them (Momsen 1993b: 135). Factors of age and social change are important in Dominica: older women usually have less education in Dominica and are more involved in agriculture than their younger counterparts, and therefore are not employed in clerical positions. As well, the number of places in secondary schools has increased dramatically, and so have the positions that women are now filling in the so-called ‘white collar’ sector.

To compound the situation, cash is becoming increasingly necessary. Barrow points out that changes in habits of consumption are putting more pressure on making money: where goods and services may have once been exchanged for barter, cash is now required; mass media has introduced metropolitan tastes; one-time luxuries, such as household appliances, have

become necessities; manufactured (and imported) goods have replaced the homemade; people in many areas must now pay for piped-in water, electricity, and propane fuel rather than spend time gathering wood and hauling water; and loans have become widely available. The acquisition of all of these things signal, culturally and socially, an increase in status, and economically, an increase in the need for cash and the means to obtain it (Barrow 1986a: 135), and women working in urban settings, especially in business settings, need to dress appropriately, creating another expense (Yelvington 1995; Freeman 2000).

Work patterns in the Caribbean have always been gendered, through a historical process that has marginalized women in the official workforce and rendered their work invisible, even though during slavery and afterwards, women worked alongside men in the fields. At the same time, women who do work fall mainly into specific job categories which pay them as women, that is, at a lower salary, following the notion of the “male breadwinner.” These gender ideologies render women’s burden even dearer, as, especially on the lower echelons of the social ladder, they are often without male support as men may have several other obligations to children and other family members and may themselves be underemployed. As well, the association of women with the “domestic sphere” has served both to marginalize them within the official job market, and to shroud women’s actual participation in providing food and other types of support for their families. Nevertheless, women have been successful in the creation of economic organizations of various types, and much of their ability to organize comes through networks with kin and others. Clarke (1986) holds that women’s networks are strengthened when “accompanied by economic interests” (Clarke 1986: 114), and cites the existence of several economic organizations and informal credit associations formed by women throughout the region covered by the WICP (St. Vincent, Barbados, and Antigua). In Barbados, there are eighty-three factions of the “Friendly Society,” some with up to seven hundred members. In St. Vincent, the “Bun-Pun” is a burial society which aids members in financing funerals and has a total of 20,000 members.

Of the women surveyed in the WICP, 19.6 percent have participated in informal credit associations called “sou-sou” or “meeting-turn,” a type of revolving loan organization, which helps women to save and to finance improvements for their home and children’s education (Clarke 1986: 115). While the informal structure of these organizations does not allow for long term planning, it helps to women to maintain and improve their households, especially with low employment and in the absence of a reliable partner (ibid.). Generally, women have been able to employ trust, cooperation, and their abilities to create networks in order to ameliorate their financial situation.

In a different vein, in some regions, women traders in the informal sector have organized themselves into associations to protect traders’ interests. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the TBSA (Traffickers’ Small Business Association) was formed in 1983 to “establish training programmes for both new entrants to the trade and experienced traffickers [covering] plant quarantine regulations, post-harvest requirements, export documentation and licenses, simple record keeping, marketing regulations, simple curing of root crops and effective use of packaging material”; to explore the “development of new and existing markets”; to “encourage the sale of improved packaging materials to the traders”; to “assist members in the preparation of their shipping documents; and to act as a “coordinating unit between boat owners, government officials and support organizations” (Mulakala 1991: 205). However, this organization is fraught with tension at the level of the board of directors (all male), and membership of traders (95 percent female) has declined from three hundred in 1986 to eighty in 1990 (ibid.: 207).

In Dominica, on the other hand, the DHA (Dominica Hucksters’ Association) has been highly successful. Established by hucksters themselves in 1981 following the devastation by hurricanes in 1979 and the subsequent increase in the numbers of hucksters who turned to trading to offset their loss in crops, this organization, in addition to a mandate similar to that of the TBSA, developed a “revolving loan programme,” enabling hucksters to borrow enough money to buy

goods, granted they meet certain conditions of the DHA. As well, the DHA has been extremely successful in its sale of packaging; in 1990, it earned EC\$175,000 (Mulakala 1991: 211-212). However, while nearly all members of this organization are women, it addresses only the economic needs of the traders and not the gender-related problems that may occur with family because of their occupation, such as being household heads, single motherhood and childcare, disagreement and sometimes violence over huckstering activities with male partners (ibid.: 216). This association has nevertheless allowed traders in Dominica to create a more stable economic base through price controls and the loan plan and, at the same time, more strength in legal and political arenas.

Women, while active in the community, whether through work, kin networks, in church groups and economic associations, or in party politics, have been said to take a “back seat” to men when it comes to positions of power and authority on the job or in the community, playing out at the “public” level the same gendered roles and relations associated with the “domestic” sphere (Clarke 1986; Reddock and Huggins 1997). Upon closer examination, historically and contemporaneously, it becomes evident that gender and class ideologies, spread through school curricula (Green 1998), as well as public policies inherently based on these ideologies (Reddock and Huggins 1997; Harrison 1997), do help to define male and female roles, and serve to constrain both women’s desire for, ideologically, and their access to positions of authority in the economic or political arenas.

However, while statistics show that women participate less in mainstream politics than men, and are even ridiculed for doing so (Clarke 1986), these statistics do not account for women’s definitions of what is political, nor what is successful politics, and thus women’s political involvement, like their work, is downplayed and domesticated, rendered quasi-invisible and perceived as less valuable than men’s contributions (Foster 1992).

During slavery and afterwards, slave and former slave women were involved, alongside men, in resisting colonial exploitation and domination,

individually through their roles as purveyors of African culture, refusal to work and verbal insolence (Bush 1990), and as esteemed leaders, priestesses and healers who gained power and prestige among the African and creole populations (Senior 1991). “Nanny of the Maroons,” says Senior (1991: 150), following Brathwaite (1971), “was not only her people’s leader but their military tactician and priestess, occupying a role similar to that of the Queen Mother in Asante culture.” In a more subversive mode, women in St. Domingue exchanged sexual favours for bullets and gunpowder in military camps in the 1790s (Moitt 1996: 245). In Jamaica following Emancipation, women were involved in uprisings in Falmouth and elsewhere, contesting the working conditions posed by plantation owners as well as the activities of magistrates. They were also implicated in protesting against the banning of street vendors, the majority of whom were women. Women figured also among those arrested in the 1848 Morant Bay uprising in Jamaica (Wilmot 1995: 286-287). In Martinique in 1848, slave women participated in the uprising that took place when the promised emancipation did not materialize (Moitt 1996: 244). In Dominica in 1898, two women were killed in the La Plaine Tax Riot, resisting colonial forces who evicted a local resident (R. Green 1999, public address). Following Emancipation, women also participated in labour movements and civil unrest. In the Georgetown riots in 1905 in what is now Guyana, for example, forty-one of one hundred and five convicted rioters were women (Peake 1993: 110). However, their presence was rendered all the more rebellious by the fact that they were women and out of place, so to speak, because they acted outside of their expected role and public power belonged to men (ibid.; Senior 1991: 151). “In creole society,” remarks Senior, “it was only outside the formal power structures that women could hope to assume positions of leadership, power and prominence in their local communities” (Senior 1991:151).

In keeping with this statement, the West India Royal Commission, in its 1945 report on social conditions in the Commonwealth territories, found women were almost totally excluded from the formal realms of public life. In most

territories, women had no voting rights, there were no female members elected to office, they held no administrative positions, they did not have equal access to jobs in the civil service or in the field of justice, and there were no women magistrates or jurors. Where women were allowed to vote and hold elected office, they could rarely meet property requirements. There were no women on boards of local and municipal authorities (ibid.: 152).

One facet of the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) was intended to gauge women's participation in the public sphere and their effect upon political decisions. Clarke (1986) found that while women were active in politics, they almost always assumed a subsidiary and supportive role, backing male politicians through campaigning and fund raising. Women's participation in party politics in the three islands of the study, Antigua, St. Vincent, and Barbados, took the form of party membership, which in Barbados consisted of 40 percent of the total membership (Clarke 1986: 124), and women's arms, for which membership was considerably lower. These "arms" are perceived by non-members as having no real power, and serving a supportive rather than a leadership role (ibid.: 126). The women's arms were principally involved with campaigning and fund-raising, supporting the largely male candidates, and had no independent mandate. Leadership was generally concentrated among middle-class, middle-aged women (ibid.: 123). Clarke concluded that women generally did not participate in associations, although 80 percent of respondents felt that it was important. As Foster (1992) points out, however, Clarke did not take into account that the women who participated in these political party arms felt they were successful, both for their parties and for themselves (Foster 1992: 26-27). In both Antigua and St. Vincent, income-generating projects undertaken by the women's arms were successful. In Antigua, the women's arm of one party developed an agricultural project, a food co-operative, and a training programme for women to help them develop cottage industries, subsidized by the agricultural project (Clarke 1986: 127). In St. Vincent, profits from the women's airport restaurant were turned back to the party. As well, women campaigned, going from door to

door meeting people that would “enable them to establish personal and political contacts within the communities,” thus extending their personal networks at the same time as helping the party (Foster 1992: 27).

While women’s public involvement in creating programmes for social improvement have largely been successful, women still occupy few places of authority within the official, mainstream and male-defined and dominated political framework. In political parties in the three territories examined by the WICP researchers, women made up less than one fifth of the executive councils (Clarke 1986: 125). Their representation in national assemblies is even more dismal according to this study: in Barbados, since 1966, there have only been two women representatives in parliament, one of whom became a Minister, while three women sit in the present (at the time of the study) government’s Senate; two of six Senators are women in St. Vincent, while there are no women in the lower house; and one Senator is female in Antigua, and there has only been one woman in the lower house (ibid.: 122). The *Caribbean Yearbook 1977-8*, gives a summary view of the situation: of a total of 237 elected representatives in nine territories, twenty-three were women; eleven of ninety-four senators were women; of one hundred eleven cabinet ministers there were five women (Senior 1991: 157). In Dominica, a woman, Eugenia Charles, was elected as head of state in 1980, a first for the Caribbean.

Women hesitate to go into politics for several reasons outlined by Senior (1991). First of all, politics is seen as a male domain, as dirty, dangerous, and unfeminine:

“Politics is still seen as a man’s world. What is more detrimental to our cause is that it is seen as a dirty game” (Gregory 1985: 21). A highly placed female politician said: “Politics can be highly dangerous you know; women don’t like it, they can’t stand the abuse, they can’t stand stories being told about their mothers and their grandmother in their earlier lives and so on. You have to have a high strong stomach to do this.” As for herself, the Opposition “made their abuse even more bitter and deep, you see, because I’m a woman... I don’t think they believed it themselves but they were using it, you know” (WICP, Interviews with women in public life). (Senior 1991: 159)

Secondly, women who would wish to enter politics may experience conflict between their roles in the family and politics as either the support of husbands or boyfriends is lacking, or they do not want to put their families through the pain of exposure and abuse that makes up part of the political game (Senior 1991: 161). Lack of support by both males and females, largely due to gender ideology that place “men at the head” and women in auxiliary roles was another reason for not going into politics (ibid.: 162-163). Also, the lack of definition of issues pertaining particularly to women may account in part for women’s lack of interest in this domain (ibid.: 163).

In recent decades, governments in most of the Caribbean Commonwealth nations have formed Women’s Desks or Bureaux, “intended to provide the catalyst through which women and organisations can articulate women’s needs and suggest possible paths for the implementation of ideas” (Clarke 1986: 117). In the three territories examined by the WICP, the women’s organs within government were subsumed by a Ministry; in St. Vincent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then Information, Culture and Tourism; in Antigua, by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth Affairs; and in Barbados, to several different Ministries, the latest one in 1986 being the Ministry of Labour and Community Development. These women’s departments, initially founded with good intentions, are often sorely underfunded and understaffed, signalling the little importance they hold within the government machinery as a whole (ibid.: 120). These departments are largely involved in income-generating projects and training programs, some of which, however, are very successful in both Barbados and Antigua. In Barbados, the women’s department has interfaced with feminist research organizations affiliated with the University of the West Indies such as WAND (Women and Development Unit) which has worked on curriculum development through the Ministry of Education (ibid.). CAFRA also interacted both with government bodies and non-government associations in its research projects on Women in Agriculture, Women and the Law, and Women in History (Foster 1992: 30), including a study in Dominica on the first topic, Women in

Agriculture, carried out in conjunction with a local non-governmental organization, the Small Projects Assistance Team (SPAT) (see Babb 1988).

In Dominica, Eugenia Charles established a Women's Bureau under the wing of the Ministry of Community Service in 1980 and, supposedly, made it a priority to improve women's status in that country. The Policy Statement on the Status of Women, drawn up and passed as law in 1980, stressed equal opportunity in education and employment, consideration of women and their importance in the home in development policies, the elimination of sexism, attention to women's special needs, and the effectiveness of the Women's Bureau. However, the existence of this Policy Statement was never made public, and while it stressed equality between men and women, women were not aware of these laws and could not act in consequence. As well, in 1987, the Women's Bureau, staffed by two women, carried out research on domestic violence and produced a report that was to be distributed widely throughout the community; the report remained in the hands of government agencies, so that most Dominicans were not aware that such a study had been conducted, nor that their government was paying any attention (English 1991).

The women's departments in governments appear to generally exist in name only; however Clarke's (1986) report on the Barbados Women's Department showed it to be reaching women. In Dominica, the Women's Bureau is now officially joined to the Ministry of which it was once a part: the Community Development and Women's Affairs Ministry, headed by Gertrude Roberts until 2000, a sign that the importance of women's issues has grown in the public (read government) eye. Since the election in January of 2000, however, she has been replaced by a male minister, and the name of the Ministry changed, replacing the word 'Women's' with 'Gender'.

The success of women's political involvement was gauged by Clarke (1986) and others to be based on its effectiveness within the "official" political realm, including the change of policy. However, as seen in the case of Dominica, a change in policy is not necessarily effective just because it is made: policy

changes must be made public, and action must be taken on those policies. At the same time, women's own efforts in associations of different types were successful, as goals set were achieved.

While women are not excluded from political action and involvement, the political realm is gendered so that the type of political action that is perceived as "female" appears to be turned towards social causes, and employs an extension of what is perceived as "female" networking and cooperative interaction, while official politics is largely turned towards bettering one's self-representation through confrontational interactions which could be compared to perceived "male" verbal interactions in the wider social sphere (see Wilson 1973: 156; Abrahams 1982; Miller 1994: 227-228). Indeed, women's community involvement and support has historically been largely carried out through church organizations and other NGOs that work to effect social improvements through charity and education rather than through open political voice (Rheddock 1998). In Dominica, the Catholic Women's Social League, started in the 1950s, was the most prominent of these (see Honychurch 1995).

Women are generally involved far more than men in religious congregations in the Caribbean: men, however, are most often the official church leaders. In many denominational churches, women's participation in carrying out the religious rites is marginal and there is a strictly respected gender hierarchy; often their role is limited to Sunday school instruction, or women's associations. These associations have a role in organizing and promoting Christian family life and morals, and support of the church through income-generating projects (Clarke 1986: 128-129). In other churches and sects, however, women may act as religious specialists, in the same or in different roles than men. During slavery, women as well as men were active as religious leaders and women were especially important for their knowledge and talents as healers (Bush 1990: 154-155) through which they could acquire respect and prestige from within slave society (Geggus 1996: 263). Contemporary women also are important as spiritual

leaders and healers in present-day cults and churches (Austin-Broos 1987: 11; Simpson 1978: 139).

It is through church organizations that much of women's community action in the Caribbean has taken place: Reddock (1998) has pointed out that in Trinidad, ladies of the Anglican Church were active in charity in 1938, providing meals for the poor. Other church-based women's organizations could be said to be 'domesticating' through the kinds of activities, such as sewing and cooking, that they promoted, seeking to promote Christian family values and 'respectability' (Reddock 1998: 58). Religious organizations were also important in Dominica, the principle one being the Social Centre of the Catholic Church with Social Leagues in each of its outlying parishes. Now, in Dominica, a local NGO, the Dominica National Council of Women which oversees local women's groups, and has a representative in each locality, has become a more important arm of organization for women than the local Social Leagues in many localities.

Gender and ideology

Much of the research discussed in the above section is concerned with women's material conditions of existence, and not so much with the discursive understandings of gender, class, and race. Complementing this research, other investigations have been made into the colonial and contemporary constructions of race, class, and gender. The construction of gender identities and gendered relations in the Caribbean colonies was intertwined with the construction of racial ideologies and a hierarchical status/class system (Smith 1987, 1988) as well as the kinship system which favours consanguinal over affinal relations.

Gender hierarchies based on the relation of colour to freedom (and thus status) were important for the reproduction of the slave system, since one's status as free or enslaved was inherited from the mother. Women, both black and white, were "socially constructed," "engineered and re-engineered to facilitate the agro-commercial enterprise and its supportive social environment" (Beckles 1995: 131). Propertyless white women from Europe were the first to labour in the fields

in the Caribbean as indentured labourers and were considered undesirable for marriage within the white plantocracy. Some hence formed unions and produced children with slave men (ibid: 132). Eventually, however, the racial hierarchy superseded the original European class stratification, and “the” white woman was construed as moral, chaste, weak, delicate, sensitive and in need of protection, hence relegated to the home and the “domestic sphere” (ibid.: 133). “The” black woman therefore, was conceived in contrast to the white female stereotype. She was imagined as strong, able to work all day and have sex all night, as lacking in emotion, and thus prone to physical love rather than romantic love (ibid.: 134). Through the attribution of these traits, the black woman was construed, in her opposition to white women, as quasi-masculine, and hence fitted her to what was conceived of as “masculine” work, and because she was not “chaste” and “moral,” she was open to be sexually exploited by white men.

This duality through which Victorian morality and black women’s supposed promiscuity were construed has persisted into the 20th century, has informed studies of the family and conjugal relations in the Caribbean as seen in the overview of that literature above, and has contributed to the ambivalence of women’s relations to men, as discussed above. The ideology which placed some women as marriageable partners and others as concubines has in turn been instrumental in honing ideas about status, conjugal relations, and child-bearing that continue today. According to Bush (1990: 17), this ideology purported that “one set of moral standards was applicable to white women, another less honourable set to black.” This was important in the creation and maintenance of a racialized and gendered system throughout slavery, after Emancipation until recently. Black women were both sexualized and de-humanized; their progressive “re-humanization,” to be read as “Europeanization” took place at least partially through the mediation of sexual relations. The more black women became like white women were expected to be, in colour and in attitude, the more they were placed (almost) in the same role, but without formal marriage, in the house carrying out sexual and domestic tasks.

Atwood's descriptions of white British women and free coloured women in Dominica is revealing of their economic position as well as the attitude of the times. Regarding British and Creole white women: "the generality of the English white women in the West Indies are as lovely as in any part of the world besides, make as goods [sic] wives, tender mothers, and as agreeable companions" (Atwood 1971[1791]: 211). His remarks regarding free coloured women contrast to those about white women: "They are, in general, very idle and insolent; ... to the great detriment of more industrious poor white people, and will often get credit for articles in their way of business when the latter cannot; but being in general young persons of the [female] sex, they contrive to pay their debts very satisfactorily to some merchants" (1971[1791]: 220). This quote reflects the construction of Caribbean women's sexuality wherein white women were perceived as chaste and coloured and black women were thought to have loose morals. This same idea is reflected from a slightly different perspective in a later observer of young women in Dominica, who notes: "I can only say that if their habits were as loose as white people say they are, I did not see a single licentious expression either in face or manner" (Froude 1888: 136). These views, which portray women's domesticity and chastity as virtuous, conflate colour, class, and 'proper' sexual behaviour and contribute to the symbolic valorization of patriarchy; while in the second comment by Atwood, the presence of poor white women is acknowledged, their virtue is not questioned.

The ideological endorsement of patriarchy and female chastity has been extended to discussions of the development of the middle class, and women's role in this. The largely 'coloured' middle class is perceived by some to have developed strictly out of "the nonlegal union of a white male master and a black female slave, which produced an illegitimate brown offspring of status midway between slave and master" (Alexander 1984: 173). According to Alexander, this is a myth of origin which serves to explain the colour hierarchy present in Jamaica in relation to past events, and emphasizes the marginal role of the male in family and in society in general (ibid.: 174). In Austin-Broos' interpretation, on the other

hand, this origin myth places the onus for men's marginality on women's promiscuity, especially for her lower-class male informants; for them, non-white women's sexual relations with white men produced a new oppressive class which aligned itself with the white masters against the slaves and profited from this relation (1997: 166). In this view, the conditions of poverty in which lower-class Jamaicans live are the result of women's "fornication," a responsibility that Austin-Broos holds corresponds to the Judeo-Christian idea of the "fall," thus supporting a patriarchal ideology and men's (desired) control over women (ibid.).

At the same time, the 'real' West Indian middle class, which, in Smith's estimation, developed after Emancipation from a gradual assimilation of the remaining creole white population to the coloured stratum (Smith 1988: 100), subscribed to a dominant gender ideology that prescribed chastity and domesticity for women. Men, however, continued to have sexual relations outside the conjugal unit, fathering children for lower-class women. At the same time, paradoxically (or hypocritically) people of the middle class held what were perceived as only lower class mores, the so-called promiscuity of the lower-class populations, in contempt (Smith 1987: 187-189).

The link between kinship and the colour/class hierarchy is one of mutual reinforcement, yet at the same time, of contradiction. If the upper classes support the idea of a male-headed family, then it garners value in its association with social status; however, because consanguinal relations are more important in many people's day-to-day lives even in middle class families, they work against the ideology, creating for many people a situation of ambivalence that comes from symbolic importance on the one hand, and their experiences and lives, on the other. At the same time patriarchy, or the control of resources by men (there is not total control, but a relation of access to resources that favours men), overlaps with class, as the higher in the hierarchy one goes, the fewer women one finds in positions of authority (Green 1995: 95), and conversely, the lower one goes, the more women, especially female household heads, one finds. As well, many women in the upper classes espouse both their husbands and the ideology of

respectability and domesticity through which they reproduce both their own status, and that of their husbands through the control they accord their husbands over their bodies. At the lower levels, the “patriarchal bargain,” to use the term preferred by Kandiyoti (1988) is different, because both men and women have less access to resources, both symbolic and material, but while women’s practices find them involved at all levels of social and economic production, “patriarchy” persists through the production of gendered stereotypes, sex-typed work, the devaluation of their work by low salaries and non-recognition.

It also becomes evident that the dualities that underlie the ideology of class and gender - domestic / public and African / European - work to organize, attribute value to, and to justify class and gender differences in and control of access to resources. They hide the heterogeneity that exists, how the different values interact, and the unifying role of kinship. As well, they guide perceptions of ideal (read stereotypical) gender roles. As Barrow (1986b) points out in her examination of men’s images of women in Barbados, men make a distinction between the “Euro-ideal” and “Afro-real” woman; the former is obedient, faithful, and domestic, while the second is autonomous, conniving, opportunistic, and not always faithful or easy to control. The seeming binarism created between a middle-class morality of respectability that prescribes marriage and what have been perceived as strictly lower class family patterns, can be seen, not as separate “African” and “European” mores that are culturally and systematically distinguishable, but as an ideology that confers meaning and value to behaviours associated with status, (e.g. marriage, owning a home) while justifying class differences on the basis of a perceived inherent inferiority, and by a negating links of kinship that exist between men and women of different classes. This does not suggest that there are no African cultural influences or European/American ones, but that they have been transformed, reinterpreted and reinscribed within the matrix of relations gender and class relations, and are reappropriated by individuals in their self-configurations.

The Critical Turn

Attention to women's status, gender ideologies which focus on construction of femininity and women, and male absence has sparked reactions from several perspectives. Concern with masculinity and male identity construction, as well as attention to gender socialization and the school have been explored. Barrow (1998) has questioned the representations of family in structural-functionalist literature that under-represent male participation in family life. Chevannes (2001) has carried out a comparative study of male socialization in five Caribbean communities, and Brown et al. (1997), discussed above, have explored perceptions of fatherhood among Caribbean males. Lewis (1998) explores the construction of masculinity in Caribbean literature, and several authors have examined gendered relations in the classroom (Leo-Rhynie 1997; Bailey 1997, 2002; Leo-Rhynie and Pencle 2002; Whiteley 2002; Miller 1994[1986]).

The revelation of an increasing proportion of women as compared to men who succeed in secondary education and greater numbers of women enrolled at the University of the West Indies or who enter the white collar workforce has elicited a response of alarm on the part of some scholars. Miller (1988; 1991; 1994[1986]) contends that males have become increasingly marginalized in the Caribbean, due to the gains women have made in access to education and in the work force, and has posited the 'rise of matriarchy'. His hypothesis is formulated in respect to relations of class and race: the elite classes are supporting the rise of the 'weaker' (under the ideology of patriarchy) females to undermine the males of the lower class – in other words, women are only gaining access to education and jobs because men are letting them do so, so that in essence, the patriarchy of one class is seen as undermining the right to patriarchy of the other (see Lindsay 2002). The idea that girls are better achievers at school, in that they fill more places in high schools and universities has caused some governments (Jamaica and Barbados) to incorporate affirmative action measures that favour boys. (Green 1998: 547). Recent research in Dominica on gender and education has

taken the same approach, showing that girls are entering high school at higher rates than boys (Goldberg and Bruno 1999). Even so, in Dominica few of either sex actually graduate, and of those who go on to post-secondary training, the majority are male (see Table 3 below). As well, domains in which men and women are employed remain gender specific, with few women going into such fields as engineering, and women are not generally being hired for the highest paying jobs (Lindsay 2002). As described above, they fill lower administrative, clerical, and sales positions. In Dominica, while more women are employed than previously in these sectors, their employment in the agricultural sector has declined considerably, due in large part to the male-oriented nature of the banana industry, and the large numbers of women who do not go to secondary school remain without gainful employment (Green 1998; Trouillot 1988). Rather than women ‘getting ahead’ of men, the portrait here is of a shift in gendered positions, and class relations, that benefits only some men and some women. As well, the sectors in which women are most likely to become employed are sectors that are stereotypically ‘female’, especially offshore data-processing, banking, and gambling, so that in the international division of labour, women are still in the lower ranks, filling a feminized space of “pink-collar” workers (Freeman 2001).

Recent work has critiqued approaches that focuses on women from a single perspective, and several works have explored new approaches to understand gender relations and women’s status in the Caribbean and to account for the complexity of ethnic and class relations. Barriteau (1998) has proposed looking at gender as a system that has changed over time, and as a mix of both material and ideological elements that do not necessarily shift simultaneously. While this position accounts for differences on a historical plane, as well as for different dimensions of gender relations, by separating material and ideological realms, it obscures the possible interrelation between them and also the possibility of other dimensions as well; it also does not account for different experiences of women based on class, ethnicity, or colour. Beckles (1998) has attempted to account historically for the varying experiences of women, demonstrating

positions they occupied that derived from class, race, and the interactions of women in different positions, both from an ideological and a material point of view. Mohammed (1998) points out that most Caribbean writing on women in the Anglophone Caribbean has focussed on lower-class Afro-Caribbean women, obliterating the experiences of other groups and providing only one perspective on what is really a complex, multi-faceted region.

This overview of literature pertaining to kinship, family, gender and women has served as a basis on which to build my analysis of the discursive frames employed by women in their narratives and performances in Dominica. Because the peopling of the Caribbean with the ancestors of its present population occurred in relatively recent history, tracing social institutions to the first social configurations, the relations of the plantation and slavery, is useful in order to understand present relations and their ideological underpinnings. One must be careful, however, to take into account their mutability over time, due to colonial policies, shifting economic interests, etc, as well as the fact that continued pressures of domination, the lines of which may shift, along with processes of cultural reinterpretation and invention cause both new divisions to be created, and elements thought to belong to one or the other category to be appropriated.

Evident in much of this literature is an attempt to grapple with the complexities of Caribbean social configurations in which class, gender, and race are combined inextricably, where practices that become associated with them take on value in a symbolic hierarchy. Emerging here is the importance of consanguinal relations as a basis of family organization, and their juxtaposition to an ideology of patriarchy (as the male-headed family and male breadwinner) that is also associated with status and class. The matrifocality concept, while it attempts to account for the relative lack of male household heads, does not recognize the presence and role of other males, and undergirds the 'male marginalization' hypothesis. Focus on women's status has revealed the effects of the shifting economy, which in recent times has contributed to a permutation of gender positions and class configurations. The increase in female over male

education and entry to the white collar sector has given rise to concern that lower class men are not only marginalized at home, but in the economy as well. However, this view does not account for the fact that the white collar sector is gendered in that women fill most of the more menial occupations, and that income levels for men overall are still higher.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PAST, TRANSFORMING THE COLONY

In addition to the general social and cultural framework pertaining to women's lives in the literature on women in the Caribbean discussed in the previous chapter, a synopsis of the regional context and Dominican history is key to grasping the effects of colonization and the subsequent transformations of decolonisation that form the framework of my analysis.

In the first section below, I briefly describe the Caribbean region in order to extrapolate some of the underlying commonalities and differences between islands and other included areas. The Caribbean region, of course, has also undergone changes involved in decolonisation, and as pointed out by Girvan (2001), what constitutes the Caribbean is a matter of perspective. However, much can be understood about the social and cultural divergences and similarities through a look at the historical context.

The rest of the chapter provides a more particular, though brief, history of Dominica divided into three sections that correspond to periods, each of which can be roughly characterized on the basis of colonial policy and change in governance. The second section of this chapter, then, provides a discussion of pre-emancipation (1834-38) social relations to help understand the development of colonial post-emancipation society in Dominica. This is especially important to understand the relations of gender and class, and to grasp the transformations that have occurred in the more recent, especially post WWII period. The third section covers the post-Emancipation period until WWII and shows the development of a quasi-autonomous peasantry, nonetheless shaped by colonial forces. This is contrasted to the fourth section, which briefly describes recent history since WWII as a period of decolonisation, democratization, and nation-building. The

purpose of this chapter, as can be inferred from its title, is to provide the socio-historical context of change through which the rest of the study is to be read.

3.1 The Caribbean: Regional Distinctions and Similarities

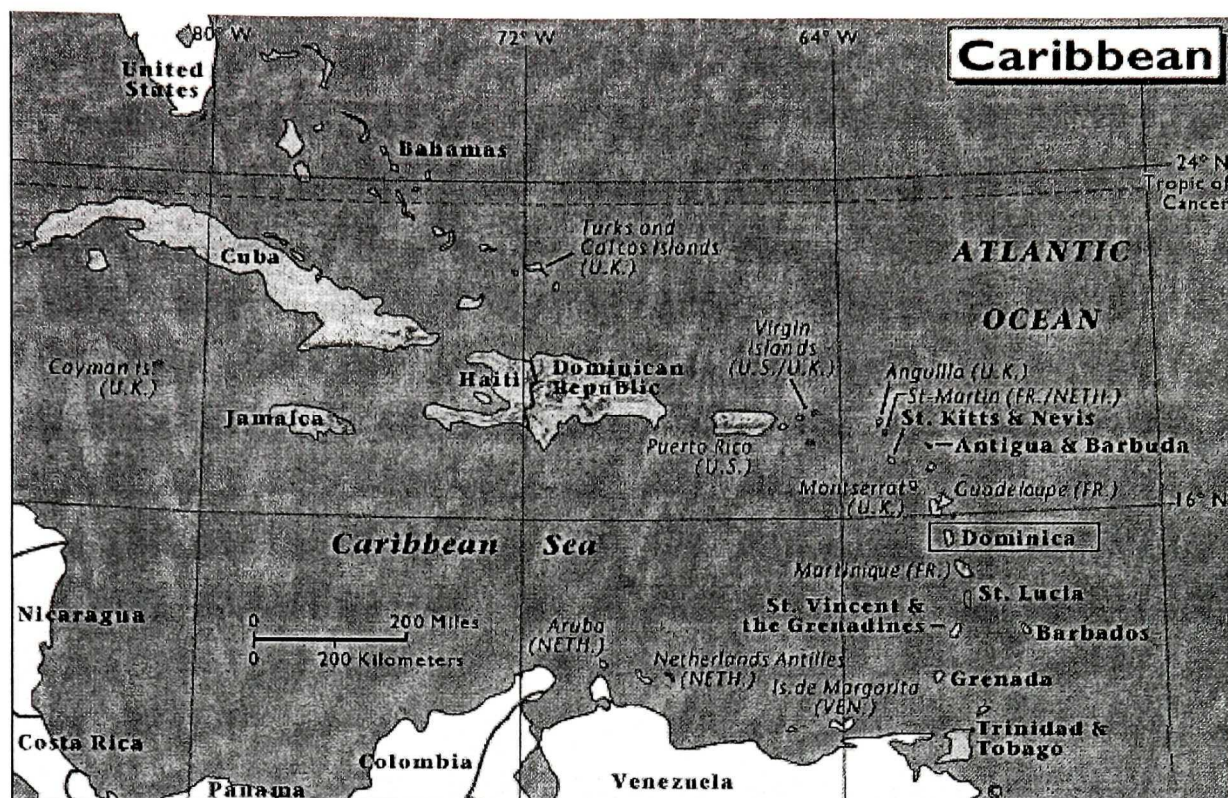
The Caribbean region as a geographical (physical) entity can be defined here as all areas that touch on the Caribbean Sea. This description would include all territories on the Caribbean coasts of South and Central America, countries which have little in common with the island Caribbean in terms of colonial history and culture, but are connected through economic and political interests and related interventions and policies. Only Guyana, Guyane, and Suriname on the Atlantic Coast of South America share a similar colonial and cultural history to the island regions (Anderson 1984; Payne and Sutton 1993). Mintz and Price (1985: 5) distinguish between island Caribbean (but including Belize, Suriname, Guyane and Guyana) and the mainland based on their economic and social histories and development., although interactions between islands close to the mainland and colonies there were common (especially Trinidad and Venezuela).

On the mainland, European enterprise in the form of haciendas and plantations employing mostly aboriginal labor was erected upon the ruins of the pre-Conquest indigenous economies, except in Brazil and parts of Venezuela where imported slaves were used. On the islands, mostly black peasantries eventually achieved a fragile freedom from what had once been flourishing, slave-based European plantations. In this perspective, the Caribbean region can be considered a more or less distinct culture region (with some similarities to mainland plantation regions), with internal diversity due to colonial and contemporary specificities of the localities that comprise it (Mintz and Price 1985.: 6-7 and Eltis 1997).

Part of this diversity can be attributed to the interests and practices of the different European powers that were involved in colonizing the Caribbean. Five European nations had a major hand in the initial colonization of the Caribbean –

Spain, France, Britain, Holland, and Denmark, plus marginally, Sweden. Spain initially held sovereignty over the entire region of the Caribbean, a monopoly underwritten by the papal division of the world between Spain and Portugal, by Pope Alexander VI, in 1493, which gave all of the so-called, and as yet uncharted, 'New World' to Spain (Grewé 1988). At the outset, Spain's primary interest in the Caribbean was to extract precious metals, and to a lesser extent, to grow sugar cane. Once both mines and workers were exhausted, Spain's pursuits moved elsewhere, especially to Peru and Mexico, and its Caribbean colonies were neglected, left largely to themselves and unprotected (Craton 1997a: 34-35). Agricultural production turned away from commerce to local needs. France, Britain, and Holland took advantage of Spain's weakened position in the Caribbean, and began to develop colonies used mainly for intensive agricultural production in the late 16th and 17th centuries.

France possessed the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe and its satellites, as well as part of St. Martin, in the Lesser Antilles, and then successfully developed plantations on the western half of Hispaniola, in what is now Haiti (Craton 1997a: 36), Guyana on the coast of South America, and possessed as well for short periods several of the smaller islands including Tobago, Dominica, Saint Vincent, Saint Lucia, and Grenada. These islands, in spite of subsequent British domination, retain to different degrees cultural remnants of their French colonization including the French Creole spoken by most inhabitants and a large segment of the population who adhere, at least nominally, to the Catholic religion (Duke et al. 1995). Of the larger islands originally held by the Spanish, the British claimed Jamaica, and several of the Lesser Antilles as well as what is now Belize in Central America. The Dutch were much less active in the colonization of the Caribbean, their interests lying mainly in the mercantile aspects of the sugar trade; however, they colonized several of the smaller islands including Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, part of St. Maarten, and Suriname on the mainland. The Danes were really a weak player in the contest for colonies and had only St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, eventually



Map 2: Map showing the Caribbean region, including Dominica.
Source: Mapquest.

sold to the United States to become the Virgin Islands in 1917. The Spanish, in the end, retained colonies in the Greater Antilles: Cuba, the largest, the eastern portion of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic) and Puerto Rico.

A principal social and cultural distinction can be drawn between the Hispanic regions and the rest of the Caribbean, as defined above, based largely on the way the plantation societies developed. Hoetink (1985) outlines several differences between the Hispanic regions and the others on the basis of economic, social, and cultural discrepancies. The Spanish Caribbean was marked by two periods of plantation economy: the first, at the beginning of the colonial period, developed just after conquest and was to last not even a century, and the second developed only after plantation economies were well established in the other islands in the late 18th century. In fact, the lag in the development of a sugar mono-culture in the Hispanic Caribbean using intensive slave labour and the concomitant physical, social and cultural domination was instrumental in the

social and cultural development of these areas. As Spanish interests turned elsewhere, the colonists, native Americans, and Africans were left on their own to develop a peasant economy, syncretic culture and highly mixed population leading to a “fluid type of socioracial structure,” and retaining the Spanish language and Catholic religion (Hoetink 1985: 58). By contrast, in the non-Hispanic Caribbean, there was no break in the plantation economy until, in some areas, well after emancipation, and thus a more well-defined class/race correlation developed, as well as distinctions in language and religion. In the Hispanic islands Spanish is the only language widely spoken, in contrast to most of the other Caribbean islands, where a Creole is spoken in a diglossic relation to an official European language, whether it be Dutch, English, or French (ibid.: 57).

Similarities can thus be seen across those colonies where a continuous plantation production system with slave labour was employed. For Beckles (1997; see also Craton 1997b: 226), the development of comparable economic and demographic structures in the different colonies posed problems to the planters that elicited similar responses. Colonial solutions to the control of slaves that greatly outnumbered their European masters thus largely overrode imperial policies and many of the cultural differences that they reflected.¹ Because of this,

¹Distinctions between regions have also been accredited to the philosophical leanings of the particular colonizer, and how they become translated into legal codes and religious beliefs and practices. Beckles (1997: 199) writes, while positing broad similarities that overrode imperial distinctions due to “commonalities across imperial boundaries in colonial circumstances, and the slave owners’ search for broadly similar solutions within judicial administration,” that imperial laws reflected different philosophical leanings. The Spanish *Siete Partidas* was based on 13th century feudal practices, which both recognized the slaves as “persons with civic identities and a right to freedom” and the need to control them. Spanish colonial laws (1680) in the Caribbean thus incorporated obligatory baptism, the right to manumission along with strict policing and punishment (ibid.: 200). The French *Code Noir*, which also recognized the slave as a person with some rights, provided for baptism and manumission, as well as legal recourse for maltreatment. As well, as Catholics, Sundays and religious holidays were to be observed by slaves, and slaves could form families. However, several restrictions were imposed, such that slaves could not own property, were executed for striking whites, could be chained and whipped as punishment (but not tortured), could not assemble nor marry without owner’s permission, and could not own nor sell sugar cane (ibid.). English laws, on the other hand, reflected the secularized state, and provided no religious incorporation of the slaves. As such, slaves were not regarded as persons with any social or legal rights. Rather than being imposed by the imperial power, colonies devised their own slave codes: the Barbadian code of 1668 thus deemed slaves as “wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws and practices” of the “English Nation” (cited in Beckles 1997: 201). Torture was a public spectacle, and ensuing death was not considered criminal. Even outright murder, until the end of

similar social structures and relations developed across the different territorial boundaries. However, variations in intensity of production, usually due to the kind of crop being grown, determined the number of slaves needed, and according to some authors, treatment and general living conditions were better on smaller plantations (Craton 1997a: 215, Engerman and Higman 1997). The type of crop and amount of land devoted to crop production are also factors in production intensity, and in differentiating the relations of masters to slaves and in the general socio-economic development of the different islands. In Barbados, for example, most of the land was given over to sugar production; on many plantations slaves lived in barracks, and they had no land to grow food for their own consumption (Green 1998). The owners were therefore obliged to provide most of the sustenance for the workers, and therefore were able to control, and minimize, their intake of food. In Dominica, on the other hand, the extremely mountainous topography, as well as the differing interests of the groups of planters, did not allow for a large proportion of the land to be put under sugar production, which cannot grow on the extreme slopes found there. Much land was therefore available for provision gardens, so that the slaves were able to produce their food, in spite of their heavy work requirements on the plantation. This arrangement was more beneficial to the planters, as they did not have to put out money to fuel their labour force, which conveniently produced its own food.

Further territorial distinctions can be made on the basis of the evolution of the plantation / peasant economy after Emancipation (1834-1838 for British Colonies) and whether or not indentured workers (and thus new cultural elements) were brought in; government policies concerning workers, education, and women's rights; the development of the rural peasant economy; urbanization;

the 18th century and impending abolition, was only punishable by a fine. As well, until slavery neared its end, the rights to have a family, to leisure time, or to legal recourse against masters were inexistant (ibid.). Dutch laws resembled the French provisions in that they were allowed religious instruction but were at the same time considered as property and their submission and exploitation was essential (ibid.: 202). Danish laws as well originally provided for the slaves as social beings, protecting them from inhuman cruelties (ibid.). However, in all areas where laws were, at the outset, less harsh, they became more so as the slave population increased, and the colonists felt more need to suppress them (ibid.: 203).

and more recently, the development of tourism and off-shore industries. All of these things have had an impact on the development of cultural configurations and social relations and tensions, so one must employ caution when drawing generalizations about any facet of Caribbean social and cultural life. At the same time, while local cultural specificities exist, some general parallels can be drawn in regards to the social and cultural development of the various Afro-Caribbean populations in the different territories, due, in part, to similar historical experiences and in part to the repercussions of current on-going wider processes of global and regional (i.e. Caribbean) political and economic involvement. While many of these processes have much in common with other parts of the colonial and post-colonial world, the Caribbean region, because of its historical, cultural, economic, and geographic particularities, has its own story to tell. In this way, the “Caribbean” can be spoken about, with some reservation, in general terms, that all the while allow for the comparison of particular cases. This can be seen in the development of similar kinship systems, family and landholding patterns, much of which was described in Chapter 2, as well as cultural expressions such as language, religion, music, etc. These have been linked to the circumstances of slavery which necessitated the reinvention of social relations, institutions, and culture, under the hegemonic influence of European masters and through, in part, the reinterpretation of African social and cultural forms.

In the following historical overview of Dominica the particular complexities of Dominican social, cultural, economic, and political development will be discussed, revealing the cleavages and tensions that emerged based on colour, economic situation, and gender.

3.2 Dominica Prior to Emancipation (1834)

Dominica, like other islands in the region, was colonized by Europeans who developed a plantation economy, and enforced slave labour for the production of goods that were then exported back to Europe. While Dominica holds certain similarities with the region in general, especially family patterns and

kinship, this island's particular colonial history is due in large part to the island's topography, which made difficult the large-scale cultivation of sugar; to the continuing presence of native people; and to interactions of French and British with regards to the colony.

As other islands were colonized, the Amerindian population known as the Island Carib or, according to some, more correctly as the Kalinago (Honychurch 1995: 20),² who regularly engaged in inter-island travel, retreated to Dominica and St. Vincent from where they launched attacks on European settlements on other islands. Dominica, along with St. Vincent, was declared a neutral territory in 1660 (Taylor 1972a: 9), and was not to be colonized but left to the native population (Honychurch 1995: 47). Escaped or captured slaves from raids on other islands were adopted into the Kalinago communities on Dominica. The Kalinago were ultimately granted a reserve of 3,700 acres in 1905 (ibid.: 21) and Dominica is the only Caribbean island now to have a recognized indigenous population and reserve, although many have been absorbed into the mainstream Afro-Caribbean population. Accounts show that early settlers had interactions with the native population, and a priest, Raymond Breton, visited them over a twelve-year period, in the 17th century, documenting their culture and language (Taylor 1972a). Evidence of early interactions has survived among the present population, for example, in the knowledge of plants, the local terms used to designate them, and in boat-making techniques. The position of the indigenous population in Dominica is one of ambivalence: they are celebrated as a national symbol, but disdained as morally inferior by many Afro-Caribbean Dominicans. Linguistically and culturally, they have been integrated to the mainstream culture, but maintain their distinct identity through their attachment to their territory, through cultural groups and celebrations, by making and selling handicrafts such as baskets made of local vegetation, and by consciously attempting to maintain bloodlines.

² Father Raymond Breton, a French missionary to Dominica in the 17th century, stated that their real name is 'Callinago' (Taylor 1972b:18).

In spite of the 1660 decree to leave Dominica to its indigenous inhabitants, settlers, at first temporary, arrived, and eventually the island became colonized. These first settlers consisted of a few French families who cut timber, and the first permanent settlements arose in the early 1700s. French and free-coloured settlers with their slaves, began inhabiting the island from at least 1727, and there is record of blacks on the island in 1707, according to one priest's writings (Boromé 1972a). By 1727, fifty or so families were established (Honychurch 1995: 47) and they began to form a plantocracy, pushing the Kalinago further towards the windward side of the island.

In the same year (1727) a commander was appointed by the French (Honychurch 1995: 50), who remained in control of the island until 1763 when Dominica was transferred to the British under the Treaty of Paris at the end of the Seven Years War between those two powers (ibid: 60). Recaptured by the French in 1778 (ibid.:85-86), the territory fell once again to the British in 1783 under the Treaty of Versailles (ibid.: 90), and remained in British hands, but not without some contestation by the French, until independence nearly 200 years later in 1978. During the period between formal French control of the island in 1727 and its final transfer to the British in 1783, the population grew and diversified, and with it social relations between the different groups developed. Myers (1976: 55) states that in 1730, there were 351 whites, 30 free coloured, and 395 slaves, for a total population of 776, based on the French census report of that year (ibid.)

By 1753, Dominica had a population of 4,690 settlers, including 3,530 slaves, the remaining 1,160 being white and free coloured, in addition to about 900 Caribs (Myers 1976: 55). Ten years later, in 1763 when the British took control of the island for the first time, 6,000 acres of land were under cultivation of coffee, which was Dominica's main export crop during slavery and would remain so until the 1830s. Cotton and cocoa were also important export crops (Goodridge 1972: 153). The population in 1763 was comprised of 1,718 whites, 500 free coloureds and 5,872 slaves for a total non-indigenous population of 8,090, almost the double of that of ten years earlier (Myers 1976: 55).

According to one account (ECLAC n.d.),³ during the 18th century, prior to British colonization of the island, three more or less distinct social groups lived there: the European, mostly French and coloured group with their slaves, a small number of free blacks, and the Caribs. The last two were probably set up in independent villages, which may have had some interaction. The other group set themselves up along the coast, with some degree of organization in order to maintain their stronghold over the slaves, but without any unified or direct colonial support: “the slave-owners did not constitute an organic group capable of imposing unilaterally their interests on the enslaved” (ECLAC n.d.: 52). While each of these groups was self-reliant and more or less equal to one another, without direct colonial control (apart from the French commander), they still interacted within the framework of the wider regional colonial context, according to this author, something that must have influenced their interactions, especially with regards to racial hierarchies of the time.

The French slave laws, the *Code Noir* decreed in 1685, prescribed baptism and practice of the Catholic faith by slaves, so that under French rule, most slaves had been at least nominally converted to Catholicism (Honychurch 1995: 173) and most of the settlers came from those islands under French jurisdiction. Priests were present well before any other European settlers, working among the Kalinago (see above). The parish in Roseau was founded in 1730, with a chapel for 600 worshippers, and the Jesuits established a plantation in the southeastern part of the island at Grand Bay in 1749, and while their interest was primarily commercial, the 200 slaves were baptized and given some Catholic instruction (Honychurch 1995: 55-58). A common language was spoken, the French Creole that resembles closely the dialects spoken in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and most probably a dialect of French was maintained by the French settlers and the priests. The French *Code Noir* also prescribed freedom for the children born of unions between Frenchmen and slave women. The free coloured were able to

³ This unpublished document was made available to me at the Roseau library, the only classifying information being the title and the organization by which it was prepared, the Social Development Unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The author's name and

inherit from their European fathers, thus gaining economic power and were able to establish themselves as planters. In Dominica, free coloured people from the French islands established themselves as an elite alongside white planters and administrators, possessing land, businesses, and slaves.

Most early Caribbean societies under the colonial slave regime, including Dominica, were characterized by the existence of a white privileged class, a European and white Creole⁴ sector of varying class origins; black slaves, and the emergence of a mixed group of descendents of white men and slave women who, in some cases, were freed by their white fathers (becoming what is called 'free coloured' persons), or were given privileged positions in the slave hierarchy. Manumitted slaves and free people of colour thus formed a third level in the slave/master system. This type of stratification during slavery has often been referred to as a type of "caste" system because each level formed a fairly distinct social grouping, hierarchically arranged in relation to the others, each in its turn stratified within. This internal stratification was mainly organized according to occupation and wealth, but among slaves, status distinctions based on place of origin and ethnicity were common, and within the coloured "caste", gradations of colour following the general colour/status hierarchy were important⁵ (Heuman 1997: 139, 145). Thus the coloured children of slaves moved up the hierarchy, either by being manumitted by their white fathers, or by being accorded an occupation of higher status (Smith 1988: 96). This system was not rigid as boundaries between slaves, free-coloured, and whites were permeable because of sexual unions, and movement across the slave and free "caste" boundaries occurred (Heuman 1997: 139). The progeny of colonists and female slaves thus blurred the distinction between slave and master, black and white, the "other" and the "us" through the various gradations of colour, and by creating links of kinship

the year do not appear, but it was probably written in the early 1980s.

⁴ The term 'Creole' here refers to descendents of European colonists, born in the Caribbean.

⁵ In the British Caribbean, colour/race demarcations were: 'mulatto', the result of a union between black and white; 'sambo', between black and mulatto; 'quadroon', between mulatto and white; 'mustee', between quadroon and white; 'musteefino', between mustee and white (Heuman 1997: 145).

which were sometimes recognized by the white father. Women of mixed ancestry would often produce offspring lighter than themselves through liaisons with white men, children who could, eventually become absorbed into the white population (Smith 1988: 102-103). The free coloured population created an ambiguous middle ground, neither black nor white, that benefited from freedom yet not all the privileges of the whites (Heuman 1997: 145).

After 1763, the population of Dominica expanded greatly: by 1773, the white population had doubled to 3,350, the free coloured had only grown by half to 750, and the slave population had almost quadrupled, to a substantial 18,753. The great increase in slave population can be attributed to the British development of their own plantations and the importation of slaves for resale, and in the white population, to the presence of soldiers as well as British settlers: seven years later, in 1780, the slave population had fallen to 12,713, while the white population had dropped to below 1763 levels at 1,066, with the free coloured group also dropping back down, to 543. This is likely due to the recapture of the island by the French in 1778. However, in 1787, after the island had returned to British hands, the white population only increased slightly to 1,236 whites, while there were 445 free coloured people and 14,967 slaves.

A contemporary observer, Thomas Atwood, described the free population of Dominica in 1791, as consisting of the "English, French, Spaniards, Italians, and Genoese, who are native of those countries in Europe, or their issue, born in the West Indies; which latter are called Creoles... there are also a few Americans" (1971[1791]: 208) "The other free inhabitants of this island are free mestiffs, free mulattos, free negros, and native Indians" (ibid.: 219). The British he numbers at about 600, the French being more numerous (although he does not provide a figure), and the slaves, more than half of whom belong to the French, are counted at between fifteen and sixteen thousand. Indeed the statistics for 1805, just fourteen years later, enumerate 1,594 whites, 2,822 free coloured, and 22,083 slaves (1976: 55). This extremely large population of slaves is due in part to the use of the island as a transit station for slaves being shipped to other colonies,

perhaps in anticipation of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Notably here, the non-white free population had grown considerably since 1787, outnumbering by far the white population, a trend that was to continue. Just prior to Emancipation, in 1832, there were 791 whites to 4,077 free coloured people. Births can account for some of the increase in this population, as can manumission which was increased just before Emancipation, but importantly, an influx of free coloured people from the neighbouring islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe was likely occasioned by newly imposed stringent laws restricting their freedom in their home islands (Baker 1994).

Under British rule, the French and free coloured remained in Dominica, though with limited rights. They were allowed to retain the lands they held under cultivation at the time of British take-over, under the condition that they pledge allegiance to the British flag. However, they did not benefit from full civil or political rights. Nevertheless, French colonial social and cultural life continued to flourish and to influence the development of Dominican society, and the language and religion – French Creole and the Roman Catholicism – were firmly entrenched: even though the British were present, they did not achieve cultural hegemony in the rural areas until well into the 20th century. The Catholic Church, rather than any British institutions, became the leading factor in cultural and social hegemony among the French-influenced slave population. Atwood remarks that “French planters in all the settlements belonging to that nation have their negros baptized, and taught some prayers, which they repeat on their knees every morning before they go to work, and every evening after finishing” (1971[1791]: 259).

Because of the small size of French plantations in Dominica, Baker (1995) suggests there were better relations between slaves and planters on those plantations than on British owned plantations, which were only established after British occupation and tended to be much larger. French owners resided on their plantations and thus interacted directly with their slaves, perhaps fostering patron-client relations (that exist in inter-class relations today), whereas English planters

often resided abroad, and hired overseers in their stead, whose only interest was productivity. Atwood (1971[1791]) remarked that many of the British owned slaves perished or escaped to the mountainous interior, due to the harsh living conditions imposed upon them and the difficult work they endured, especially of clearing hardwood forest in preparation to plant. This he attributes to British ignorance in their choice of slaves (domestic slaves or Africans) rather than to cruelty, and, in support of slavery, he goes on to laud generally the good conditions of the slaves throughout the region (*ibid.*: 225-6). However, it is probable that in Dominica, the conditions imposed by the British were harsher than those on the French-owned plantations, which could follow from either the fact that their operations were larger and more 'industrial' or that the slaves were considered differently: under British law, the slave had no personal rights, in fact, was not a person, whereas under French law, slaves had some, if very limited, personal rights (see note 1). In any case, the large British estates were often attacked and pillaged by Maroon slaves (runaways) who had established settlements in the interior of Dominica, (Baker 1994: 95) becoming especially violent after 1805, until most were captured or killed at the end of 1814 (Honychurch 1995: 118).

The division of labour on the plantations has not been researched for Dominica but would likely reveal much the same distinctions as those described in Chapter 2, with both women and men carrying out field tasks, while men would also fill the role of skilled tradesman and overseer, and women would do most of the domestic labour. Field tasks varied depending on the crop, and the division of labour was variable as well, according to the size of the plantation. On smaller plantations, women could be called upon to do both field labour and domestic service.

In Dominica, British colonial rule was superimposed upon the already existing social groups, which nonetheless prevailed, and continued to grow in numbers. This created a rather complex social scenario, with status divisions along both colour and linguistic (French-English) lines, but also some social

stratification within each of the groups. As the population statistics cited above show, the free-coloured sector greatly outnumbered the white population in Dominica by 1832.

The majority of the free coloured sector were traders, craftsman, or small land owners, and they controlled, in 1820, only 19.1 percent of the coffee production, and only 3 and 2.7 percent of sugar and rum production, respectively (Trouillot 1988: 99). In addition, they were largely an urban-based population, making up the majority of the population of Roseau in 1832, at approximately 60 percent (Baker 1994: 127). Unlike their white, British or French, counterparts, the free coloured people had no mother country, other than Dominica, with which to affiliate and through which to create their identity and were therefore moved to establish themselves as 'the Dominicans'. In 1822, they formed an association in order to gain political and civil rights (ECLACS n.d.: 81), and in 1831, the 'Brown Privilege Bill' was passed, according them these rights. In 1832, three coloured men were elected members of the Assembly.⁶ While this was to be commended as a move towards greater democracy, the ascension to power of this group was to further entrench existing racial divisions between both the white elite whose power they had usurped, whose interests they did not represent, and who held them in contempt for their lack of British political savvy and culture (especially the use of the English language), and the enslaved population, largely rural, whose well-being was not high on the political agenda of either faction. Women of any group were not privy to official political voice of any sort at that time, nor would they be until half way through the 20th century when universal suffrage was accorded.

⁶ During this period, Dominica was governed by a tripartite structure that included a British Governor, a nominated council, and an elected assembly. In 1871, Dominica became part of the Leeward Islands federation, and the seat of government moved to Antigua. In 1899, Dominica came under Crown Colony Rule, and was directly under British control (Baker 1994).

3.3 Post-emancipation: 1834-1939

No more slavery! She had to laugh! 'These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people's feet. New ones worse than old ones – more cunning, that's all. (Rhys 1966)

British slavery ended in 1834,⁷ after which commenced a four-year apprenticeship period wherein former slaves were bound to remain on the plantation to work for a wage. Apprenticeship was a transition period, conceived to facilitate the transformation of slaves into a salaried labour force, and to avoid mass exodus from the plantations and hence their economic failure. This period was also supposed to allow the necessary legal, institutional, and plantation management changes to be made (Baker 1994: 100-101). During Apprenticeship, however, many former slaves, especially those employed in field work, refused to remain on the plantation, or left after the apprenticeship period was over, preferring instead their new-found freedom, independence and self-sufficiency to a continuing obligation to their former owners. The general failure of this system is evident from the number of indentured labourers brought into the sugar producing islands of Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, as well as into the mainland colony of Guyana, to replace recalcitrant ex-slaves who were not at all eager to continue the work they had carried out during slavery. In Dominica, the failure of Apprenticeship to fulfill its goal is manifest in the inability to create a wage-based working class, and the difficulty in maintaining production on some plantations due to labour shortages (Trouillot 1988).

In contrast to other Caribbean colonies, Dominica's main plantation crop prior to Emancipation (1834) was coffee, employing an estimated half the slaves in 1810, compared to sugar plantations which employed only 30 percent of the total slaves at that time. Decline in coffee was largely due to a blight that wiped out production in some areas in the mid to late 1830s (Trouillot 1988: 56).⁸ Baker

⁷ French slavery ended in 1848, while the Spanish kept slaves until 1886.

⁸ In 1833, the year just prior to Emancipation, coffee exports measured 1,612,528 pounds. By 1836, they had fallen to 186,426 pounds, and by 1838, had dropped to 43,079 pounds. Amounts rose again slightly, to remain between 100,000 and 200,000 pounds until 1849, when they dropped

points out that because of the blight, many of the French planters had no money to pay wages to the apprentices. Former slaves were reluctant to remain on the plantations, and added to the difficulty of some planters to pay them, the refusal of others to do so, and a hastily put together system of regulation, “apprenticeship came to be linked, in the eyes of ex-slaves, with coercion, generating new frictions between manager and labourer” (Baker 1994: 102). Stipendiary magistrates, “officers receiving half-pay in the army or navy – who would be beyond the influence of local politics and free from local passions” (ibid.: 101) were assigned to the different islands to monitor the state of affairs, and ensure some sort of order and justice in the absence of any judiciary system. They were often biased towards planters’ interests. For Dominica, according to a report on the apprenticeship system in 1836, there were five stipendiary magistrates (CO 71/80, No. 37). This report contains the responses to a questionnaire administered to each of the magistrates. The responses are similar for each. One such magistrate’s response to the question “In what condition have you found the apprenticed labourers on the estates on which not more than 20 serve?” was revealing of the relations and conditions on those estates in comparison to the larger estates:

The apprentices on the small estates alluded to appear to be happy and comfortable. The cultivation being chiefly provisions, there is not such a strict attention paid either to working hours, or the quantity of work daily performed, which is the great bone of contention on the larger estates; added to which, the employers and employed are more on an equality with each other. (Colonial Office 1836: Enclosure No. 1)

What exactly is meant by the phrase “on an equality with each other” is open to interpretation, but I believe it to mean an overlapping of socio-economic proximity, race, as most small plantations were owned by free coloured proprietors, and the preferred use of sharecropping over salaried work. Another stipendiary’s answer noted no real difference, except that the smaller estates, being mostly coffee producers, were in a bad state because of the blight that

to 48,446 pounds. (Trouillot 1988: 54). Amounts continued to decrease, and today, coffee production is negligible, grown and processed mostly for home use.

destroyed the plants. Many of the stipendiary magistrates remarked on the lamentable state of the free children, whose mothers did not want them to work on the plantations. Most plantations had no school, and the stipendiaries complained that the children were often left unattended, as most adults and older children worked, and took to thieving, sometimes with the encouragement of parents. However, parents valued more the freedom of their young ones than the extra money their labour could procure. The following comment illustrates:

There is a great dislike on the part of the parents to allow their free children to work, saying "They are free." I know instances where such answers have been made by the mothers to proposals from their employers to feed and clothe their children, if they would merely drive the fowls away from their doors. In fact, a woman objected to my having her son, about seven years old, on the same grounds, and being afraid the other apprentices would say, "She had sold him to me." (Colonial Office 1836: Enclosure No. 1)

Most magistrates proposed the implementation of a police force, to oblige the apprentices to remain on the plantations. One commented: "I strongly recommend the formation of an efficient police, without which the working of the apprenticeship system has not a fair trial; vagrancy and all its accompanying evils would then be greatly checked" (Colonial Office 1836). The same magistrate also recommended the erection of stocks in the marketplace and on the estates for punishment by public humiliation and discomfort without injury, unlike during slavery when beatings and other forms of molestation were common practice. Clearly, while some methods of coercion had been transformed with the end of slavery, becoming more 'humane', the colonial officials were searching for a way to discipline and regulate these people formerly held in bondage, to compel them to remain on the plantations.

To the chagrin of the planters and colonial government, the incentive of wages did not attract the former slaves to remain as salaried workers on the plantations, as they cherished their freedom and besides, had long provided for themselves as well as for the local and regional market, and were accustomed to selling their products, not their labour. In fact, for many, the provision grounds

had been and continued to be a source of profit, as well as a source of subsistence.

One observer, within the first decade following emancipation, remarked:

The profit of which (provision grounds) often proved to an industrious negro much more valuable than wages of the estate for the whole year. Strange as it may seem, these vegetable products ordinarily fetched very high prices on the market. One reason for this was the large scale exportation of yams, for instance, to the larger, more prosperous islands such as Trinidad and Barbados where the soil was less favourable for their growth. (Leevy 1972: 34, cited in ECLAC n.d.: 108)

Following apprenticeship, large numbers of slaves left the plantations, especially those working on properties requiring wage labour. Those who remained preferred the *métayage* system, or sharecropping, where up to half the crop belonged to the labourer, to wage labour, while some who left supplemented their own crops with cash from plantation labour. Under the *métayage* arrangement, farmers cleared and planted land, then gave a portion of the harvest, sometimes as much as half, to the landlord, who was greatly advantaged by this system as he did not need to be present on the plantation to oversee production. Another arrangement involved giving the owner two or three days work in exchange for using a portion of the land for themselves (Trouillot 1988: 80). These arrangements allowed them to continue to live on the plantation and grow provisions and crops for their own benefit, whereas those who were wage workers could not use the estate land to grow their own crops, and were usually obliged to pay rent for their houses and any land they used for themselves. However, the *métayage* system was not without its pitfalls, as it was sometimes exploited by owners, who would evict tenants before they were fairly compensated for improvements on the land. The case of Fanny Firmin, a woman who had worked the same land under the *métayage* system for forty years, only to be evicted without compensation, demonstrates the heartlessness of some owners (Royal Commission 1894). In one parish, in 1897, the priest recorded sixty-five evictions (Trouillot 1988: 87, citing Sugar Commission Report 1898b: 142).

Others left the plantations to establish new villages, either on unused coastal areas known as the Queen's Three Chains, a strip of land around the

perimeter of the island, approximately 60 meters wide (Baker 1994: 62),⁹ kept clear for defence purposes (Baker 1994: 103) or on the ridges between the fertile river valleys where the estates were established (Honychurch, personal communication, 1999). These people valued their new-found freedom, and set themselves up on the abundant unused land (either by squatting Crown land, abandoned estates, or on lots bequeathed to them by owners, or some were able to buy lots) to support themselves through farming, as they had during slavery. They both had little faith in their ex-masters, and, according to one author, conceived of land differently than the latter:

They sought independence from their former masters and chose to create a separate and marginal identity for themselves. Land had a different value for them than it had for their former masters: they thought of it as an expression of freedom and identity rather than as an economic resource to exploit to exhaustion. (Baker 1994: 109)

It is less than obvious, however, that former slaves *chose* to be marginal. They were not accorded any political rights, but nevertheless sought autonomy from colonial oppression: they chose autonomy, not marginalization. Marginalization was perhaps the only way they could obtain their autonomy. This was evident from their refusal to send their children to work for others, lest they be re-enslaved. They were suspicious of the intentions of the colonial government and their former owners who would force them into landless wage labour that consumed all their time and energy. In this case, they would end up with fewer benefits than when they were slaves: they would have no access to provision grounds and their money would be spent to pay rent and buy provisions. In choosing autonomy, they chose options that would benefit them the most, given their exclusion from mainstream society through pressures from the planters to promote their own interests, coupled with a racism that pervaded and upheld socio-economic divisions.

⁹ According to Baker (1994: 62), a chain is sixty-six feet, so the Queen's Three Chains was measured at 198 feet from the high-water mark.

Trouillot points out that the development of the peasantry in Dominica extended from a conscious choice to reject wage labour in preference of sharecropping, a conclusion he draws from examining the redistribution of workers in the monthly reports of stipendiary magistrates. Those estates that demanded wage labour lost the most workers, while smaller estates that favoured sharecropping, perhaps through lack of other means to maintain workers, drew more labourers: “the combined distributions show that the former slaves who remained on the estates or returned to them had already made a clear choice against wage labor and in favor of sharecropping or labour-rent arrangements less than three months after the end of Apprenticeship. This preference would soon lead to the implementation of the peasant labor process in the production of export commodities on the estates themselves” (1988: 81).

These options usually involved obtaining land in one of the ways discussed, growing their own food, and procuring cash in any way they could, including temporary work on estates. Money and material goods were thought of in relation to a specific purpose rather than for day-to-day necessities, and therefore working for wages, as a sole means of survival, was barely conceivable, but cash was nonetheless sought after.

In Dominica, rather than creating a salaried labour force totally dependent on plantation agriculture for their livelihood, a peasant economy developed, based on what Trouillot (1988) has called the “peasant labour processes,” where subsistence production was supplemented by marketing of food crops to both local and inter-island buyers, as well as some cash crop production, either on one’s own land or through the *métayage* system. Some worked part of the time on plantations for wages, but maintained their own gardens as well. Even though former plantation slaves were involved to a certain and fluctuating extent in a market economy, because they were not dependent on the plantations for subsistence but only for cash to buy commodities, when cash crops – and thus plantations – failed, they were usually able to retract more fully into a technologically simple, subsistence mode of production.

Although former slaves valued their independence, they were not adverse to participating in the cash economy. But rather than creating venues that would assist them in becoming successful, the colonial government had the planters' interests at heart and therefore implemented measures that would undermine the petty cultivators, causing them to become even more autonomous and mistrustful of colonial intentions. Various strategies to regulate the farmers were used, including evictions from Crown lands, taxation and licences, as well as differential levies on plantation products and small-holder products, which penalized both the petty cultivators and the small estate proprietors, usually coloured. Resistance turned into confrontations between peasants and colonial forces, which at times turned to violence.

In 1844, the colonial government undertook a general census, which was interpreted by former slaves as a way to regulate them and perhaps even re-enslave them. This led to uprisings in several areas of the island, in what is known as *La Guerre Nègre*. Martial Law was declared, troops were brought in, and several deaths occurred. In 1853, tenants on the Batalie estate on the western part of the island were asked to pay rent or to leave. Their resistance was widely supported, even among coloured members of the elected Assembly, though they finally lost their battle (ECLAC n.d.: 109; Honychurch 1995: 137; Baker 1994: 120). A road tax was introduced in 1856, which required men to pay 2s and women 1s 4d per trimester, causing the need for cash. This tax was instituted in part to force peasants to do wage labour on plantations, as access to lucrative markets was made difficult for them. The tax was later increased, but revised to allow people to pay with their labour instead of money which they seldom had (Baker 1994: 111). In 1886, a comprehensive land tax was imposed on owners in rural, previously untaxed lands, only to be increased in 1888 (Honychurch 1995: 142). This tax targeted small proprietors, as evaluations for small holdings were at or above market value, while for large estates, they were usually evaluated at lower than value. The peasant farmers, already low on cash, had difficulty paying the taxes. An estimated 1,700 properties were seized in 1893-94. In 1893, in La

Plaine, one resident was unable to pay his land tax. This region was at the time one of the poorest in that people had little access to cash, as it had been a sugar producing region and sugar production had long been halted. While cassava (*fawin*) and arrowroot (*toloman*) were grown and processed into flour to sell, it was difficult for peasant farmers to bring their goods to Roseau over land. When the eviction was to take place, local residents resisted police and then soldiers, ending in the death of four residents (Honychurch 1995: 142).

Licences were required to control participation in certain activities, such as the production and sale of rum or the use of boats, making it difficult for the peasant or small proprietor to take part, thus keeping them “from engaging in activities that might increase their freedom from plantation labour and to prevent the latter from expanding their land” (Trouillot 1988: 108). In the Report of the Royal Commission in 1894 following the land tax riot, petitions, signed by local parish priests, for the eastern regions, including La Plaine, pointed out, in addition to their difficulty in paying the land tax, the unfairness of licensing fees on boats that, because of the rough conditions of the sea for several months of the year, were not used all the time. The licensing of horses was also contested: because people had to pay to use these means of transportation, it made getting their little produce to market more difficult, and therefore the procuring of cash, to pay these duties, even more tenuous, especially when plantations were not operating. As well, export levies were introduced that discriminated against the non-British producers; for example only 1s was charged per 100 lbs of sugar, which was mainly produced on British-owned plantations, whereas for arrowroot, mostly produced by small proprietors who were mainly French or coloured, a payment of 2s per 100 lbs was required (Trouillot 1988: 109).

The Royal Commission Report of 1894 shows that villagers in La Plaine were unable to make money to pay their taxes, and had to “labour abroad to satisfy the Amt: so we has no benefit” (Royal Commission 1894: 99). The taxes and licenses created a necessity for cash, and incited people to work on the plantations, making it difficult to improve their situation or to participate fully in

the mainstream market economy as farmers. While people desired and relished their autonomy, as freedom from control by their former masters, they did not necessarily crave total or even partial marginalization from the mainstream economy and the benefits it could offer them. Marginalization was the price they paid for their freedom. Their ability to provide for themselves, and being pushed into a corner by colonial endeavours to curb their development, in addition to the unpredictable ravages of nature on crops, made them autonomous and more self-sufficient than they might otherwise have been, or wanted to be.

When coffee production dropped off in the 1830s, sugar, latently (compared to other West Indian colonies) became Dominica's most important export crop, reaching its heyday in the 1840s. At first sugar brought a good price and attracted plantation owners to grow it. Sugar prices dropped in Britain due to the deregulation of the British market: in 1854, barriers were lifted and by 1874, sugar entered Britain from around the world. European-produced beet sugar became an important competitor, and from the 1840s to the 1880s, sugar cane went from filling 95 percent of the world sugar market to under 50 percent (Trouillot 1988: 56), affecting all of Britain's sugar producing colonies in the Caribbean. Prices of molasses and rum also declined during that period. Production of sugar in Dominica dwindled from 72 per cent of total exports in 1882, to 14.6 percent in 1896. (ibid.: 58). With the fall of sugar prices, plantations stopped producing, leaving Dominican peasants to their own means to find necessary cash to pay taxes and purchase sundries. Many chose migration to the gold mining areas of Venezuela and French Guyana: in 1896 alone, 1,200 Dominicans migrated (out of a population of just over 20,000). A priest's testimony for the report of the West India Royal Commission of 1897 shows:

their condition [is] worse now than formerly; a great number are in want, not in want of food in the country but almost anything else; not many earn wages... wages have decreased principally owing to the fall in the price of sugar, also because landowners have no money to cultivate their land; the peasant cultivators are distressed, they do not cultivate their land, they prefer to go to Cayenne and work for wages. (Royal Commission 1897, para. 538, in ECLACS n.d.: 112)

Both men and women migrated during this period, although men migrated considerably more: in 1901, the ratio of males to one thousand females was 801 (Myers 1976: 71). During the period between the two World Wars, migration continued, as there were 5,637 more departures than arrivals (Myers 1976: 92). During this period, Myers suggests that one attraction for migrant workers was the oil refineries in Curaçao and Aruba, in addition to United States, especially during the 1920s (Myers 1976: 94). In the 1920s and 1930s migration towards Cuba and Dominican Republic to work on sugar plantations also occurred (Green 1998: 289).

Table 1: Population Size, Sex Ratio, and Average Annual Increase, 1871-1991

Date	Population			Sex Ratio/M per 100 F	Average Annual Increase/Decrease
	Male	Female	Total		
1871	12,737	14,441	27,178	88	
1881	12,867	15,344	28,211	84	103
1891	12,059	14,782	26,841	82	-137
1901	12,870	16,024	28,894	80	205
1911	15,231	18,632	33,863	82	497
1921	16,760	20,299	37,059	83	318
1946	22,277	25,347	47,624	88	423
1960	28,167	31,749	59,916	89	878
1970	32,968	36,581	69,549	90	963
1981	36,754	37,041	73,795	99	385
1991	35,471	35,712	71,183	99	-261
2001*			70,925		-158

*Population for 2001 is based on preliminary census results, obtained from the Statistical Division, Dominica.

Source: Dominica Statistical Division, 1991, 2001.

By the late 1880s, after the decline of sugar production in Dominica cocoa, important prior to the British occupation of the island, became once again a significant crop, especially for small-scale farmers, as the dried cocoa bean was easy to carry to market (Green 1998: 397). In 1883, cocoa accounted for only 4 percent of the export market, while by 1891, it made up almost 40 percent of the market. Cocoa's preeminence was short lived although it remained an important crop, as limes and their products took over as the leading exports.

Cocoa was grown easily and cheaply by small proprietors in the steeper areas, but the colonial government promoted the lime industry because it was profitable for large planters (Baker 1994: 143). Besides being easier to carry the dried beans as a head load to market than limes, cocoa trees could be easily propagated in the field, in contrast to the hybrid lime trees, which were largely nursery started by the Roseau Botanical Gardens (Trouillot 1988: 62). As well, limes took several years to bear. Limes garnered the support of the newly appointed president, Hesketh Bell, who, under Crown Colony rule, opened the road to the interior, so that new lands could be sold to English planters and put under cultivation. Five thousand acres were cleared and sold (*ibid.*), and workers from Antigua and Montserrat, sorely in need of work due to the decline in sugar production, migrated to labour on these new plantations. The Census of 1911 counts 891 persons born in Antigua and 963 from Montserrat, ten times the numbers in the 1891 Census (Myers 1976: 81). These immigrants, arriving via the northeast coast, settled in Marigot and Wesley, bringing with them the Wesleyan Methodist doctrine and an English Creole called Kokoy.

The colonial government's attempt to reinstate a British plantocracy through the promotion of lime production over cocoa exacerbated existing dualities between the elite and the peasant farmers because the latter were mostly excluded from participating, except for providing some wage labour on plantations and in processing juice, oil, and citric acid. Even then, labour on lime plantations was much less intensive than for sugar or even coffee.

Lime as the principal monocrop was undermined by the late 1920s due to diseases (withertip and red root disease); the American alcohol prohibition which reduced their importation of lime juice used in alcoholic beverages; the Great Depression; to a lesser degree, hurricanes; the end of WWI during which juice was given to soldiers to ward off disease; and increasing competition from other producers. As a result, both production and the market were slowed considerably. With the decline in lime production, cultivation of coconuts and especially vanilla increased (Trouillot 1988: 62). Trouillot argues that promotion of plantation crops always took precedence over crops that favoured small producers, reflecting “the plantocracy’s propensity to resist the preeminence of any crop easily produced on peasant-held plots of the hinterland, and to acclaim and dearly to sustain any crop that fitted the plantation labor process better than it did a peasant one. Coffee, cocoa, and vanilla required little local processing” (ibid.: 63). Not only did the planters want to protect their interests, but at that time, the colonial government, under the representation of Bell, was also promoting them.

The Depression of the 1930s greatly affected sugar estates and factories in the sugar producing islands, and strikes and riots ended in injuries and death in Trinidad and Barbados (Honychurch 1995: 163). Dominica, as a largely peasant economy, was spared the economic problems of other colonies, but with the demise of the lime industry, many plantations stopped producing altogether, making cash more and more difficult to come by, especially in areas like La Plaine.

Political developments

From just before Emancipation until WWII, Dominican politics were played out between, and for, the ruling elite groups and the colonial government, with little concern for the masses of rural cultivators, domestics, and vendors, except to maintain a hold on their labour. As well, the white population was divided according to national origin, as far as political rights were concerned: the French, since 1829, were allowed to vote, but not to be government

representatives, and in this respect were in the same position as the free coloured people (see ECLAC n.d.: 84). After the passing of the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill, free coloured men were elected to parliament so that by 1838, the House had a coloured majority, and remained so until Crown Colony Rule came into effect in 1898. By 1881, the descendants of the free-coloured population, numbering 6,505, outnumbered the remaining white population twentyfold, against a black population of 21,039 (English 1991: 43), and were well established as the reigning elite. The conditions of slavery and miscegenation had facilitated the ascendancy of a coloured elite, that, according to Smith (1988) would have slowly absorbed the remaining white colonists, and colour, that is closeness to European in appearance, had become in Dominica as elsewhere in the Caribbean a measure of status.

At the time the Brown Privilege Bill was passed (1831) the colony's government consisted of two chambers, one of appointed members, and the other of elected members by British proprietors of at least eighty acres of land and one hundred pounds of yearly income (*ibid.*: 84). After the Brown Privilege Bill was passed, the coloured elite quickly filled the majority of seats in the elected house (Honychurch 1995: 127), and thus began years of factionalism along the lines of colour. Unfortunately, the coloured members of Assembly had only their own class interests in view, and eclipsed the largely rural, black majority. This factionalism among the colony's leaders led Britain to attempt several solutions to governing Dominica, slowly diminishing their autonomy which finally ended at the end of the century (1898) in Crown Colony Rule, with Dominica placed under the Leeward Island Federation, whose Governor was seated in Antigua. This signalled the end of any form of elected representation, as local affairs were administered by a President with a small nominated Council, who followed orders of the Governor (*ibid.*: 132). In 1940, Dominica was removed from the Leeward Islands Federation, and placed in the Windward Islands Federation. In 1925, Dominica received a new constitution, and elected representation was once more allowed – there were four elected representatives that year. Suffrage was not

universal – in 1835, the prerequisite to vote was ownership of ten acres of land, or a leasehold of at least twenty pounds yearly, a lot of money at the time (Trouillot 1988: 100).

Political involvement and knowledge of the general population, especially in rural Dominica, was gravely lacking. As one commentator of the pre-war period states:

When some sort of representation was granted in the legislative council, it did not involve the people as adult suffrage was yet to come. The closest the rural population came to any form of political awareness would be on occasions when the Administrator or the Governor visited a village. Then he would receive a petition from the villagers appealing for pipe borne water, supply of a school, or improvement of the roads. The Principal of a school, where there was one, would usually be the person called upon to perform such a duty (Christian 1992: 15).

The ascension to power of the coloured population further entrenched already existing racial hierarchies, especially between the black population and the mulatto elite. Through their involvement in the political process, the coloured elite began to adopt the language of the colonialists, who held the education and especially the broken speech and writing of their Creole-speaking coloured political counterparts in contempt, as expressed in this excerpt from the British political voice, the *Colonist*: “Very few of them articulate English decently and still smaller number are able to write it with any degree of accuracy and propriety” (Boromé 1972b; 121, cited in ECLAC n.d.: 87). As well, since the majority were established in Roseau, and therefore used the political arena to look after their interests there, a rural-urban rift was exacerbated, the countryside already being cut off because of the difficult terrain that separated it from the town (ECLAC n.d.). In short, this period saw the development of an urban, mulatto elite that separated itself from the interests of the large plantation owners, mostly British, and the masses, mostly rural and black.

Social History after Emancipation

Despite relative lack of either hegemonic or direct state control, Dominican rural villages did not grow out of a social vacuum, but integrated elements of society and values that had existed during the period of slavery, including, and especially, divisions of labour and hierarchies built on the overlap of race, class, occupation, and gender, and adapted them to the new situation in which they found themselves. As well, Dominican peasants were also constantly faced with the pressures of colonial domination, which, while not a direct intervention in their daily lives, constituted a force of repression through tactics of exclusion by preventing them from participating in the dominant economy and to some extent, regulating gendered access to resources through differential salaries. The rural villages, because of this marginalization that excluded most of their residents from full political and economic participation, developed quasi-autonomously from the dominant sectors of society, the urban region, and neighbouring areas.

Many villages were established in proximity of the estate lands, allowing villagers to travel by day to the estates to work. The following quote from the Royal Commission Report of 1897 makes this clear:

There is a great desire among the people to settle on the land, this (is) a country of peasant proprietors, but they all want to work to supplement their production by wages, they come to the estates to work, and their holdings are not as a rule, too far off for this. (Royal Commission 1897, para. 255, cited in ECLAC n.d.: 113)

Following Emancipation, then, the modality of land tenure and occupancy was transformed, characterized by the growth of a peasant economy on the margins of plantation society (Baker 1994: 103). Many estates dwindled following Emancipation, due to crop failures and labour shortages, and some were sold while others were divided into lots, and some were abandoned or used only as part-time residences, leaving them open to squatting, or allowing peasants who had managed to accumulate some cash to purchase lots. Villages that grew out of squatter settlements, according to Baker, “developed a fluid structure that allowed

families and villages to move back and forth from degrees of independence to degrees of dependence on the cash-based economic system of their former masters” (1994: 108). These villages, built within the three chains close to shore or on mountainous ridges flanking estates lining the river valleys, became the foundation of rural Dominican society. The villages were configured somewhat differently in the various regions: in the more populous and somewhat less difficult terrain in the west, where most of the coffee plantations had been established, villages were more tightly knit, with houses closer together, whereas in the east, villages were more dispersed and houses further apart (ibid.: 111). Because the mountainous topography made travelling between areas difficult, or even treacherous, these villages or groups of villages became fairly isolated from one another, forming regional village enclaves around the island (Trouillot 1988). While virtually cut off from one another, they had some contact with Roseau, by boat or over land, as that is where produce was usually taken to be sold, and imported goods, such as codfish, salt, cloth, and kerosene, bought. Since each area produced ample food for its own consumption, and other sundries were only obtainable in Roseau, contact between village enclaves was practically unnecessary, except for social interaction.

The main institutional presence was the Catholic priest, along with planters or their attorneys (representatives) when plantations were operational, colonial officials for specific purposes such as tax collection or eviction, and eventually teachers and police officers. By 1891, there were, in the Parish of St. Patrick where La Plaine is located, three persons who were of “legal and official” professions and two police officers, to serve a total population of 3,940, spread out in several villages. The number of teachers was not specified as teachers and pupils were counted together (Leeward Islands 1891). By 1921, the numbers were slightly higher, with four “public officers,” a “police force” of six, and two “excise officers,” along with ten teachers, but by then, the population had grown to 5,771 (Dominica, General Register Office 1921). The presence of these officers was more to protect property in instances of violation and to collect taxes, rather

than to regulate everyday interactions. Teachers became important only in the 20th century, when education was more widespread, and they were looked to as instillers of discipline and respect as much as of literacy, thus collaborating with parents in their child-rearing and reinforcing local configurations of social relations that prevailed between adults and children and gender roles, with the added effect of official sanction.

The Catholic priests, most of whom were French, for their part were not directly representative of the formal British colonial power and its Church (the Anglican Church), and became on many occasions the spokespersons for the local people in their pleas to the colonial government. The priest, who today has lost much of his prestige as people move away from the Catholic Church, was seen as a community leader, and children were taught to fear him, as this narrative excerpt from an interview with an informant clearly reveals:

And you meet the priest, you would just take the priest as your god. So you taking the priest as your god, you respect him. You just respect the priest. ...When you see the priest, you just afraid him, na. You can't say anything, you cannot watch him, if you go to confession, the confession box, he there and you there, he just watching you, you have to put down your head to tell the priest what you have to say.

It is clear from the report on apprenticeship, cited above, that churches were established on many plantations, and schools, though few and poorly attended, had begun to appear. For the magistrate of the parish in which La Plaine is located, the situation in his region showed that "On some of the estates, there are Catholic churches, built by the people, the master supplying some of the wood. The attendance at church on Sundays is very good. There are a few estates in my district on which there are schools; they are very badly attended, as there is no regular attendant to instruct; a woman goes there occasionally; she is paid by the apprentices" (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1836: Enclosure No. 6). The people in this case, and not the proprietors, desired to educate their children. In some areas, after Apprenticeship, proprietors charged extra rent to workers who sent their children to school, for labour lost.

Soon after Emancipation in 1834, the colonial government sought to anglicize the population, beginning with schools which were set up by Mico Charity in 1836-1838. The Mico Charity was a non-denominational group, so it was welcomed by the British in the Catholic islands. In 1835, 600 pounds sterling were given to develop schools in Dominica, and by 1840, the Mico Charity was running twenty schools, with an attendance of only 740 children. The general population did not respond to the school program and it dissolved (Honychurch 1995). The government realized the importance of the Catholic Church in the lives of people, and in 1867, the Lieutenant-Governor remarked that it would be unwise to “to do anything that would in any way withdraw children from the parental control of the priest” (quoted in Honychurch 1995: 200). The government and the Church then established an agreement whereby the schools would be overseen by the clergy. However, school attendance remained very low, as people saw more advantage in keeping their children free to work with them in the fields and at home rather than sending them to school.

Secondary schools developed in the second half of the 19th century, but were created for upper class girls and boys, and until after WWII, only existed in Roseau. The first secondary school was established in 1850 by the nuns of the Roseau Convent, for girls, teaching both academic subjects and needlework (Green 1998: 284). Convent High School still exists, as one of the better schools in Roseau. Another girls’ secondary school was opened by a religious order, the Sisters of the Faithful Virgin, in 1858, in addition to an elementary school, as well as a “Second Class Boarding School” in which the girls were trained for domestic work in the convent (ibid.: 285). The training of girls was differentiated based on perceived class differences, and geared, in both cases towards different class-based occupations of women in the domestic arena.

The first secondary school for boys was only established in 1893. The Dominica Grammar School (still in operation) was developed by the colonial government to train boys in the upper classes to become planters or merchants (Green 1998). For the boys of more humble origins, an agricultural school,

attached to the newly built Botanical Gardens, was opened in 1900, to produce knowledgeable workers for the new lime estates, or to work on small holdings (ibid.; Honychurch 1995). Clearly there was a gender and class bias in the newly developed education system, that, besides excluding most people from more than the most rudimentary education, promoted gendered and stratified spheres that reflected more a European ideal than the reality of the Dominican masses. Upper class boys were trained to run the estates and business, girls the household. Lower class boys were provided with agricultural skills, while girls learned the practical aspects of taking care of the house, as domestic workers. As Green perceptively remarks: "Not only was the system explicitly divided by class, but it should also be noted that only boys were trained for skilled 'practical' jobs in agriculture in a situation where females comprised over half of all agricultural laborers working for others" (Green 1998: 286).

Rarely did rural children attend secondary school, or even remain in primary school to obtain a school-leaving certificate. The existence of schools for the few contributed to and reinforced class divisions, while providing role training for their members. Even the agricultural school contributed to the creation of status distinctions where there were perhaps none before, although it is likely that the rural boys who attended came from families who already had money to provide for the students while they lived in town.

Because the Catholic Church was already firmly established among the population, rather than 'converting' them religiously to the official Church of England (the Anglican Church), British hegemony was enacted secularly, through education (Goodridge 1972: 157). However, as shown in the following quote, in spite of the attitude of the Colonial Office, which disdained the local Creole language, or Patwa,¹⁰ and the government's attempts to anglicize the population through the education system, they had little success:

¹⁰ 'Patwa' is a French-based Creole spoken in the majority of the regions throughout the island, but in one part of the Eastern region, an English-based Creole, 'Kokoy' is spoken.

The position of Dominica is exceptional in that in many of the districts patois is the language of the population even where English is known. This patois is of no cultural value and there is no question of preserving a racial language as in Wales or Quebec. The aim should not be to make the children bi-lingual but ultimately to make English the mother tongue. (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1945, cited in Goodridge 1972: 157)

During slavery and apprenticeship, social control (of slaves) was effected through disciplinary measures meted out mainly by the plantation owners, and afterwards, through magistrates and mediators, but there was little higher-level intervention except in cases of dispute. This can at least partially be attributed to the remoteness of and difficult access to villages and to a colonial policy which did not recognize the farmers except in their capacity as labour for the plantations. This resulted in the development, after emancipation, of a quasi-autonomous peasantry that, while impeded from participating in the international market and in politics of the island, relied on the plantation economy only to acquire a little cash, but not for subsistence. The social order that developed, while it may have been influenced by social relations on the plantation, relied little if at all on interaction with the colonial authorities, with the exception of the Catholic Church which did not directly represent British colonial authority and in fact was at times called upon to mediate in favour of the local people. Government actions in the past were often treated with mistrust and bitterly contested.

While status differences prevailed, based on colour, land ownership, and occupation, these were not fixed or impermeable, and became blurred especially through the development of familial ties that crossed them, in the same way as Smith (1988) has described (see Chapter 2 for discussion). While the coloured land owners were better off economically, inter-relations with lower status people, the birth of children from these relations, and the institution of family land, where parcels of land were distributed to at least some of these children, all contributed to the mutability of class boundaries, and eventually, to the gradual lessening of the distance between groups, in the symbolic indicators of class, especially skin colour, and the socio-economic ones, especially the attribution of land. Very little cash circulated in the rural areas, and people depended much more on relations of

reciprocity, including exchange of labour and services, as well as food and other goods. Any large project, such as clearing land for a garden or building a house, would usually be carried out as a '*koudmen*' (from French '*coup de main*' meaning 'helping hand'), with several friends, neighbours and/or relatives involved. Labour would thus circulate in an informal, generalized reciprocal manner, as at a later date, each helper would be able to benefit from the labour of the others in his turn, if needed.

However, as long as plantations were operating and had people working for them, the distinction between owners and workers prevailed. Among the villagers, distinctions probably followed colour and occupational levels established during slavery, as mentioned above, as well as land ownership, but even more so, an egalitarian ethos developed, so that while the ability to acquire some cash and land was important, so was their sharing capacity (the more you have the more you can share). While labourers and peasants did not fully participate in the social, political and economic worlds of the elites, they had appropriated some of the elements of this order, and reinterpreted them within their own social environment, which developed as a product of, and alongside the largely urban, dominant political and economic order, without being fully dependent on it nor totally autonomous from it. They thus adapted their life-ways to living beside the plantation, sometimes on it, sometimes withdrawn from it. In spite of the relative absence of colonial influence, the distinctions wrought by colonial domination were always imminent, inscribed in the land, mapped out in the villages, provision gardens and plantations, the one located up steep slopes, far from potable water and access to markets, the other often located down in the river valleys, on the flatter, easier to cultivate land, and in the efforts made to keep things that way.

Women and labour

During the years following emancipation, the divisions of labour that were forged throughout the period of slavery persisted for former slaves, with men

carrying out field and skilled labour, while women were employed as domestics and in field labour. In town, in addition to domestic work, women were heavily involved in marketing goods, some were skilled seamstresses, but in the countryside, most were involved in agriculture for themselves or for others. The role of women in agriculture continued to be important in Dominica, especially in the rural areas, although wage differences in plantation labour devalued their work in relation to men's. There was, however, a decrease in the percentage of women who were gainfully employed during the latter part of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century: in 1891, 81 percent of females, aged ten and over, were gainfully employed, compared to 83 percent of males; in 1946, only 49.2 percent of females, aged fifteen and over, were gainfully employed, compared to 75.5 percent of males (Green 1998: 408). The decrease in employment during this period may be due to several factors, including the decrease in women working on plantations, related to the decline of sugar production, and the increase in subsistence farming. As well, colonial bias towards acknowledging the male as the provider that filtered into the education system and policy towards growers may have downplayed women's economic participation, especially for married women; presumably, when a woman's partner is a farmer, her role is assumed to be that of housewife, even though she may have a very active part in the farming process.

The economy, and to a much smaller extent, colonial policy with regards to education, labour, and land distribution, affected the gendered distribution of labour. First of all, migration of men off the island to work was accompanied, to a lesser extent, by a migration of women to the urban centre, Roseau, to look for work especially as domestics or seamstresses (Green 1998: 278). According to the census of 1921, there were considerably more black females than males in Roseau (2,476 to 1,793), and the difference in numbers was even more pronounced among the 'coloured' population, with almost twice as many females (1,496) as males (785). In the countryside, the proportions were much more balanced, although the ratio of females to males was slightly higher in most parishes, and

inversely to Roseau, in most places, the difference was more pronounced among 'blacks', probably indicating more male migration from this group.

Plantation labour was more poorly paid for women than for men: the 1931 Leeward Island Colonial Report states that the average male salary for unskilled labour was from 1s 3d to 1s 6d per day, while for women it was only 10d, and male skilled labour was paid at a rate of 4s to 6s per day. As well, only boys were trained as overseers for the plantations (Green 1998: 410). Both of these factors contributed to the marginalization of women's labour on the plantations. However, Dominica's rural population had always been involved in subsistence agriculture so when plantations failed, people who were working on them could fall back their own food production, as was the case after the decline of lime production until after WWII (Green 1998: 388; Brereton 1985: 24). The ability to fall back on agriculture may partially explain the difference in sex ratios in the urban region as compared to the rural areas.

The 1930s was a difficult period in the West Indies, as elsewhere: in other islands more dependent on wage labour, protests and riots broke out, causing the British Colonial Office to carry the 1938-39 Royal Commission to examine social conditions in the British West Indies. The recommendations made brought about a shift in colonial policy that would favour the small farmer, and the rise of banana production, beginning in 1949 was to underwrite a shift towards a more cash-based economy in Dominica.

3.4 WWII until the present

The West India Royal Commission of 1938-1939, headed by Walter Edward Moyne, was Britain's response to the explosion of labour unrest in the islands during the 1930s (the report was only published in 1945, due to the War). Prior to 1937, disturbances in the West Indies had been sporadic and isolated, but then, a series of widespread strikes and riots occurred throughout the islands. While labour strikes did not erupt in Dominica as they did in other islands, the Commission found in Dominica "the most striking contrast between the great

poverty of a large proportion of the population, particularly in Roseau, the capital, and the beauty and fertility of the island” (Royal Commission 1945).

Generally, for the region as a whole, the report called for the implementation of social services that the colonies themselves could not finance. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed in 1940, followed by the appointment of a Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies with a budget and working team to fulfill the task of improving social conditions in the colonies (Honychurch 1995: 185). Its recommendations for Dominica included “more peasant holdings, teaching of improved agricultural methods, and better communication, particularly a road across the island. It recommended the use of rivers for hydro-electricity and a programme against malaria” (ibid). T.S. Simey, a sociologist, became the first Social Welfare Adviser to the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies. Between 1941 and 1945, Simey investigated West Indian society in order to create appropriate policies, and “believed, ardently, in the possibility of a scientific approach to social engineering” (Smith 1987: 81). The Social Welfare Department, under the colonial government, was established in Dominica in 1945.

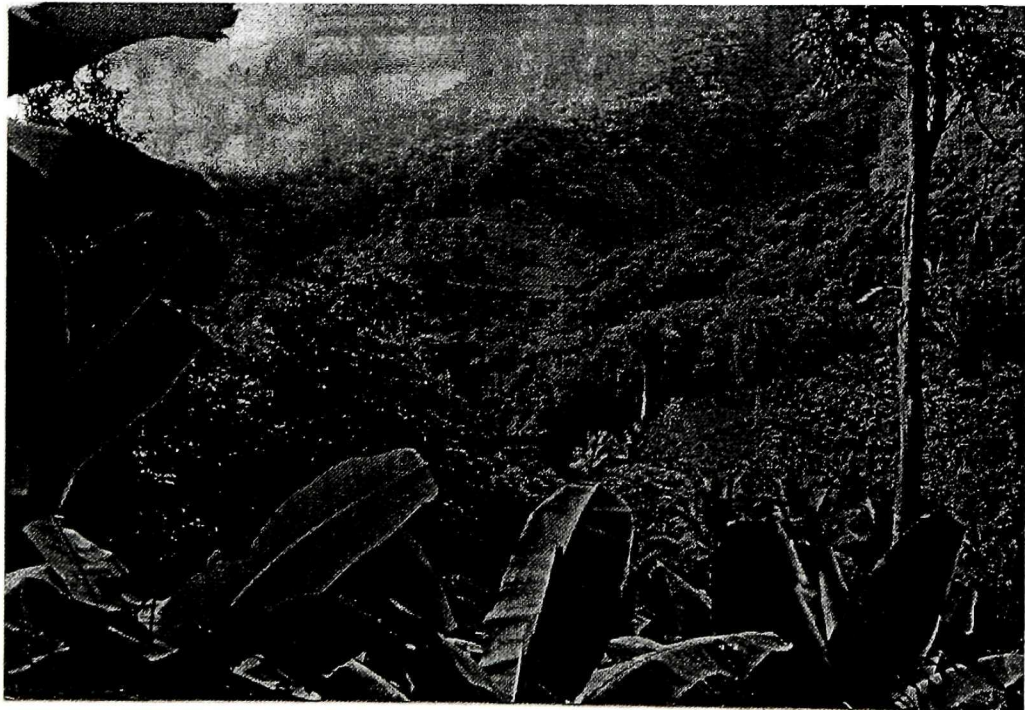
The report of the Royal Commission was at once the instigation and the symptom of the changing face of the colonial world in the Caribbean. For the first time, there was a concern with the well-being of the wider population, mirroring, or extending from, recent concerns with the well-being of workers and their families in Britain and elsewhere in Europe (Gauthier 1996). The Commission was concerned with the creation of a healthy productive society, and so among its recommendations were those pertaining to appropriate education, public health, and family life as well as the development of peasant agriculture. This involved the promotion of the ‘male breadwinner’ ideology, and the domestication of women, through training and wage differentials that already existed to some extent (see French 1988; Royal Commission 1945).

Bananas and the cash economy

Prior to 1949, bananas were not grown on a large scale. However, in 1926, Dominica began to export fruits to Britain, establishing the Government Fruit Packaging Depot (Trouillot 1988: 124). In 1928, promotion of peasant-based agriculture started to take shape, and the Dominica Banana Growers Association (DBGA) formed in the early 1930s to aid in the marketing of bananas (ibid.: 125). Export of this product began in 1934 to Canada, though it was limited by the advent of the war and the reduction in the circulation of ships. Vanilla, largely grown by peasants, benefited during this time from higher prices, and filled the largest portion of the export market during the war. It was after the war that banana production really took off, in 1949, with the formation of Antilles Products Limited. The company signed a contract with the DBGA to export all bananas of the Lacatan variety to the United Kingdom, and the founders of the company purchased the Woodford Hill Estate in the northeast of the island to begin their own production. Other estates followed suit, and Geest took over the Antilles Products interests in 1952. Small holders began cultivating bananas, as it is easily adapted to the peasant labour process because of environmental factors – the need for water and drainage was easily met with the high rainfall and the sloping areas under cultivation by peasants. They require little processing after harvesting, and bananas are both an export commodity, and a readily consumable food, unlike vanilla (ibid: 129-133). As well, they only take nine months to bear fruit, and they can be grown year round, planted at intervals, so they can be harvested year round as well. Since banana growing became largely a peasant enterprise, there has been a shift in landholding patterns in favour of the small farmer. Since 1961, holdings of over 100 acres have decreased in number, while those of under ten acres have increased: “By 1970, 90 percent of the banana growers had farms of fewer than five acres, and the majority of these were fewer than three acres” (Baker 1994: 147).

One of the most important developments spurred by banana cultivation was the development of a system of motorable roads in areas that previously were

only accessible by foot. While bananas were easy to grow, it was difficult for many farmers to bring their bananas to the distribution point. Bananas had to be brought, initially, to a boxing plant, where they would be graded, washed, and boxed, and then sent by truck to the port in Roseau. Farmers in areas like La Plaine grew few bananas until they had a road, because the bananas damaged easily and by the time they arrived at the boxing plant, they were too bruised to be accepted. Oral accounts tell of walking long distances heading a load of bananas only to have them rejected, thus discouraging the farmer from growing them. In order to increase production, roads were necessary, and were built with great expense. In the La Plaine area, a road to the village was finally built in 1964. Farmers then only had to bring their bananas to a station on the road, to be trucked to the boxing plant.



Fertile mountain slopes: view from a banana garden near La Plaine, 1999.

Banana growing drew the peasant farmer into the cash economy more fully than ever before. The weekly harvesting of bananas meant a regular cash income for many that previously had been sporadic at best. The coming of roads to the village meant easier access to the town, Roseau, where goods could be bought and brought by truck to be resold. Shops proliferated, many of them run by women, selling locally the goods brought in from Roseau, and the transportation of goods and people provided a money-making enterprise for those who were able to buy a vehicle. Also, people could now more easily market other produce. This new relative affluence also spurred the building of houses, in Roseau and in the village, no longer using local materials but with cement and imported tiles and windows. In short, a new middle class was emerging, along with a greater dependency than previously on cash to buy imported foods that slowly replaced locally grown ones.

This entry into the mainstream economic system also signalled a hold on peasant labour: “integration of the peasant labour process in the global process of valorization occurs in Dominica through the disguised sale of the labor power of the producers to the Geest transnational corporation” (1988: 144). The petty cultivator, Trouillot contends, is not selling their product. Rather, they are selling their labour at below value to the corporation. Geest effectively controls the banana production in the Windward group (Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Grenada) through, first of all a law, the Banana Act of 1959, and the Banana Contract of 1997, through the Dominica Banana Growers Association (now the Dominica Banana Marketing Corporation). All bananas of ‘exportable quality’ were to be bought by Geest through the DBGA. Geest, in other words, had the say on which bananas it would accept or refuse, the price of the bananas, and the conditions and production process (ibid.: 146-50). The grower, as well as the DBGA, was at the mercy of the buyer, without the choice of going to another buyer if the conditions or price were not suitable. What was meant by ‘exportable quality’ was not clearly defined, and was left up to the discretion of Geest: “in short, the DBGA must deliver the bananas to Geest who may accept or reject

them at will” (ibid.: 146; see Welch 1996 for a detailed discussion of the growth of banana production and marketing).

In addition, more and more of the labour of preparing the bananas for market was handed to the grower. In the early 90s, the work of dehanding, washing, and boxing the bananas was turned over to the farmers, and they became responsible for bringing them to the port as well. Whereas before, the preparation of the bananas and the boxing, as well as the trip to the port, was carried out by staff paid by the DBGA, now, the farmer was responsible for organizing and carrying out the work himself. Standard boxing sheds had to be built, to Geest’s specifications. In order for a grower to become certified, and thus become an official grower who could get the top price for his bananas, certain conditions had to be met with regards to the procedures of growing and boxing the bananas, including use of pesticides and fungicides. The DBMC inspectors visit the farms to ensure that these specifications are being met, in addition to verifying banana quality at the port. Geest then, first through the local agency of the DBGA and then the DBMC controlled the industry, setting the price and the conditions for production and quality control. The labour of the cultivator was exploited by the corporation, which paid less for the actual labour involved than if it owned the land and paid the workers a salary, for each task. As Trouillot points out: “The continuing and apparently paradoxical coexistence of peasantries and capitalism finds coherence in an acute exploitation which greatly contributes to capital accumulation on a world scale” (ibid.: 144). While prior to WWII, small holders in Dominica had little access to cash from their produce because of lack of infrastructure causing transportation difficulties, and lack of support from the government for crops that could easily be grown by them, the inverse was now true, with full government support for the banana industry. While local planters were unable to harness the labour of small farmers through salaried employment, Geest was able to control peasant labour through its monopsonistic hold on the banana industry. Whereas previously farmers had paid for their autonomy with marginalization from the mainstream cash economy, with their greater

participation in the cash economy, their autonomy, seemingly intact, was now being appropriated and capitalized upon by Geest, and regulated through the imposition of procedures for growing bananas. The greater access to cash for many meant greater dependency on cash for food, and less land and energy is now spent on growing food for local consumption. However, the recent decline in banana prices has resulted in many small farmers pulling out of banana production, and going back to growing ground provisions or migrating to find work.

Social welfare, education, and governance

The insertion of the peasant cultivator into the global market through the production of bananas, the development of improved communications, along with discourses of state and family emanating from the metropole, as well as the increasing move towards political autonomy, put the rural village communities on the map, so to speak. Whether the Royal Commission of 1938-39 was the instigator of these changes, or simply the catalyzer and the justification, it was nonetheless following those reports that social transformations in rural areas began to occur, through both civil and religious avenues. This is discussed in length in the last section of Chapter 4.

From this time, an increase in social programmes and, gradually, government involvement in the outlying villages such as La Plaine, took place. These included public health, including programmes for the eradication of malaria through education regarding stagnant water, the eradication of yaws and tuberculosis, and a campaign to dispose of human and other waste hygienically (interview with a former public health officer, 1999). Nurses were placed in the villages, a system of public health developed based on regional health centres, and more attention was paid to education and training of teachers than previously. Nutrition programmes, such as the 3 F campaign (Food for Family Fitness), and other adult education programmes were carried out, largely at the discretion of the school headmaster of the time in La Plaine (Christian 1992). The Social Centre, a

woman's Catholic Church group was formed, with sections in each of the church parishes, called Social Leagues.

The development of the banana industry and the accompanying infrastructure had several repercussions for the relations of gender and gendered access to resources. Women's formal participation in agriculture in Dominica by 1946 was noted in the previous section. Table 2 below shows further decline in both men's and women's participation in agriculture, but especially in women's: the 1991 figures show a participation of 31.9 percent for males, while for females, the percentage is less than one third, at 8.5 percent. The numbers of both males and females have decreased, but for women, the decrease is more remarkable. The 1997 Labour Force Survey shows a little higher participation by women, at 11.1 percent. As noted, some of women's agricultural labour could be included in the category "Elementary Occupations," which is a catch-all term for such occupations as street vendor, laundress, etc. Nonetheless, the shift from agricultural work to white collar work for women is evident, as they are most numerous in the "Sales and Service," "Professional and Technical," and "Clerical" sectors, after "Elementary Occupations." Men appear to be most numerous in the category "Production and Related Workers" which includes factory work, construction, and other trades, as well as general labour. This category has remained fairly stable.

Table 2 shows both the increase in women's participation in a labour market outside the agricultural sector (although 24 percent are involved in "Elementary Occupations"), which might lead one to believe that women are gaining access in Dominica to a lucrative job market, while men are being left behind. It is true that for the last thirty years, more girls than boys have graduated from high school in Dominica, positioning them to be able to enter the "white collar" job market. However, in looking at the statistics for those who go on to post-secondary education, males by far outweigh the females. For males, 22.2 percent of the total who graduated from high school went on to get a university degree, while for females, only 7.9 percent did so (see Table 3 below).

Table 2: Distribution of Employed Persons by Occupation and Sex, 1946-1997

Occupation	1946		1960		1970		1981		1991		1997	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
-Professional & Technical	1.8	3.0	2.9	5.6	4.2	11.2	5.9	17.0	8.9	17.6	9.1	17.3
-Administrative & Managerial	0.4	0.1	1.7	3.6*	1.0	0.3	1.1	0.8	4.2	9.7	4.2	7.9
-Clerical	0.8	0.8	2.2	2.7	3.4	8.9	4.0	15.5	2.6	18.3	3.3	12.5
-Transport & Communication	2.0	0.4	7.0	3.0	1.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
-Sales	1.5	7.0	1.2	7.0	3.1	12.6	2.6	12.7				
-(All Sales and Services)***									5.3	13.6	8.7	19.8
-Services	1.6	19.6	3.9	17.5	4.3	23.0	5.6	19.4				
-Farm Managers & Supervisors	28.7	15.0	33.8	16.6	19.6	5.4						
-(All Agricultural Sectors)	58.8	49.4	57.8	42.3	48.7	29.7	44.0	20.4	31.9	8.5	26.7	11.1****
-Other Agricultural Workers	30.2	34.0	25.0	25.7	29.1	24.3						
-Production & Related Workers	18.7	14.8			26.2	9.1	36.9	14.3	28.2	7.2	31.5	6.3
-(all workers)			23.2	18.3								
-Labourers	8.5	4.9			7.8	4.7	0.0	0.0				
-Elementary Occupations									16.9	21.9	15.6	24.0

* Probably an error.

**General Worker Rate for 1946 is calculated for the gainfully employed population aged ten years and older; for the other years, it refers to the gainfully employed population aged 15 years and over (Green 1998, citing Senior 1991).

***The 1991 Census and the 1997 Labour Force Survey list Service and Shop Sales Workers together: however, the category "Elementary Occupations" may also account for some service workers.

**** The 1997 Dominica Labour Force Survey category is "Skilled Agriculture, Fishery Forestry," so that some of the farm labour may be included in "Elementary Occupations"

Sources: Green 1998, Table 10.7, 507; Dominica Statistical Division 1991, 1997.

Table 3: Educational Levels by Age and Sex, 1991

Age	No Certificate		School-Leaving Certificate		High School Certificate*		Post-Secondary Diploma		University Degree	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
10-14 years	3,616	3,348	10	11						
15-19 years	3,070	2,595	247	286	299	496	1	3		
20-24 years	2,410	1,927	275	316	535	938	32	16	26	13
25-29 years	2,216	1,746	138	210	360	557	43	39	67	33
30-34 years	1,823	1,450	160	251	216	334	65	37	78	49
35-39 years	1,383	1,119	161	229	174	211	69	43	56	45
40-44 years	1,157	1,020	77	174	71	94	53	32	55	33
45-49 years	960	997	67	89	59	56	38	20	30	15
50-54 years	771	90	51	79	19	26	16	20	27	12
55-59 years	694	955	47	70	28	25	26	17	26	10
60-64 years	735	905	61	72	20	24	14	10	15	5
65 years +	1,975	2,698	135	189	36	46	28	7	24	5
Not stated	154	97	8	2	11	4	2	2	3	3

*This column includes: Cambridge School Certificate; General Certificate of Education (GCE); Caribbean Examination Council Secondary Education Certificate (CXC); Higher School Certificate.

Source: Dominica Statistical Division 1991.

Additionally, despite the fact that women have moved into these sectors, their salaries remain generally lower than for men, except at the higher levels. That means that the majority of women are earning less than men. In fact, 56.4 percent of women gainfully employed make under \$800 EC per month, compared to 41.2 percent of men; 23.1 percent of women make between \$800 and \$1800 per month, while 35.5 percent of men have the same level of income. This is compounded by the fact that 40 percent of households are female headed, and the percentage of women gainfully employed is much lower than that of men. In 1991, the number of employed women aged fifteen and over numbered 8,023 out of 23,346, or 34 percent; for men, 15,642 out of 22,981, or 68 percent were gainfully employed, according to the census categories.

Table 4: Income Distribution of Employed Persons by Sex, 1997

Income Group EC \$*	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0-99	846	5.8	964	8.7
100-299	1,240	8.5	1,562	14.0
300-499	1,807	12.4	2,186	19.6
500-799	2,108	14.5	1,572	14.1
800-999	1,734	11.9	1,085	9.7
1000-1299	1,588	10.9	818	7.3
1300-1400	1,014	7.0	255	2.3
1500-1799	826	5.7	428	3.8
1800-1999	390	2.7	379	3.4
2000-2499	689	4.7	448	4.0
2500-2999	653	4.5	302	2.7
3000-3999	389	2.7	236	2.1
4000 +	255	1.8	114	1.0
Not Stated	1,022	7.0	785	7.1
TOTAL	14,560	100.0	11,134	100.0

* The base unit of measure is not indicated: the amounts appear to be based on monthly income. Eastern Caribbean dollars (EC) are fixed on the US dollar, at a rate of 2.7 to 1.0.

Source: Dominica Statistical Division 1997

**Table 5: Percentage of Gainfully Employed Persons,
by Sex and Year, 1946-1991**

Year Sex Percent Employed	1946		1960		1970		1981		1991	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	75.5	49.2	86.7	52.6	77.8	36.3	68.3	32.4	68	34

Source: Green 1998; Dominica Statistical Division 1991.

The decline in women's participation in agriculture is not only due to the availability of higher education and jobs. Prior to the 1950s, much of peasant agriculture was comprised of food crops or crops that could be sold through

hucksters to local or regional markets. While women's participation in agriculture had diminished already by 1946, the greatest decline occurs between 1960 and 1981, when bananas really took hold. Commercial banana production marginalized women's role in agriculture even further, even though it favoured small producers: in 1970, only 14 percent of farmers were women. Men's participation in banana farming, as registered growers, allows them easier access to credit than women, and procures them the ability to purchase land more readily, as seen in Tables 6a and 6b below.

Table 6a: Properties Registered, 1993

Total:	1,733	100%
Male:	1,242	72%
Female:	328	19%
Together:	163	9%

Table 6b: Bank Loans, 1993*

Total	3,219	100%
Male	2,273	71%
Female	946	29%

*Excludes loans made by Roseau Co-operative Credit Union, which made 3,171 loans in 1993. This figure is not broken down by sex.

Source: Dominica 1994

While women have made advances in the workplace so that they now occupy the majority of white-collar jobs, they have been marginalized from the agricultural sector, and are migrating in greater numbers than previously.

When immigration for Caribbean residents to the United States was halted in 1942, under the McCarren Walter Act (Myers 1976: 103), Great Britain became a choice destination, throughout the 1950s up to the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, which effectively plugged the exodus to England. Migration to other islands to work continued, and migration to North America, including Canada, increased. Canadian immigration laws were selective, allowing only limited numbers of West India immigrants to fill certain niches in

the job market: in the 1960s, for example, restricted numbers of women were allowed to enter as domestic workers (Myers 1976: 209). Whereas prior to WWII, migration had attracted more men, recent migration affects both sexes. Women often migrate to work as domestics in the more developed regions of the Caribbean, or to North America, often leaving children behind with a relative, returning sometimes several years later, or sending for their children once they are established. Many migrate to work without papers. Some young people migrate to attend university, and many of these begin a new life in the host country, as there are few opportunities in Dominica.

It is evident that new colonial policy, the development of the banana industry, the infrastructure, and education have changed the gendered and classed landscape. Rural populations have entered the cash economy, and a new middle class is emerging. However, while some are able to benefit, the majority of young people never finish high school, and unemployment is high. At the same time, the banana growers are suffering because of disputes regarding the preferential treatment of Caribbean growers by certain member nations of the WTO, and the ensuing deregulation of the market. Many banana producers, dissatisfied with the rising cost of production and the decrease in profit, have simply stopped producing because it is no longer beneficial to them, returning to subsistence production, the informal market, or migration to resolve their economic woes.

Political roads into the new millenium

Democratization, including universal suffrage (1951), a representative government, and the creation of a Dominican constitution, were definite steps towards political autonomy and nationhood. The first political party, the Labour Party, was formed by Phyllis Shand Allfrey, a Dominican who had been involved in the Labour Party in Britain and Emmanuel Loblack, a local trade union organizer, in 1955 (Honychurch 1995: 229). The Dominica Constitution came into full effect in 1967, when Dominica was declared an Associated State, tied to the British government through defence and foreign affairs. (ibid.: 233). Full

independence was granted in 1978, through British legislation after discussion with island leaders (ibid.: 233-234).

Under O.E Le Blanc, leader of the Dominica Labour Party-headed government, a stream of development projects began to materialize. While many of these, funded by the CDW (Caribbean Development and Welfare), had been planned previously, it was under Le Blanc that their actualization took place, between 1961 and 1966. Notably, the road to La Plaine was completed in 1964 (ibid.: 234-235). Ferdinand Athanase, a La Plaine carnival composer of the day, created a song to celebrate the coming of the road (Christian 1992:). For La Plaine, the arrival of a motorable road would allow its inhabitants to participate more fully in the cash economy, as the road facilitated the marketing of goods which had to travel to the other, more populated and port side of the island to be sold, and would allow easier migration and commuting of workers to the capital, Roseau, reducing the urban / rural divide that had persisted since slavery.

Democratization was occurring at every level, with the creation of village councils. It is noteworthy that the colonial government had attempted to set up village councils since the 1930s, and had not been successful: councillors were to be appointed by the government, and local people were fearful that they would enforce house taxes they could not pay, and they would lose the little they had. The government was finally able to create village councils that were formed of five elected and three appointed members. The village council was able to identify village needs, and present them to the Government for funding. This system replaced the old system of petitioning the government for needs (Christian 1992: 80-1), which was usually effected through the priest or other influential person. These developments had as their goal the creation of citizens – in essence, a democratization – which, combined with the newly acquired right to vote (1951), increased representation at the level of the island. A shift in governance through a shift in techniques of control, from subjugation, corporal discipline, and the subsequent evocation of resistance and mistrust, to persuasion through popular

involvement, facilitated hegemony of the state and the enactment of programmes of reform and social transformation of the population.

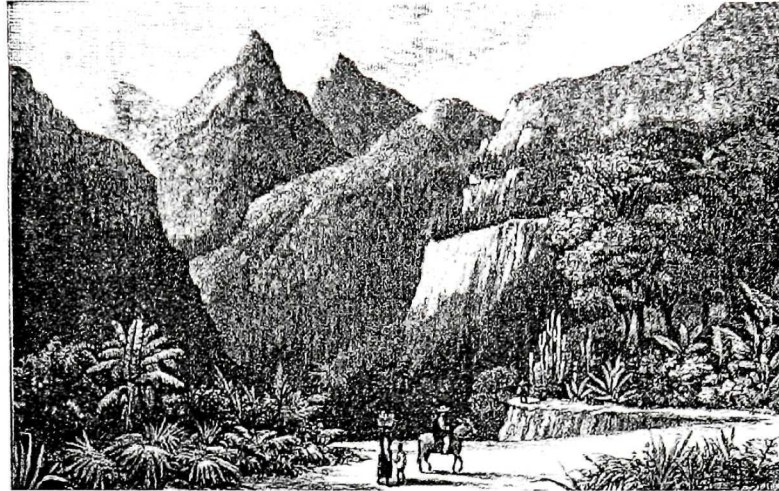
Funds from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund also went towards developing the infrastructure in Dominica: the transinsular road was finally built, as well as other feeder roads, to facilitate the marketing of mostly peasant (small-holder) grown bananas to market. The hydro-electric plant was installed which produced electricity for a restricted area. While social transformation, especially of the outlying, difficult to access, rural areas, did not occur overnight, there was nevertheless a steady coming together of the rural and urban, through the development of infrastructure, and the reaching out of the tentacles of government to the population.

The Caribbean region has been continuously involved in the world political economy since European contact, slavery and the development of the plantation economy, through emancipation, independence, and into the present. The hegemony of colonial policies and interactions of Europeans and African slaves wove a fabric of intersecting class, racial, and gender hierarchies (Beckles 1995; Bush 1990; Green 1995; Stoler 1991). This brief history of colonial Dominica, in demonstrating the connections between the economic, political, social and cultural transformations, has revealed the development of particular patterns of social and economic relations, including statuses, gender roles and hierarchies, etc. through colonial times to the present. Social relations developed during slavery were not 'dual', with one elite and one lower class, but were complex, derived from a configuration of colour, language, religion, land ownership and wealth, civil status (free or slave), and occupation, due to the colonial history that involved both the French and the British and the development of statuses and hierarchies within. British domination was superficial, as the French influence was more important for much of the period of slavery – culturally and socially. The fall of coffee as an important plantation crop left many smaller planters poor and although there were some fallouts and evictions after abolition, many smaller planters and local peasants probably formed

integrated communities. Barriers set up by the colonial government prevented the ordinary people from participating fully in the political and economic life until after WWII. They were thus forced to remain, or to become, quasi-autonomous and subsistence-oriented rather than market-oriented, and community centred rather than directed towards a central government. The 'democratization' that occurred during decolonization was, in essence, the internalization of government. Increased social services, especially access to secondary education for more of the rural population, was to create a shift in the class/race structure that had been so deeply engrained. These transformations were to have very profound effects on the social and cultural fabric of the village and Dominican society as a whole, as will be discussed throughout the rest of this study.

CHAPTER 4

“THINGS WAS BADLY OFF...” NOSTALGIA, MORALITY, AND SHIFTING SUBJECTIVITIES



“Morning Walk, Dominica”

(Froude 1888: 137, engraving by G. Pearson after drawings by the author)

The previous chapter undertook a historical excursion of Dominica’s colonial and post-colonial periods, from slavery through to independence, revealing the transformations that occurred and their effects on people’s material and social lives. In this chapter, I continue in a historical perspective to ascertain transformations that have occurred on the level of configurations of moral discourse. To do so, I first examine four women’s perceptions of changes that have taken place during their lifetimes by a reading of their narratives of the past in which they juxtapose practices and behaviours of the pre-WWII period, when three of them were growing up. These accounts, while they relate to their own experience, are accounts of general conditions, rather than of personal experience of those conditions, and in this way differ from women’s narratives in subsequent chapters. Through the narratives in this chapter, I discern the moral frameworks these women appear to uphold, as they compare them to – and critique – the behaviours of today. Through this juxtaposition of practices and ideas of proper

behaviour, I am able to extract moral frameworks and understand how they have been transformed. I then turn back to the historical context in order to determine the ‘political technologies’ employed through a process of decolonisation and social reform and to understand how they were deployed within the rural population in La Plaine.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines women’s accounts of the past as ‘moral narrative’ and as a critique of the present. The moral frameworks that emerge in this section involve an intertwining of respectability and egalitarianism that is contrasted to a modality of improvement, where ‘respectability’ is disengaged from an egalitarian ethos, and sharing from love, with the pre-eminence of a new modality, that of ‘improving’ oneself. The second section continues to examine accounts of the past, highlighting the relations between adults and children that form the basis of relationships of authority, as a hierarchy based on age and responsibility through which is derived autonomy and respect. This pattern of authority that I have called an *economy of respect* is being transformed, as is evidenced through women’s narratives, so that control of children is leaving the hands of the parents, largely due to education, welfare programmes, and the influence of the media. The third section takes these claims and critiques, and examines them in the context of practices and discourses associated with the project of decolonisation and social reform.

4.1 – “We see misery”: the past as moral narrative

In this section, I examine accounts of the past that reveal the economic situations in which older La Plaine residents were raised, especially during the inter-war period of the 1930s. The women’s narratives disclose not only the hardships they endured, but also their concern with transformations they have experienced, and subsequent changes in behaviour and a shift in values that they perceive as deriving from these transformations. The lived past as conveyed by these women emphasizes aspects of their lifeways that have changed, so that the past is perceived as different from the way things are now and expressed as

activities that are no longer carried out, objects that are no longer used, and values that are no longer prevalent. Rather than a description of particular events, the past, as told in these narratives, is construed as a set of practices, as well as artefacts and ethos associated with them, that are held to represent how people lived generally. The past, for these La Plaine women, is perceived as 'other' not only because the time of the past no longer exists, but because that time is associated with practices that are no longer carried out. As well, elements of the past emphasized are those that are considered important in relation to the present interests of the local people.

Conceptualizations of the past and their expressions play a strong role, for the people whose narratives appear below, in formulating their concerns and opinions about the present. Accounts of the past can serve to make statements about the present, either negative or positive. Perceptions and representations of the past have salience in relation to certain discourses pertaining to social values and ethos. Narrative and other expressions of the past are thus used by La Plaine people in both the production and the critique of moral discourses, with regards to which they can position themselves.

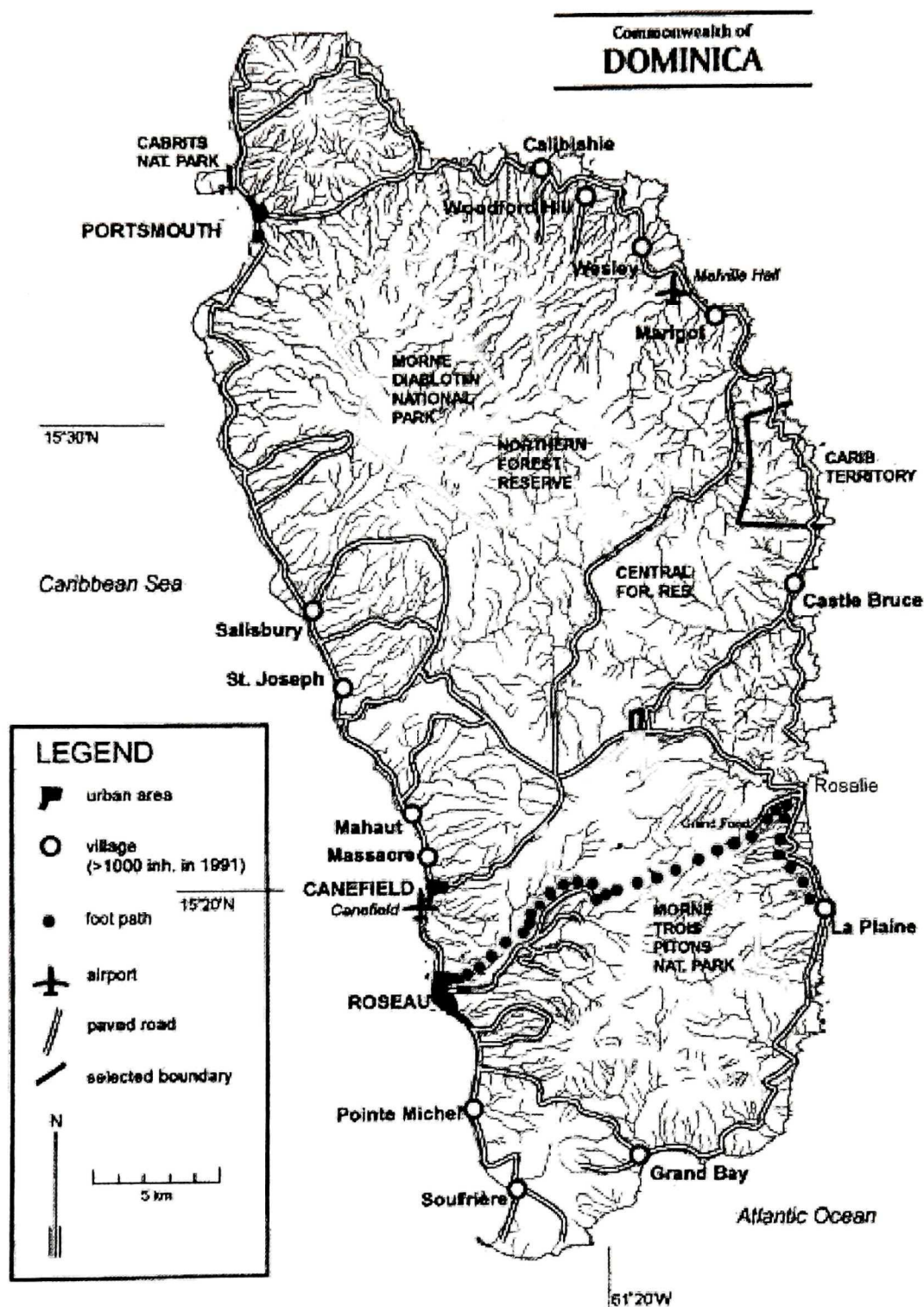
The very conceptualization of the past and its relation to the present, the way it is talked about, and the topics it covers are therefore not only informative from an oral historical point of view, but also reveal a critical stance towards changes as people understand them. This section thus proposes an examination of the use of this past in the formulation of moral discourses about the present, and subsequently the narrators' self-positioning in relation to their ideas about the present. While knowledge about the historical context of the research area, gained from various 'official' sources is extremely important for any project, for my research, I felt that local people's perceptions of the past and of change were equally important to understand the meanings they hold for them in relation to the present, and to see how people create narratives about the past that provide a space for commentary on the present. The particular relationship to the past that is revealed through the themes, tropes, and what is deemed salient or tellable and

how it is told indicate the importance of this past in defining the present for the narrators. The way people configure the past in their accounts ultimately positions them in terms of the present and the future.

The following narrative excerpts emphasize the economic and physical hardships endured by the narrators and their contemporaries in the past. They reveal the lack of infrastructure that made movement of people and goods to markets on the other side of the island difficult, and scarcity of cash to purchase products they could not, or could only with difficulty, make for themselves. Not only do they show the past as difficult, these narrators make statements about the changes that have occurred, positioning themselves in regard to these transformations.

A central motif around which these first narratives are constructed is the trek across the island to the capital, Roseau, prior to the completion of the road in the 1960s. Construction of the road crossing the island from Roseau was completed in 1956 (Honychurch 1995: 188), but the link to La Plaine was only added in 1964. Even when the transinsular road, as it was called was completed, it led to the northeast (see Map 3 below) and not to the southeast towards La Plaine. Eventually, a road was completed to Rosalie, situated on the coast approximately ten kilometers north of La Plaine, and even then, it was an arduous trek: climbing and descending to reach the road and accessibility to motorized transportation still took several hours. Prior to the completion of the road to Rosalie, the local people, especially women, would make the onerous journey on foot to the capital along treacherous mountain ridge trails flanked by steep, precipitous valleys, heads stacked with produce to sell at the market. The walk to Roseau was usually completed in approximately twelve hours even though the actual distance was only about twenty-five miles (thirty-three by some accounts). One slip of the foot, and all was lost. Trails were especially slick due to frequent rains and generally humid conditions, and goods dropped would become infused with mud, or slide to an inaccessible location at the bottom of a ridge. As well, different products such

Map 3: Dominica, showing roads and footpath through central region to Roseau



Source: Lipsanen 2001

as kerosene and flour could become mixed, rendering them totally irretrievable. What little money women would receive from the sale of their produce was used to purchase goods they could not make themselves – wheat flour, cloth and thread, kerosene, or saltfish, for example. Larger goods such as hardwood cut from the lush mountainsides would be transported by rowboat to Roseau by the men, who faced great risk circumnavigating the lower part of the island in the inclement and unpredictable waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the channel that separates Dominica from Martinique. The men would return with sacks of flour, barrels of oil, and salt, if they were lucky enough not to capsize before reaching home. The advent of the road to La Plaine was such a momentous and long-awaited event, that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, a La Plaine man composed a song celebrating the event (see Christian 1992: 36).

The association of status with the ability to purchase goods that cannot be made locally reflects and extends from the structures that prevailed during slavery, where money was available from the sale of produce. Having land, though of utmost importance both symbolically and for survival (see Olwig 1993 for a discussion of the importance of family land), was not enough; one had to be able to market one's harvest. Having cash in the past did not allow one to cross the social barriers erected during slavery, based on race, education, and land ownership, but it was what allowed slaves, to celebrate and to purchase goods such as cloth not provided for them during slavery, and even to occasionally purchase their freedom. Access to cash, I suggest, took on an importance during and after slavery, prior to WWII, not as a way of joining the dominant classes, but more as a way of resisting them. Now, however, a shift has occurred, where class/race barriers have almost tumbled, and access to cash, the ability to purchase homes, land, and convenience items as well as imported food, is indicative of a rise in socio-economic status within the wider society. The following examination of narrative excerpts will illustrate this.

Althea, the first narrator below, was born in 1922 in La Plaine, and hence was raised in the 1920s and 1930s. Althea has lived all her life in La Plaine,

leaving the island only on rare occasions to visit her children in Guadeloupe or to seek medical treatment. She grew up with her mother and her mother's second husband, along with several siblings. She has always farmed for a living, growing various crops for home use and for sale, and raising goats, cows, and the occasional pig. She supported most of her children on her own until her marriage at around age forty, when most of her children were grown. At the time of this research, she still would walk up to her garden, on foot, about two miles from her residence, to move her cow to another spot to graze (cows are tied in Dominica), or to work weeding her garden where she grew dasheen¹ and tannia.² She now lives fairly comfortably with her aging husband, whom she married after she had her last child. They live in a cement block house with all the amenities, including electricity, a propane stove, indoor plumbing and a washing machine, and cable television.

In this passage taken from her narrative, Althea recalls the journey on foot to Roseau:

When I was going to school, things was badly off. Not me alone, everybody. We used to walk lakeside, by the lakeside to go to Roseau³. And from here, we had to cook our food, and bring it along with us, with our load. Anything, *fawin* [cassava flour], or *toloman* [arrowroot], or anything like that to sell, ...any produce, or cocoa, or thing like that. And then when we reach somewhere they call Gwan Wivye [Grande Rivière], we putting down. And we putting down, eating what we have, our little food, and after we finish we heist up the same load and we going up again. Barefooted you know, two dress, one on your hand to reach, one for when you reach in town for you to sleep, to stay in the town for you to go back. And then sell what we had, we used to sell *fawin* five cents a pot. A pot is four pints, and when go up, next day, we have salt, in the same basket, we have kerosene, that's for the home use, we have everything, we have sugar, flour. At times its muddy rainy, you fall in the mud.... You lose everything, passing sugar, it all spoil. And if it is man they go by boat. They go in boat they take to go to Roseau. When they go to Roseau, many a time some of them having boards, when they come back in the harbour,

¹ *Dasheen* (diminutive of 'choux de Chine', scientific name *Colocasia esculenta*) is a tuberous vegetable and one of the staple ground provisions grown in Dominica.

² 'Tannia' is the common name for another tuber grown as a staple food, present in Dominica prior to colonization (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*).

³ The footpath passes by one of three lakes in the central mountainous area, called Fresh Water Lake.

there, they losing everything again. The boat capsizes. The men they go up empty handed – many a time someone, a good friend of yours, can give you a little money there for you to buy something for you to bring home, a little codfish, a little flour, sugar, what have you, some kerosene – to have lights it's kerosene... Things was very badly off.

Althea's narrative starts out as a somewhat personal account, relating what went on at the time she was a schoolgirl. However, the narrative does not pertain only to her own life experience and is not about events in only her life, but reveals certain aspects of life when she was growing up that are relevant in a general sense to everybody in the village, as she notes when she says "not me alone, everybody." The use of pronouns "we," "they," and "you" reaffirms this sense of generality and common experience. The activities described are given the quality of repeated, habitual practices when she says "we used to..." and "many a time."

The theme of her account is established by the phrase "things was badly off," which she states both at the opening and at the closing of this text. This statement serves to contextualize the body of the narrative text – everything that is said illustrates the physical and economic hardships that people endured when Althea was growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, as described above. These hardships are expressed here in terms of the difficulty of getting goods to market, the little money one would receive for their sale, and the problems encountered bringing the goods that could not be made locally, either on foot or by boat, to the village from town. Althea's account clearly points to the isolated location of the village, cut off from easy access to the marketplace by the lack of transportation and infrastructure, made worse by the difficult terrain and tempestuous seas. In reinforcing the relative isolation of communities on the east coast, these difficulties also forced them to maintain their economic autonomy and self-sufficiency. A major concern that emerges in Althea's account is therefore the difficulty of obtaining goods that must be bought with cash, signified by the hardships she describes.

Althea's story is that of a hard-working single mother of several children, who worked the land alone to provide for her family until she finally married, and

who began to acquire a little cash once markets became more accessible from the village in the 1960s. This account, in detailing these hardships, could be considered a critical view of the past from the narrator's personal experience and her position in the contemporary world where, although not all has changed, access to cash has increased immensely through the development of the banana industry for the international market, sale of produce locally, and jobs in town and abroad. These economic improvements were facilitated through a relatively well-developed infrastructure that has made access to the west coast and the capital easier.

Fittingly, the elements highlighted in the account are precisely the aspects that have been transformed. In this way, the account indirectly addresses change, by employing a conception of the past that reveals those practices no longer carried out, and that contrast life in the past with the life of today. For that reason, practice is much more important than particular events, unless the latter are important in signifying change. 'Practice' implies repetition of an act as something that is done usually or habitually. Changes in practices are thus changes in habitual activities, and can be indicative of transformations at multiple levels: economic, social, cultural, political. Recounting what one used to do and no longer does reflects a perception of the past that differentiates it from the present, portraying it as 'other'.⁴ Perceiving the past as 'other' has been appropriately described by De Certeau (1988: 2) (in reference to Western historiography) as what allows us to 'know' it, for it to become an object of knowledge. Perspectives on the past can be said to reflect a relationship between the perceived past and the interpreters of that past, and this relationship to the past ultimately informs the identity of those who claim that past as their own. For de Certeau, this differentiating of the past from the present reflects a particular relation with death that is embodied in the notion of progress. A notion of

⁴Bloch (1996) describes two ethnographic examples in which the relation to the past is differently conceived: among the Yemeni Muslims, the past they hold as their own is one of continual rebirth of the same, while the past as change is conceived as outside their realm of cultural identity; the Merini of Madagascar, on the other hand, view change as a part of the living, as a continuous process which slows down as death nears and stasis, and thus permanence, sets in.

progress would not be possible without differentiation, through death, of what came before. We could say the same in the case of any kind of perception of change, or of progression from one state to another; the separation of past and present (and future) is necessary for the conceptualization of continuity through change. Substantiating the past is also fundamental to the appropriation of the past as an object of knowledge, as *the past*. This objectifying conception of the past, as separate from the present, is reflected in the narrative excerpts above and in those that follow in this section. It signifies the perception of social and cultural transformations that people hold, and is the condition for the development of a nostalgic stance towards the past, which reflects the relation perceived between the past and the present. This space created by the distinction made between the past and present allows for a critical position (moral stance) to be taken. This will be discussed in more detail further on in this section.

In the following narrative excerpt, the transformations are made explicit as Beatrice, born in 1951, recounts what her mother, Eleanor, told her about growing up in the 1920s and 1930s. The hardships of the past are again the theme, foregrounding those practices and elements of their subsistence economy that have been alleviated through the years by the introduction of the cash economy and viable infrastructure. Here, Beatrice makes an explicit comparison to the life of today.

In those days things were rough. Food, all they had is what they rear, and codfish⁵ because they had no electricity. They had no fridge, because they had no electricity they had no fridge, they only have lamps, and at nights they would make a big thing of fire, to see at night in the kitchen. You have to burn wood from January to December. Even though lightning flashing, thunder rolling, you have no wood, you have to go in the bush to find a wood. You know how dangerous it is to go in the bush with a cutlass under lightning and thunder because people didn't have stoves. Because in those days it was very hard. They didn't have kerosene stove, nothing. People before saw a lot of misery. And just to think about it. From here to Roseau is thirty-three miles. And people had to walk from here to Roseau to sell a little produce. To walk it, thirty-three miles on your feet with load on your head.

⁵ Dried and salted codfish has been imported since the time of slavery, and has remained one of the staple protein foods.

Beatrice frames her account in terms of hardships endured, starting her narrative with “things were rough” and midway reiterates this point by saying “people before saw a lot of misery.” She describes the activities they used to carry out, emphasizing the lack of electricity. Because they had no electricity, they could not refrigerate food to preserve it, so they were obliged to eat fresh meat and fish right away or else preserve it by smoking or salting it. People had no stoves, so all cooking was done with wood. In this way, Beatrice describes the past in terms of what was lacking, compared to life today, and characterizes this past as “misery” – a misery which is conceived of relative to the amenities of today.

Like Althea’s account, Beatrice’s takes on a generalizing tone in two ways, firstly, as she uses the term “people” and the pronoun “they” as the subject on which the activities and practices she describes are predicated. Secondly, the past she describes is a general past, referred to as “in those days,” meaning the period when her mother was growing up, rather than any specific event or time. By this general reference to the past, practices rather than events are again emphasized. The past, because it is described in terms of what was lacking, is differentiated from life today. It becomes ‘other’ in that what is spoken about as being in the past are those practices and hardships that are thought to have been overcome today. Life today is used to recreate the past, highlighting oppositional elements and practices. This opposition, based on lack in the past of elements that are present today, can be construed as a way of stating the advantages of the present. However, it also sets the stage for using the past, in its contrast to the present, to critically evaluate the present, which will be illustrated in developing the analysis of the following narrative excerpts.

In the narrative excerpts that follow, the theme of hardship due to lack is reiterated, with special reference to the lack of clothing. Helena, another La Plaine woman who was born in 1926 and raised during the same period recounts the journey to Roseau:

It was by the lake, by Grand Fond side, by Rosalie we would pass, go Grand Fond to walk to go to Roseau. My mother have one dress. But to

leave La Plaine and to go Roseau you going Friday, you staying the Friday, you staying the Saturday, Sunday morning for you to be back. Sometime when we reach in town our foot big like that, it swell up. We have to go in the sea and wash our foot. One dress my mother walk with it all the night. ... arrive around one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, not in the morning, in the night, for day to break cause, call it Laudat side and so on. We walking with *flambo*.⁶ We buying kersone puttin it in a jug, in a bottle, and we cuttin a lime, and we puttin it round the bottle for the heat not to break the bottle. And each time it coming to out, it blazing up again, alright? My mother have one dress, we leave La Plaine and to go Roseau three days. My mother used to borrow people's clothes, for when she reach in town for her to go in the sea and wash her foot and to change the one she did have on her to put the dress on her. And when people thinking it her own it's not her own, a person dress she borrowed. You understand me? So we raise up like that, we raise up like that, we raise up like that.

Helena stresses the physical hardship endured in the journey, trekking barefoot, in the dark, along the mountain trails, arriving in Roseau exhausted and with feet so battered from the walk that they had to soak them in the sea. She also emphasizes a concern with lack of clothing, especially a clean dress to wear in town. This concern with clothing becomes apparent in other narratives as well, and reveals the extent of people's hardship and the lack of cash to buy cloth to sew or clothing, becoming even emblematic of this lack, as a metonym of misery.

The concern with the scarcity of clothing also shows a preoccupation with one's appearance, especially how one presents oneself in public spaces. Taking a second dress to Roseau to change into was usual practice, as corroborated by Althea's account above, when she says, "Barefooted you know, two dress, one on your hand to reach, one for when you reach in town for you to sleep, to stay in the town for you to go back." In Helena's account, her mother was concerned with adhering to the practice of appearing neat and clean in town to the extent that she borrowed a dress to change into once she arrived in Roseau, so that people who saw her would think it was her dress and would not know that she had to borrow it. This concern with one's appearance reveals not only the extent of poverty

⁶ 'Flambo' (from French *flambeau*) is a kind of torchlight made by putting kerosene in a bottle with a cloth for a wick. A half lime is placed around the neck of the bottle to prevent the flame from heating and breaking the glass.

because of lack of clothing, but also a concern with one's self-presentation, a pride in one's appearance, that is reflected in the importance of the second dress. The significance of clothing and appearance can be seen in accounts of travelers and observers in the 18th and early 19th century with respect to free coloured people, both women and men, and generally, at festive occasions (Atwood 1971 [1791], Burton 1997 point out the attention to clothing). The importance attributed to clothing appears to be linked both with freedom, as slave clothing that was given out on plantations was very minimal and utilitarian, and a certain status associated with the ability to buy cloth and clothing. Not having the second dress would betray the state of one's poverty, that is, lack of cash, and pride dictates that it is necessary, even if it is borrowed, in order appear equal in status to others. This was especially important in Roseau, where, because of the more ready availability of money, clothing was more easily bought. Poverty, hardship and one's rural-ness were thus to be concealed. The fact that this poverty is being recounted today by the women who endured it, however, shows a certain pride in having gone through it. The idiom of hardship, through which they express their past, is used in contrast to life today, and in this becomes both an idiom of identity for these women, and of critique of the changes that have occurred. Clothing is one symbol of this that is pervasive, and has been preserved today in national celebrations, especially the Wob Dwiyet (from French *robe douillette*) contests discussed in Chapter 8, where women model elegant dresses fashioned after those of their ancestors.

The lack of clothing is again emphasized in this account by Althea:

When I know shoes, when I make my first communion, my mother buy a shoe for me before I never know shoe. Barefoot all the while. Not me alone, all children. All children. Never knew... Every Friday mother wash your clothes for you to go school next, on Monday coming. You got to be clean. Or if you big enough you go to river and wash, you put another one on you. Understand me if it don't dry you have another maybe two clothes. No uniform, no have uniform, same clothes. Ordinary clothes like this. Time was very, very, very critic you know... At times, we could not even go to school. You don't have clothes, you have the food, you don't

have the clothes to go to school. Maybe one hard clothes⁷ alone you have, one use this week you go next week with it. Thing was very, very, very bad you know.

Lack of clothing was so severe at times that one set of good clothing would sometimes have to be shared among the children, so that only one child could go to school each week. Children were not sent to school wearing their 'home' clothes. They would wear the same 'hard' clothing to school every day, and change into 'home' clothes after school and on weekends, to do their chores and play. If they did not have good clothing for school, they simply would not go. This reflects a concern with one's self-presentation in a particular public space, where appearance was (and still is) important. The child's appearance reflected on the adult: if a child was unkempt, dirty, or improperly dressed, the child would be remarked by other adults and talked about. The concern with appearance is consonant with a concern with self-presentation in public that resonates with Helena's account above. The concern with the lack of clothing is corroborated by this account of a colonial observer in Grenada in the late 1930s, showing the widespread conditions of poverty in the British Caribbean:

Among children of school age the question of clothing is very important, for parents (and it is to their credit) are very reluctant to send their children to school in dirty or in ragged clothes. Very often the child has only one decent suit and when this requires washing (as it almost invariably does towards the middle of the week) the child has to be absent from school while the suit is being washed and dried (Report of the Labour Commission, Grenada, circa 1936, para. 50, cited in Colonial Report 164, 1939: 34).

This concern with the scarcity of clothing is taken up by Beatrice as well. Her account is similar to that of Althea and of Helena, except that for Beatrice, school clothes had to be worn to church on Sunday as well, another public space where one's grooming was important.

People had no clothes. You would send children to school with at least a dress or whatever, and on Saturday, this child would maybe go with you and stay, and bathe without clothes, and wash his clothes and put it to dry, to go to church on Sunday. That same church clothes had go to school on

⁷ 'Hard clothes' means good clothing, without holes, as opposed to work clothes.

Monday until Friday. So all you had was two old home clothes sometimes all tear up, you had to take needles and mend them, because no clothes, you had no money, no money. Although it was very, very cheap, there was no money to buy it at a low cost.

In all of these accounts, a distinction is made between ‘home’ clothes and clothes to be worn in public spaces. In my time spent in the village, I noticed that dressing to go out was important, for both men and women. Particular care was taken with grooming, especially of hair for women. Any functions, including church, special events or meetings, or even Sunday afternoon watching a cricket match or simply standing around in the main area of the village (a common practice) saw people taking particular care with their grooming. However, when they were at their homes, even if they had visitors, or went out to carry out their chores, to go to the shop, or to go to their gardens people would often wear old ‘home’ clothes, sometimes torn or stained, seemingly not caring if they were seen by others. People would not dress up for visitors coming to their homes, but if they had to go out to visit, would usually groom themselves well. It was not so much the fact of simply being seen by people that was important, but where they were seen dressed a certain way. Weddings, for example, could cause embarrassment for some people if they could not afford the required two sets of clothing – one formal dress or suit to wear in the church, and one more casual, but clean, outfit to wear to the reception. They would simply not go if they could not dress appropriately, or they would only go to the reception. Current practices with regards to self-presentation in public spaces, as I observed them, reflect concerns with appearance revealed in the accounts of the past used here.

Shifting values, from resistance to dominance

However, while some practices may have remained unchanged in their underlying pattern, the economic transformations that have taken place have undoubtedly had some effect on cultural practices. The following excerpt from Helena’s narrative demonstrates a concern with the effect of change on how people carry out these cultural practices. Again, as with the previous narrative

excerpts, the concern with 'lack' appears as a stance taken in the present to contrast past life and hardships with life today. However, these accounts set the stage for what could be called *critical nostalgia*, that uses the contrast between the past and the present, the absence or 'death' (according to de Certeau, cited above) of practices that were prevalent in the past, to critique the present. This critique underscores a change in certain cultural values, so that the change in practices and the access to cash to purchase goods, such as clothing, reflects or stands for a change in values. Helena told me the following:

I raise up poor. You see me, I have a lot a lot a lot of little clothes. But we have people they making show. They just show up, just stay on the soil there. Is it right? Let me tell you. That is to say people making *vari*, they making dressy, dressing up, dressing up.

...They will put dresses one behind the other, one behind the other, one behind the other, for people to see how they dressing, okay? They doesn't remember when their father and their mother raised them they was poor. Understand me? Look its there the *vari* staying. I raise up my mother have one dress, a *boman*⁸ dress like the old one I have on me...

The term *vari* refers to showing off, boasting, or having too much 'style' and has a negative connotation in this narrative. It is used in reference to someone who tries to represent him- or herself, through verbal discourse, dress, etc., so as to display what they have, or would like others to believe they have acquired or accomplished. A paradox (or contradiction) ensues: while the past lack of clothing is lamented as the inability to dress well in public and represent oneself as a 'respectable' person, the facility with which clothing is now available is portrayed, in this case, as negative and as a refutation of values and even of one's heritage, referring to someone who "doesn't remember" where he or she comes from. In the past, in order to maintain a semblance of 'respectability' in their appearance, the women I talked to, or their mothers, had to borrow (a form of sharing) from others who were probably not much better off than themselves. A certain appearance of relative economic status had to be maintained. If one fell

⁸ '*Boman*' clothes refers to work clothing.

below a certain level, it would be manifest in the lack of appropriate clothing for certain occasions and events, and showing oneself in that way would bring shame. Being respectable, in this sense, does not imply adhering to dominant values and aspirations, as in the notion proposed by Wilson (1973) in its contrast to African-based 'reputation' (see Chapter 2 for discussion) but is grounded within local understandings and symbols that link dress to availability of cash, and the latter to an acknowledgement of freedom, and the appropriation and reinterpretation of wealth as *resistance* to domination and an assertion of autonomy, more than a desire or a movement to join existing dominant classes.

From Helena's account, it seems that to have more, or at least to show that one had more, than what was appropriate went beyond the limit of her vision of propriety. One could venture to say, then, that there was a certain economic status to be obtained, on the one hand, below which one felt shame, yet there was also a certain egalitarian morality that was enacted through sharing, but also through concealment, speaking against creating a showy display of what one has, in order not to appear to have more than others and therefore not to incite jealousy and possible consequences: gossip, theft or witchcraft. These accounts suggest the importance of maintaining an attitude of equality, both through one's ability to appear as well dressed as others and through sharing; going over the limits, either through showing off or revealing one's hardships was not good.

While the lack of clothing in these accounts is perceived in relation to today and these accounts are constructed with respect to present concerns, it is reasonable to say that they nevertheless reveal the importance of the interconnection of these values attached to self-presentation in public because clothing was either borrowed or washed especially for those occasions. It is also reasonable to propose that there is not a break in these perceptions, at least for older women, who interpret present circumstances in these terms. In this instance, Helena uses the idea of this equilibrium to refer to her perception of the transformation in social values that accompanies the new ease with which cash and goods are more readily available, and especially the way in which people

flaunt them. The very possibility of *vari* today, as a critique, is located in the continuity between the past and the present in the way people present themselves and the relation of dress to status and economic success. This includes concern with an ethos of sharing and the maintenance of egalitarianism as well as concern with the changes that have occurred, that allow people nowadays to acquire more goods and that put a strain on the balance between status obtained through economic success and an egalitarian ethos.

The following excerpt of a narrative by Beatrice illustrates further this critical perspective on the transformations that have taken place. Her critique focuses on the reduction of sharing among people, and can be interpreted as a direct reference to the change in the economy and the desire for access to more cash.

Although many of us are boarding on today's life, but I always say to my mother, although I had not raised together with her, but what I experienced what it is today is too different. For the difference of today, there is no more love. People don't have love again. Unity is not there as before. People had more love before. Although, with your country and my country, even bigger because people in your country, everybody does pass on their way, and here you still find we are nice people, but it was much nicer... Because if I go and fish, when I come up, I will share my fish with neighbors, but today, all my fish remains with me, you know what I mean? Because, people tend to be, umm, selfish, like they want a lot for themselves, the more they see, the more they want. But before, you will share whatever you have. You come from Roseau, is it codfish you bring, you send for your people a piece of codfish to have a lunch, or whatever you have. But today, most people sell what they have, but before, it was giving.

For Beatrice, the problem lies in the desire to acquire goods for oneself rather than to share with others. She perceives a shift from an egalitarian, caring community, where people shared what they had, to a society in which the members were more self-centred, where everyone is out to get something for him or her self. People are no longer striving to be on a par with one another, or at least to appear to be, but look to acquire more and more. This she sees in the shift from giving food to selling it or keeping it for themselves, an observation that reflects the shift from subsistence to a cash-based economy. In this excerpt,

Beatrice equates love with sharing, stating that people had more love and unity before because they shared with each other. This shift, for some, could be understood within a paradigm of a movement from a socio-centric to an ego-centred self (see Spiro 1993 for a discussion and critique of these concepts); however, I see it more as a shift in the way 'society' relates to individuals, in this case, through a changing economy that involved the rural population to a greater extent in accessing cash.

Before cash became generally accessible through cash crop production (bananas), people were dependent upon each other to obtain the services and food they could not provide for themselves. Sharing food, services, and goods has not completely disappeared, especially between family and extended family members, as remittances from children, parents, and siblings abroad or elsewhere on the island are extremely important as a source of income and a way to obtain goods not easily available, and the lack of monetary support from social services, especially for unemployed mothers and the elderly. As well, as previously noted, the occasional *koudmen*, a form of labour sharing, is still carried out. Now, however, *koudmen* is usually used only for big jobs such as moving houses from one lot to another. Individuals would usually rather be paid cash for their labour than to wait for reciprocation in some other form, such as the labour of others to help plant or harvest, or food from the garden they helped to plant, although labour exchange does still occur on occasion.⁹ The payment of cash for labour ends the cycle of reciprocity and interdependence, as once paid, the 'debt' is settled.

The unity that Beatrice perceived probably derived from this interdependence, and the feeling of love, associated with sharing by people still today, that likely accompanied it, in an 'economy of love'. If one does not share, or help to provide for others to whom one is related (and sometimes others as well), then it would be said that the person has no love. Affection, without economic provision of some sort, is not considered to be love, and the physical

⁹ Brothers, other relatives, or friends, each with their own banana plots, sometimes work to harvest

absence of a father or mother who migrated, for example, is not considered to show a lack of love, as long as economic support is forthcoming.

Beatrice's view is rather idealized, as in reality, villagers were likely to conceal what they did not want others to see so they would not have to share it or, on the contrary, have it stolen (today, there is a concern with concealment, and I was told 'hide your business' with reference to goods purchased in a store). In contemporary La Plaine, economic success and the ability to buy things, such as a refrigerator or a television, is significant to one's status, and so is the ability to provide for one's birth family and one's children. As well, there is a fine balance to be kept between showing or revealing what one has (or does) and concealing it. To whom and how one reveals it are also important. For example, gifts are not usually opened in the presence of anyone other than the giver of the gift. One woman expressed fear of the jealousy of others as a reason why she locked up her house when she went out. Nevertheless, Beatrice's perspective reveals concern with an egalitarian ethos, and the idea that this is being lost to the desire for acquisition. This corresponds to Helena's perception of and concern with a disequilibrium between the show of material acquisitions as *vari* and an egalitarian ethos. The availability of things, the cash flow increase due in part to banana production by small holders, improved education, equal rights under the law, and the development of a somewhat unifying national identity has diminished the colour/class barrier that impeded lower status people from rising in social status within society as a whole. It would suggest a shift in the meaning of money, from the symbol of one's ability to resist domination and to remain autonomous, to the ability to rise within society, and an emphasis on improving one's social status, rather than maintaining an appearance of equality. The notion of 'improving' will be taken up in further discussions. For now, I turn to the nature of these commentaries, as critiques of change.

Critical Nostalgia

These last two excerpts, those of Helena and of Beatrice, involve a critical stance, which I have called *critical nostalgia*. Both Helena and Beatrice use the past, perceived in terms of the present, to provide a critique of the effect of transformations that are directly linked to the shifting economy and more access to cash. A dictionary definition of nostalgia characterizes it as “a wistful or excessively sentimental sometimes abnormal yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition” (Webster’s 1983). Recently, however, the concept of nostalgia has been rethought – while the theme of absence and desire of an objectified past is still present in these new renditions of nostalgia (Strathern 1995), some writers see nostalgia more as a discursive strategy or practice that is both positive and productive. For example, Battaglia (1995) calls ‘practical nostalgia’ the use of traditional gardening competitions to develop social cohesion in the modern, urban Papua New Guinea setting, and Herzfeld (1997) proposes the notion of ‘structural nostalgia’ in which the nostalgic stance, in rural Greece, is employed as a critique of state and juridical structures. According to Herzfeld, pre-state structures of reciprocity and informal ways of dealing with transgressions are used to contest but also to negotiate within the practical boundaries of state and law. For the narrators here, a nostalgic stance that could be called *critical nostalgia* helps them to voice a critique of the present and to position themselves with relation to social, economic, and cultural transformations, and to express (if not resolve) a paradox that exists within local discourses that pertains to desired behaviour. This nostalgic stance also allows people to recreate themselves in the present through their expressions of the past.

The older women position themselves in relation to the present through their talk of the past, their hardships, and the changes that they have experienced. While they do not directly speak of their lives in the accounts used here, as self-experience, but rather speak of ‘how things were’, they position themselves by making moral inferences that invoke and engage a discourse of both respectability and egalitarianism, that appears to hark to Wilson’s dichotomy of respectability

and reputation, but does not, as they are not separate and exclusive values or systems of value; rather, 'respectability' and 'egalitarianism' are intertwined in a complex and interdependent matrix that guides people's expectations, actions, and interactions. The critique that women express stands against the destruction of this interdependent matrix (the separation of respectability from egalitarianism) and the shift in the meaning of cash from symbolizing resistance and the assertion of autonomy to signifying status within the wider configuration of socio-economic hierarchies.

Narrative excerpts by older women have been shown here to portray a concern with change that focuses on the effects of economic and material (infrastructural) transformations on social interactions and on the moral codes that guide these interactions. Now I will turn to social transformations, such as governmental transformations and increasing involvement of government in the lives of people of La Plaine, as well as social and cultural transformations that have been induced by the material changes (television, easier access to educational institutions, shift away from subsistence agriculture) in order to draw out the discursive frameworks that underlie them.



Woman in La Plaine, 1999.

4.2 – “*At that time we have more respect...*”

This section will elaborate another discursive frame grounded in village relations, one that includes the interconnection of respect and responsibility, within an *economy of respect*. The theme of ‘respect’ recurred numerous times in conversations with village people. Older adults complained that children no longer showed respect towards adults, as *they* had when they were growing up. They remarked that children did not greet adults politely as in the past, and they would even use foul language in the street and towards adults. Whether or not it portrayed the situation justly or exaggerated it a little, these remarks constituted a common framework, reflecting a perception of change that had affected very fundamental village relations, those between adults and children, and was used as a measure of the transformation of village life. Collier, in a very different social context, in her work in rural Spain, remarked that adults there complained of the same thing, that children had less respect towards adults, and that they blamed ‘modern’ culture (Collier 1997: 153). In Collier’s analysis, this transformation was not due so much to outside influences as to a shift in the importance parents placed on education, perceived as training for an occupation to secure their children’s futures, instead of learning agricultural tasks or doing unskilled labour. Also, rather than the child becoming involved in domestic and farm work, under the authority of the parent, the parent became practically the servant of the child, undermining the traditional parent-child hierarchy (ibid.: 170).

In Dominica, a parallel situation has occurred, with schooling taking precedence over helping in the home and in the garden, as parents want their children to succeed, to ‘improve’ themselves, by obtaining a higher status occupation. However, other factors come into play that are beyond the scope of parents’ desire for their children’s well-being, and that are, at the same time, instrumental in eliciting this desire, especially those interventions designed to promote social reform.

While the colonial government always had ultimate power over the affairs of Dominica, prior to WWII, little formal government control was exercised over

the villagers except when unpaid taxes were collected by force, or squatters were removed. During this time, the raising of children was almost uniquely the concern of parents and authority structures were concentrated at the village level, including the family, a generally accepted age-related hierarchy, teachers, and ultimately the local Catholic priest who was greatly respected. Older siblings and other adults could, and were expected to, discipline a child in the absence of the parent. Many have told me that if another adult disciplined them, their parents were informed, and much to their chagrin, they would be punished again at home. The authority of adults was rarely questioned.

Since 1945, the government and international agencies have intervened to improve living conditions, including health, education, and general standards of living, with a focus on family life. In keeping with the reform of family life, since the 1970s, increasing government regulation with respect to children is slowly undermining the authority of parents and other adults over young people, by transferring ultimate decisions with regard to child welfare, especially in the case of abuse and neglect, to the state.¹⁰ As well, the Education Act of 1997 in principle relegates all school discipline to the jurisdiction of the school headmaster, removing power from the individual teachers, though in reality, this rule is not strictly observed.¹¹ At the same time, a shift in the attitude of children towards their elders, perceived by village residents as a change in the amount of respect shown by children towards adults has been remarked on by local people.

I suggest that there is a link between the changing attitudes of children, or at least the perception of such a phenomenon, transformations in parenting and

¹⁰ In 1970, the Children and Young Persons Act (Ch. 37:50 of the Laws of Dominica), which supports both the protection of young people and the establishment of juvenile courts, was ratified; in 1982, the Maintenance Act (Ch. 35:61) which stipulates that children should be maintained by both parents, was ratified; and in 1998, the Sexual Offences Act (Act I of 1998), which deals with sexual abuse of minors and women, as well as homosexuality, was brought in. Dominica signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.

¹¹ The Education Act II (1997), Part II, Section E, 49(2), states "Corporal punishment may be administered where no other punishment is considered suitable or effective, and only by the principal, deputy principal or any teacher appointed in writing by the principal for that purpose..." and 49(3) follows: "Whenever corporal punishment is administered an entry shall be made in a punishment book that shall be kept in each school for such purpose with a statement of the nature and extent of the punishment and the reasons for administering it."

the increased intervention of the state. This is manifested and maintained by a shift in the regulation and control of children, through a displacement of authority from the local adults, in direct interaction with children, to the state through its various programmes, especially those administered by the Welfare Department. These programmes, as will be seen at the end of this section, have been influenced, first by the colonial government, then by religious groups and international agencies such as UNICEF which partially funds them, and by local agents who uphold dominant ideals of the nuclear family and the social status and respectability that accompany adherence to this model. These have been engrained since colonial times, modified and reinforced by the various churches, and supplemented and supported by discourse stemming from international agencies.

In this section, I examine narratives, moral discourses and practices that are involved in raising children, in order to disclose women's perspectives on parenting in the context of the growing role and influence of government, of international agencies such as UNICEF as well as the impact of television. This does not pretend to be a study of child socialization, nor of psychological processes or the psychoanalytic relationship between childhood and adulthood. Rather, discourses and institutions linked to childrearing, as 'political technologies' (Foucault 1988), will be examined to contribute to the understanding of subjectivity in this rural community. Understanding attitudes towards childrearing provides insight into local perceptions of the person and his or her location in society because personal boundaries are configured, hierarchies established, and rights and responsibilities gained through the process of becoming an adult. More broadly, a look at child-rearing, and people's perceptions of it, provides a bottom-up view of the configuration of social relations and the structures of power and authority that prevail, and how they are developed and maintained.

In Dominica, developing a child's 'respect' stands as an important aspect in child-rearing, and is a recurrent theme in the narratives in this section; its

decline is seen by many, with regret, as an important result of a changing way of life. 'Respect', understood as a key value and mode of conduct central to the upbringing of children, also has repercussions within the life cycle generally and to the structures of authority and regulation within the village setting. The act of 'respecting' comes through deference and obedience, obtained by what could be called popular 'political technologies' of bodily discipline, that in turn create and maintain social hierarchies within the village, based largely on age, as well as gendered relations and roles.

Respect was the substance of local, mostly interpersonal, hierarchical relations. Those at the local social and economic pinnacle, including the priest, the planter, and the teacher, benefitted from respect. However, while respect, in the wider village sense involves a recognition of status, it also refers to the fulfillment of one's responsibilities towards other people, as well as the enactment of one's rights. While largely originating through the political technologies exercised on the plantation to create and maintain hierarchical relations and to exact obedience from slaves, the paradigm of respect was appropriated and reinterpreted in the creation and maintenance of social relations among the former slaves, and may have also had some basis in African social relations. The fact that now respect in the local setting is losing its hold indicates a transformation in the structures of authority, the effects of these popular "political technologies," in social relations generally. This in turn has repercussions in the conception of what it is to be a person, in subjectivity, and consequently in one's self-ethic and life trajectory.

The 'respect' that children were taught is fundamental to an idea of the person in Dominican society as well as to the relations between persons, and to the formation of subjectivities. A young person's place was defined by the amount of respect he or she owed to others, while the opposite is true for an older person: that is, an older person's position was defined by the amount of respect that he or she was awarded. This extended beyond the relation between children and adults, so that there existed, more or less, a hierarchy founded in the first instance on age. Since gaining respect also was linked to handling of

responsibilities, one's ability to execute tasks, especially those involved in procuring a livelihood and maintaining a household (production and reproduction), was also important in one's position in the hierarchy of respect.

The gaining of respect overlaps with another important aspect of selfhood, that of autonomy, since taking on responsibilities meant that one was able to look after oneself, as well as to look after others. One learned to be obedient, to acquit one's duty towards others, yet to be independent and self-sufficient. In addition, one learned not to complain about physical discomfort. The acquisition of autonomy is concomitant with learning to take on responsibilities: household chores such as fetching water or sweeping the yard; subsistence activities such as gardening, hunting and fishing, and caring for livestock; and family responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings or grandparents. Autonomy is not simply the ability to provide for oneself, but also involves being free from the jurisdiction of others. Once a person can be totally responsible for her or himself, others can no longer control this person's activities. Autonomy is the hallmark of adulthood, especially for men, who sometimes go to great lengths to ensure their autonomy (especially from women!). However, this does not keep the person from caring for and sharing with others, but on his or her own terms and volition that follow cultural expectations, not under coercion by others, nor under any prescribed rules of obligation.

The following narrative excerpts exemplify perceptions of the paradigm of respect and the changes that are occurring. Althea, who was introduced in the first section of this chapter, is brought back here with some details of being brought up in the 1930s and 40s. Throughout the following narrative excerpts, she shows the importance of 'respect' in a child's relation to adults, brought about by manifestations of authority, enacted through techniques of corporal discipline that she has described rather vividly. In keeping with the other narrative excerpts in previous sections, the aspect of hardship is invoked, employed here as a frame, or a background against which to set the account of respect.

..... Time was bad, bad, badly off. At time you don't even go to school. You don't have clothes. You have the food but you don't have clothes to

go to school. Maybe it one hard clothes you have. One is this week, one go next week with it. Thing was very, very, very bad you know. And you had more respect for your mother. Although thing was bad, you have respect for your mother.

The juxtaposition of hardship to a discussion of respect, shows a concern with pride, with proper behaviour that would elicit both the respect of one's children, and through one's control of them, one's ability to make them respectful of others, and to gain the respect of others in the village. The children's behaviour, as Althea points out further down, depends on the ability of the parents to control them, and therefore reflects back on the parents. Having the respect of others helped one to maintain pride in oneself (self-respect), even though "thing was bad."

You couldn't shake yourself for your mother because you would get a beating. You go and shake yourself for your mother? You go and lie for your mother? (cheups¹²) If you do something you can lie for your mother, not tell the truth now, all you joking. She will take information to know how the things happen. And you get more blows, more punishment. They would punish you. I get a lot of punishment you know. They would punish you. They would take your hands too, both of your hand like that, one there, one there. Kneel down, kneel down straight, and long you stand like that, bow your head, and then ask my mother pardon, as though I did that, as if you confess to your mother what you did. And if you steal You steal the sugar, and he sure he had the sugar and someone take the sugar, one of you all take the sugar, and this one say not she, is you. And she say no, and she get to know it's true, you take the sugar, (cheups) blow in your skin you know. Blow in your skin my dear, not little blows, you know, until you ask pardon, you know. You have to ask pardon, ask mama. I'm asking you pardon I did that for true. Then they will release you.

The techniques of discipline Althea describes here combine the infliction of pain, humiliation, confession, followed by forgiveness. While I have no particular evidence of the cultural roots of these practices, the bodily disciplines of Britain and France in the 18th and 19th centuries included both flogging (whipping) and public humiliation, amongst others (see Foucault 1979), which

¹² 'Cheups' is an onomatopoeic expression that refers to a discursive marker – a sound made by sucking air in between the upper teeth and the lower lip. The marker is used to provide emphasis

were also used in the colonies to control slaves; flogging was used as a punishment in schools in Britain, and is still inscribed in the law as a punishment for juvenile offenders in Dominica. Also, as mentioned previously, this is supported by idioms such as ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’. The use of confession and forgiveness very likely has its roots in Catholicism, and most Dominicans in the 1930s were at least nominally Catholic. While these practices were at least in part disciplines introduced under colonial domination through slavery and Christianity, they were appropriated and internalized within the system of local relations.

Children were not only disciplined for contravening such rules as those against stealing and lying (which showed great disrespect), or impertinence (expressed in this narrative by the term ‘shake yourself for your mother’) but for not carrying out their tasks properly, or letting themselves be distracted from their tasks by play.

You go at the river and get water, and the bucket fall down and burst, or the *bòli*¹³ you take, (cheups) *hélas*, you ask for death. They will beat you, *hélas*, they will beat you. Okay. Or you go to school, and stop by school playing, you don’t reach home to go and carry water in time (cheups) I don’t know about you, I know what your bottom can meet, huh. Your mother would give you a good, good, good beating. Next time you learn not to stay by the school. Time for games, today not games. They know they there for games, but when not games, go home. Even the head teacher will tell you go home, go at your mother home, cause you know what you have to do.

Children were punished for failing to carry out their responsibilities to the household. Very young, children were taught to contribute to the household through various tasks, which were often seen as more important than their schooling for those of Althea’s generation, and even for younger women, as will

of doubt or disbelief, to signal an irony, or to emphasize the awfulness of something.

¹³ *Bòli* refers to a container used to carry water, usually made out of a round calabash with a whole cut in the top. It can also refer to a buoy used for the same purpose. Buoys would apparently wash up on the beach, and local people would pick them up to use as containers. The term *bòli* does not appear in the Diksyonné, but *bòl*, from the French *bol* for bowl, is represented. There may be an etymological link.

be seen in the next chapter. Their ability to carry out these tasks was necessary for their survival as adults, rendering them dutiful yet autonomous, and able to reproduce at the village level a social order based, in part, on a hierarchy of age and gender.

Below, Althea expresses a perception of change in young people's behaviour, shown by the example of people, especially boys, cursing, an act of disrespect. She blames the parents for the behaviour of the young people, locating responsibility for children's upbringing with the parents (unlike the Collier's informants in Collier's 1997 analysis in a village in Spain).

But people nowadays would say it in your face. Curse in your face, and before didn't have that. Didn't have that. Like those boys using all that indecent language. You don't have that. No way, no way, no way, no way. No way. Today have no respect again. Their parents don't show them how to respect their people.

Intriguingly, the transformation she sees originates with the parents, not the children. Those who are parents of children and teens today have shifted their parenting techniques, if we are to follow Althea's perspective. Accordingly, parents today, especially mothers, are questioning the child-rearing techniques of their parents, as will be discussed in the next section.

Children's attitudes towards adults, all adults, were supposed to demonstrate the utmost deference and respect. Social decorum calls for greeting between adults when they meet on the road to simply acknowledge each other, and to thereby show respect. Children were taught to greet all adults as a display of respect, but also to keep them in their 'place' where they would not become involved with adult 'business'. The absence of greeting was seen as rude, as a sign of disrespect, and the adult to whom the disrespect was shown could punish the child or report the incident to the parents. Between adults, lack of greeting is also disrespectful, and seen as a deliberate act. The lack of acknowledgement of a particular person can be due to a conflict between the two people: it is not uncommon for people, even close neighbours, to cease acknowledging each other, rather than face open confrontation or resolve the conflict in some other way. If a

child omitted greeting an adult, it could be seen as a reflection of the parent in two ways: as a sign of the parent's feelings towards the person, and as a sign of poor upbringing by the child's parents. Either way, the child was out of place, because he or she must show respect by not minding adult business, and by showing high regard and respect for all adults, as expressed by Althea:

You can pass a child without the child saying good morning, good afternoon? The big person would turn around and slap you and say why you don't say good morning, or tell the mother that you pass and don't say hello. Myself and you have a misunderstanding, the child are not concerned. She's not in it. My business and the big persons business are not hers. She don't have to vex with you. Big people vex, but not the child. Not your business. You understand? Not your business. At that time, you would raise up with respect. Raise up with respect.

Althea reiterates her opinion that children showed more respect in the past. Below she emphasizes the fact that respect was owed not only to parents, but to older siblings, especially if they took responsibility for younger siblings. Respect was owed to those who cared for the children, and in turn, older children gained respect of younger ones by taking on the responsibility of their well-being.

Children have more respect for their mother, respect for their father, even for their brother, because you couldn't do any bad things in front of your brother you know. You have respect for your brother. You wouldn't say anything or curse in front your brother or sister because they would beat you. Respect for them. You owe them respect as your mother. When your mother is not there, and when they are not going to school they are big enough, they are the one to cook for you. So if you say anything that's rude, and she will complain to your mother or else she herself would beat you. Call you back and give you a beating. So at that time we have more respect.

As children took on and successfully carried out responsibilities, they became respected persons in their turn. Proper conduct was also tied not only to showing respect towards adults, but to gaining the respect of others. A child, then, was differentiated from adults especially through the amount of and the ways in which respect should be shown or gained, and the responsibilities he or she was expected to take on. At the same time, a child's responsibilities would usually

accrue with age, as would the respect accorded him or her, so that becoming an adult was a continual process of incrementally gained responsibility and concomitant respect, rather than an abrupt change in status. This is especially important within the household, where children and adults of different ages, and different generations may live. This is all part the *economy of respect*. While these practices have not wholly changed, as respect and corporal discipline are still important in childrearing for most, they are in the process of shifting.

Younger children often became the charges of older children, who must cook for them, could punish them if they misbehave, and were in turn owed respect by the young children, as is described above. Older children were still to obey their parents and other elders, to whom they owed respect as well. A young woman could be (and still can be) abruptly pushed into adulthood, however, when she gave birth. A girl, no matter how young, was, and still is, obliged to leave school and begin to take care of the child.¹⁴ However, if she lived with her family, which was often the case, she still owed respect and obedience towards her elders, at the same time as she fulfilled her responsibility as an adult woman and mother, caring and providing for her child. Her success as an adult, and the respect she in turn gained, was measured by her success as a provider and in developing the respect and obedience of her children.

While all adults in the past were authority figures for children and could inflict punishment, any behavioural problems of the child are viewed, in local perspectives, as a result of the ineffectiveness of the mother or principle caregiver if the mother is not there, rather than as psychological or physiological problems of the child that could be attributed to some other circumstances, such as some kind of trauma, chemical imbalance, or congenital condition. If children

¹⁴ Abortion is illegal and held to be highly immoral in Dominica, though practiced by some medical doctors for a fee and locally through the administration of herbs, some of which are reportedly dangerous. As well, while birth control is generally available through the local health centers, clinics, and hospitals, and there is family planning centre in Roseau, birth control pills or injections are only prescribed to girls and women over the age of sixteen. It is noteworthy that over 20 percent of births occur to women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, although I was unable to obtain a breakdown by year or by school attendance (Dominica Statistical Division 1991).

act with respect towards adults, then they are considered to have been raised well, and the caregiver is thought to have carried out her or his duties in keeping with local standards. If the child's behaviour is unruly, then the parent is generally seen to be at fault.

In one instance that I observed, a little boy, about three or four years of age, had what were perceived by his family as behavioural problems. He was extremely active, and would not sit still for very long, always climbing, getting into things that could be dangerous to him, helping himself to food. He began to urinate on the threshold of the door, rather than go to the toilet or go all the way outside. He had just recently come to Dominica with his mother, who had spent several years spent in another island. The child's father had carried out some violence against the mother, and following that incident, she returned to Dominica to live with her mother, where her older daughter from a previous relationship was living, as well as her older brother, uncle to her children. She arrived with no money, and was therefore dependent on her family, as well as being the youngest adult in the household and female. Both her mother and her brother blamed her for the child's behaviour, and told her she was not a good mother, constantly berating her in front of her two children, so much so that she began to severely beat the little boy, perhaps to prove her ability to mother or simply out of sheer frustration. In any case, the boy's behaviour did not improve, but apparently became more severe. I will not analyze this case further, but have cited it simply in illustration of my point, that behaviour of children, in local understandings, is attributed mostly to parental ability, and this ability is measured in terms of being able to control the child's behaviour. The ability to provide for the child, and to control his or her behaviour, both of which are the parent's responsibility, are motives to show respect towards the mother. The perceived lack of ability to do either of these, in this case, brought criticism, disdain, and mistreatment – all signs of lack of respect.

The obedience and respect of children, with the goal that they gradually acquire the ability to carry out tasks and become responsible for aspects of

production and reproduction within the household, (foodgetting, caring for children, taking care of the house), and maintain 'civil' relationships within the village, was a fundamental concern to Dominicans in La Plaine.

Althea reinforces her earlier statement with regards to the distance that should be maintained between children and adults, and the way in which the older person should be deferred to by the child. As well, she stresses the prerogative of another adult to chastise the child if he or she is acting out of place.

If right now, you meet somebody, two person talk, like Sally [her granddaughter] come here, meet me, and you conversing, she cannot stand up and watch us or to hear. No way. Go, they have to go. The talk not belong to her. The person herself will beat you. She don't need your mother to beat you. She will stop and go, the conversation not yours. At that you have respect for her too also. You cannot watch somebody fix [look someone in the eyes]. No, you had to put down your eyes. Because the person will tell your mother what you do. Or she herself take her hand and slap you in the eyes like that. Don't watch me, I'm not your comrade. The conversation not yours, and you cannot keep conversation with them. You had to watch the child for it to talk. Tell the child is good things but this is not good. You have to send the child away, she don't need to hear this conversation, she not your comrade.

The child and the adult are not on the same social level, and their interactions must reflect this. The child's bodily postures (for example, keeping eyes lowered, or not "shaking") and spatial locations (removing oneself from proximity to conversing adults) are evidence of his or her compliance.

In addition to parents, siblings, and other village adults, teachers disciplined the children at their discretion in the schools (although not always without some resistance from parents), and until after 1945, there was very little if any government funding for or regulation of what occurred in the schools, and it was up to teachers to make and uphold the rules in the classroom, although certain behaviours were usually targeted for punishment, including lying, speaking Patwa, being late, being rude, fighting, and not knowing the answer to a question, for example. As well, most teachers had little if any training, or even high school, often moving directly to a position of pupil teacher after obtaining their school leaving certificate.

Even after 1945, there were no fixed rules or government control over discipline of students, although from that time the government, with help from international aid agencies and foreign governments, was able to improve curriculum, teacher training, supplies, and build new schools, and increase supervision.¹⁵ Althea's impression of her school years in the 1930s portrays vividly the authority of the teacher in the classroom. In this excerpt, she describes the way in which they were taught, the imperative to memorize everything, and the omnipresence of the teacher who she perceived as wielding a constant threat of punishment.

I was five years old when I go to school. All children went to school at five years. When you have five years, you go to school. When you are fifteen or sixteen, you leave school, if you are not rude. We learn how to read and write, make arithmetic, make mental, hygiene. We were good at it. Hygiene. They make an essay competition, letter writing, reproduction, the head teacher read a paragraph. You had to put your slate down, face down. The teacher would read the paragraph, then tell you to go to your class and do it, from your head. You had to be attention at it. You must not talk to nobody. You must pay attention. That's what they doing 'sh, sh'. And the teacher have to take the slate in her desk, and copy it. Everything is memory. Hygiene, memory. All is there [pointing to her head]. And if you don't, he'll beat you. He'll beat you. You make round... and he asking you question from one end to the other. And if you don't know you get beating too, like two three strokes. Two to three strokes they hit you. You go to make your exercise. They bring you round the school to make your exercise. That the only ease up you have. But if not that, blows. Blows.

Althea emphasizes below the imperative to arrive on time for school, but also the necessity to obey the teacher without question. She interprets this as leading to a better upbringing than that of children today, the consequence of which was more respect. Discipline and obedience, therefore, are connected to respect, perceived as a positive value, and obtainable only through the kind of bodily discipline she describes.

If you come to school something past nine (cheups). The head teacher at the door waiting for you. He at the door waiting for you. Any children that

¹⁵ This discussion will be expanded in the following section of this chapter.

come to school late, after nine, you have a beating. If you pass, they don't see, one of them will complain. Tell teacher you come late. What's coming for you in your back! Big strap, a big, big, large strap. A large strap, our teacher. We were not badly brought up as the children today, you know. You understand, we were not badly brought up as the children today. We had more manners. More respect. We had more respect for the teacher, although he beat you, he tell you to hush, you had to hush, or is more blows in your skin. You understand, you had to respect the teacher. We would take the teacher as our god. Yes, we would take the teacher as our god. At that time we had blows. And now to learn, you must learn, even though you don't, you must learn.

Being brought up well depended on the use of corporal discipline, as can be seen in the above excerpt. Teachers, in asserting their authority over children, were admittedly asserting colonial authority and hegemony through the enforcement of English as the language of instruction, teaching history from the British point of view, and by the very fact that they were government employees. In doing so, they were playing into and reinforcing what were already locally held understandings of social differentiation and stratification, from the time of slavery, and had been internalized and reinterpreted within family and village relations. Explicit state enforcement or intervention in matters of teaching and of school attendance, in spite of an 1890 regulation to do so for children between ages five and twelve (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1933: 46), was lacking and many children were taken out of school to help with subsistence activities and childcare. While students learned to speak English to some extent, many remained illiterate. The authority of the schoolteacher, while it was in principle a representation of colonial power, was integrated to, and enacted in conjunction with, local configurations of power and village structures of authority, wherein all adults were to be respected and obeyed, and school lent itself to the maintenance and reproduction of local social relations.

Within this *economy of respect*, the order of status and authority was roughly based on age, but included other factors such as amount of responsibility and how one accomplished it, as well as one's own self-discipline or behaviour as an adult. Adults, by maintaining rigid order among younger people, and by, in

general, supporting each other in their efforts by agreeing on the fundamentals of good behaviour and respect and carrying out disciplinary actions themselves, were able to create and maintain their authority, along with relative order in the village. The control of the body and of behaviours through techniques of corporal discipline by those in authority, the adults, was the means by which it was obtained and maintained.

One's position in this *economy of respect* provided recognition, a social personhood, and a becoming (life course). One's subjectivity was therefore tied to the processes involved in this *economy of respect* and the relations of power and authority that prevailed within it. Within this configuration, techniques of bodily discipline, used to create respect, were also those that both enforced and signified authority. When disciplined, one must learn respect; when one disciplines, one gains respect. However, the right to discipline others comes along with gaining responsibility in the form of care and economic support towards younger siblings, children, as well as older parents. The discourse of respect is one of authority and social order, but at the same time one of proper behaviour, and thus of moral conduct. This discourse is also one of a continuum, and can therefore be engaged, as an ethics of the self, in the emplotment of an imagined (or real) life trajectory. The next section will elaborate the ways in which transformations in governance have been instrumental in the shift in relations of authority, as Dominica moved towards democracy and statehood.

4.3 *Transforming Governance*

The following narrative excerpts are part of a conversation that took place in my presence between Eleanor, a woman of about seventy-two years and her oldest daughter, Beatrice, who was forty-eight. In the first part of the conversation, the women reiterate the views Althea expressed in the previous section regarding the requirements of respectful behaviour when she was a child, and the changes that have occurred:

Eleanor: ... And when we raise up, when I was going to school, we meet with a big person, and you don't greet the person good, all also is a man, you have to tell the man "good morning sir" and if it is a woman, "good morning ma'm". If you don't tell the person that, when you come back from school, the person go to your mother, your mother going to beat you. You have to greet people better. You have to owe people some respect. So nowadays, people just....

Beatrice: Children will just curse, you will just hear children curse in the street. You know, children will just curse, and if they have an argument, or even if they're whistling and they see a big person coming they stop whistling. So before, people had more respect for each other.

Eleanor and Beatrice agree that children had more respect for each other 'before', in accordance with the discussion in the previous section. While both mother and daughter concurred here, the following excerpt reveals a differing of perspectives between these two women of different generations.

Eleanor: Of course. When you going to school, when you come out fight, on your way going to school. Even though you wrong, even though you right, when you come home, you know you have to get a beating. You have got no right to fight.

Beatrice: But it was, it was, it was, but all that there was foolish, ehn, of parents before. They did not ...

Eleanor: They was raisin' up better too.

Beatrice: Not, no...

Eleanor: Yes I find it was better.

Beatrice: Wrong or right, you can't be beatin a child if the child is not wrong. You have to listen to two sides of the story. You cannot beat a child and the child is not wrong. You understand? So at that time, if a child is beating a child, you cannot just stay there and take blows because mommy tell me if I fight she going to beat me. No. You have to listen to the story. And if your child is wrong, you talk to your child or you beat your child if you wish to. But before, people were ignorant. Before there was not talks, is blows.

Beatrice disagreed with her mother on the unquestioned beating of children if they acted out of place. She believes it is unfair, and states that before

people were simply 'ignorant' because they did not try to understand the situation. She makes a difference between 'before' meaning when her mother raised her, and what she does, believes in, and says she practices in raising her own children. She still believes they should respect their parents, and condones corporal discipline, but she also believes that children should be listened to, not simply punished because their behaviour went against the accepted code. She has softened the rigidity of belief in absolute respect of the previous generation, shown in the narratives of Althea and Eleanor, favouring communication, thus acknowledging a slight shift in the position of the child vis-à-vis the adult. Yet, though she diverges from her mother's views on the application of discipline, she perceives current further transformations that she sees as coming from outside influences, especially television, as dangerous:

Beatrice: ... But today, today, parents cannot even hit the children because they tell you I'll call the police too [laughing] because they watch TV.

Robbyn: You think TV has a lot to do with change?

Beatrice: Oh yes, oh yes. TV has changed the world. TV has changed the world.

Robbyn: You think it is affecting how parents are bringing up the children and how children act?

Beatrice: Yes. TV damaged children's life you know.

Robbyn: How?

Beatrice: Because, when you watch the movies, and you see the amount of young children having guns, and when you listen to the news, where you're hearing it's school children that's committing most of these things.

Dominicans who have television have access to most American networks, along with two local channels, both owned by the same company. In La Plaine, evenings in homes with televisions are often spent avidly watching favourite television programmes, including soap operas, wrestling, or local and

international news.¹⁶ Many Dominicans I spoke to hold the view that children in North America are spoiled because parents do not physically punish their children. The children are allowed to do what they want, in their view, and this leads to permissiveness, lack of respect, and behaviour such as taking guns and shooting others, and, all in all, a fundamental degradation of values. This view is widespread in popular discourse, as is evidenced by this commentary in one of the national newspapers: “Things are getting out of control here – much like the USA – and unless we start to do something we will be completely like the U.S. when it comes to juvenile crime, delinquency, even more unnecessary killings, etc.” (*Tropical Star*, Aug. 21, 1999: 12). These values are thought to be portrayed in television shows. Beatrice believes that television is detrimental to children, not only because she thinks it influences children’s bad behaviour, but also because children learn to contest parental authority through examples they see on television. Paradoxically, the television was playing each of the several times I visited her home. While she freely accepts the benefits of modern life in the village that can be obtained through cash, and the ‘improvement’ it yields, she regrets some of the transformations in the ways in which people interact with each other. She rides on the boundary between two worlds, but slips more to one side than to the other in some instances: her concern with the loss of parental authority is reiterated below in a somewhat humorous description of her disciplinary technique.

Beatrice: I wouldn’t tell parents don’t beat their children, because I beat my children often. I bite their ears...

Robbyn: You bite their ears?

Beatrice: Anywhere there, [laugh]. Just bite their arm. Anywhere when I get mad I hold them, and then, sometimes if I hit them and my hand is going to hurt me, and I know my teeth not going to hurt me, I just bite them and just [laugh]. One day Curtis told me I will call Welfare for you

¹⁶ Many women are especially fond of soap operas: one woman, who worked at a local office, told me she returned home at lunchtime to watch them, and a local man reflected popular views that watching televised soap operas prevents women from carrying out their domestic tasks, especially at mealtime.

because you dare hit me. And, and I give him more, and I tell him now you going to call welfare because now you hurt. It's just because what they are hearing, that is on their mind, of welfare. But there is a devil there in time. Like children that living in America. Dominican children that America you know, they call welfare, they will do it because they are hearing it already. That never used to happen before, you never used to hear that word before, when you beat your children, they charge you for abusing your child or whatever, and if you whip your child and there is a mark it is child abuse and so, and before you would beat your child nobody would say anything to you. But because of what children are hearing today, there will be a time when parents will not beat their children, because just look at now. Wherever, teachers could beat children, and now they have a law, teachers have no right to beat children. They came to La Plaine and have meetings with teachers, the only person who has right to touch a child is the principal you know.¹⁷

The perception of a shift in values, that is, the lack of respect of the child towards the parents along with the feeling of frustration in the undermining of parental authority, is shown in Beatrice's discussion of her son stating that he would call welfare because she had beaten him: in order to enforce her position as the parent and the controlling and deciding body, she punished him even more. For her, television influences children so they report to welfare, although they are probably getting that information elsewhere as well, perhaps even from within the school. The Dominican government, in conjunction with international agencies such as UNICEF, is actively combatting abuse of children through educative campaigns since Dominica ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1991. For example, Beatrice's son may have heard about the Welfare Department's child abuse campaign on television, or from his teacher who was one of the instructors for a parenting seminar given in the village. Another younger woman told me how a television programme made her question the way she treated her children, and linked it to the way she was treated in her childhood.

Importantly, this perception is linked to a reality, which can be measured by the increased intervention of the state and international agencies in childrearing, and a subsequent displacement of parental authority, and local adult

¹⁷ See note 11.

authority generally, in regards to child discipline. The benefits of the state interventions, such as improved access to healthcare and education are not by any means negligible, but must be understood in the context of the transformation of governance that increased state involvement implies. Improved access to education, and the perceived link between education and the ability to improve one's socio-economic status, both materially and symbolically because of the cultural capital that it provides are also factors in the transformations in child rearing. These have repercussions on the way in which subjects are formed – transformations are taking place in who can discipline, what kind of discipline is appropriate, and what the ultimate goal of rearing children may be. The reproduction of the state rather than that of the community is the aim of education, which now leans towards preparing children to work outside the community, rather than within, and the focus is less on reproducing existing relations of village authority than in creating new, state-centred ones. Great disparity is created, however, as secondary education is still not universal, so that only a few people go on to jobs that require it. At the same time, there is not sufficient employment at lower or more skilled levels, and many people migrate, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In the following subsection, I address the issue of state interventions with regards to education and welfare to illustrate the transformations that have occurred in relations of authority in their shift from community to state.

“I was sent to La Plaine to transform it...”

The most important problem which now confronts Great Britain in the Colonial Empire is that of promoting a transition from the authoritarian or ‘Crown Colony’ type of government, which has proved successful in many ways for the administration of territories occupied by peoples at a ‘primitive’ stage of development, to a form of government suitable for those who have advanced up to or within a measurable distance of social and political self-reliance. (Simey, 1946: v)

Until the early 20th century, the British colonial government was largely uninterested in the social welfare of the former slave population. Throughout the

19th century, a policy of “trusteeship” was invoked to maintain relations between the planters and administrators (Simey 1946: 22), and to control a populace that at times resisted or resented poor treatment by planters and the rising coloured elite (Trouillot 1988). This did not, however, hinder the maintenance of class relations that kept the small farmer and plantation workers on the bottom of the hierarchy, with little consideration for their well-being. Attention was directed to the producing classes only after the turn of the 20th century, and really not until the 1930s, when the Colonial Office realized that small holder production was essential to the economy, and that this was therefore a sector with which they should be concerned, and consequently control¹⁸ (Trouillot 1988: 714). Attention was given to popular education, and the reform of agriculture, linking the two, with the project of creating a viable class of small producers. When discussing curriculum reforms, for example, one report states: “we would emphasize the importance of the growing of fruit and domestic crops. If the economic future of the West Indies depends on the development of peasant proprietorship and small-holdings, as is suggested in the recent Sugar Commission Report” (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1933:63).

In the 1930s, recommendations for education reforms, while largely administrative and ineffective in bringing real change to the school system, opted nevertheless for a shift in curriculum that would place emphasis on agriculture through the introduction of nature studies, school gardens, and agriculture at the secondary level, and a streamlining of ‘unnecessary’ academic subjects, without spending more money. At the secondary level, the introduction of two streams was proposed, a vocational stream that would be divided into a junior and a senior programme, and an academic programme. This so-called “modern school” would provide industrial and agricultural training for boys, and domestic science, needlework, and some agricultural work such as grafting for girls. This

¹⁸ Trouillot states: “the local situation and the world crisis that culminated with the Great Depression forced the Colonial Office to intervene explicitly and systematically in favor of an export policy based on peasant production” (Trouillot 1988: 713-4). A report was issued recommending the formation of a Peasant Bureau, which would mediate both the integration of peasant production, and control it (ibid.).

educational reform was informed by a bias that reinforced dominant views of gender relations, placing the men in the fields and the women in the house.

A 1931-32 report recommended a shift in education that would match the abilities of the teachers with the supposed educational needs of the masses of mostly rural, agricultural pupils, while fulfilling the needs of employment in the islands, but especially, to make the education that was offered an economically viable expenditure, without increasing the moneys already allotted. It also recommended maintaining education at a very rudimentary level (note the use of the word 'simple' several times), that would effectively keep the majority of the population in the class position seen as appropriate for mainly black, 'backward' rural peasantry and labourers:

Until the supply of well-educated and trained teachers is more fully secured, the average school should not attempt, so far as separate "subjects" are concerned, anything more than English, *simple* and practical arithmetic with *very elementary* mensuration and space work, nature study in accordance with a *simple* and definite syllabus planned in conjunction with the Agricultural Department, and the *simple* laws of health on a similar kind of syllabus prepared in co-operation with the Medical Department. (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1933: 59-60 – italics are added)

Reports such as this made recommendations that largely affected administration, rather than fostering on-the-ground transformations (Simey 1946). Little if any of the effects of reorganization and centralization at the top trickled down into the actual schools. With inadequate resources, not a lot could be done to improve either teacher training or curriculum reform. As well, in spite of an 1891 ordinance that made primary education compulsory in Dominica, school attendance was poor. A 1939 report of Education Commissioners on the State of Education in the Leeward and Windward Islands stated generally that "education is in the main external to the real life of the people, affecting it from without rather than from within"; that "its resources are, and will on present lines continue to be, wholly inadequate to its task" (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1939: 3). In spite of recommendations by this report for administrative reform that would provide supervisory personnel rather than inspectors in Dominica, it still did not

propose injecting funds into the school system itself. While concern focussed on 'moulding' the peasantry and labourers, especially through educational reform, there was no significant transformation in the way in which school, especially in a village locality such as La Plaine, removed from easy access by supervisors, was run, or the role it played in people's lives. It remained largely an institution of discipline that reproduced village relations of respect – and the colonial relations of domination and lack of interest – rather than one of instruction and learning. Thus, despite these reports, little really changed in rural Dominica until after WWII. Schools in rural Dominica, while in principle run by the government, were largely under the tutelage of the Catholic Church in most rural areas (except for the Wesley-Marigot area which has a largely Methodist congregation) (see Great Britain, Colonial Office 1933: 33). The school in La Plaine, like many colonial schools, was erected on Catholic Church property and pupils were regularly brought to the priest by teachers for confession. These reports show that there was effectively little government control over education in outlying rural areas, very little government involvement in ensuring that the curriculum was followed, and in fact, that there was very little interest in really improving anything but administration of schools at an island, rather than individual school, level.

Notwithstanding the paucity of interest on the part of the Colonial Government, the Labour Commission Report on Grenada states, with respect to schooling: "...the primary school is more often or (sic) not the most important (if not the only) good influence in the child's life" (Labour Commission Report, Grenada, circa 1936, cited in Great Britain, Colonial Office 1939: 36). It also stressed the importance of poor housing as the root of social depravity:

With the social consequences of this appalling state of affairs we are not directly concerned. Its economic consequences are, however, important, in the first place because the disease and ill health engendered by bad housing considerably reduce the efficiency of the labourer, and in the second place because the overcrowded position of these miserable hovels is probably a very fertile cause of that promiscuous sexual intercourse and its concomitant high illegitimate birth rate, which together form a serious problem in Grenada to-day. For how can decent family life develop under such conditions? And how, without it, can the social and economic

structure be in a healthy state? For so long as there are unwanted children brought into the world who are allowed to grow up half starved and generally uncared for, so long will there be in the land a class – increasingly large – of bad citizens and bad workers. (ibid.: 32)

This excerpt, which refers to Grenada, could equally be applied to both conditions in and colonial attitudes about Dominica. While this excerpt positions colonial economic colonial considerations before human ones, it describes the targeted elements of social reform: health, hygiene, and nutrition; housing; promiscuity and promotion of a male-headed nuclear family; and concern with children, all for the creation of productive citizens. All aspects of life were understood in their connection to creating an efficient workforce. Government was beginning to shift its focus from simply attempting to ensure production on plantations to ensuring the reproduction of a productive peasantry.

Placed in a wider, international context, the concern of the state with family life and the well-being (and control) of individual members corresponds to a shift in governance from authoritarian sovereignty to a concern with governing the population (Foucault 1991: 99), and with creating a nation-state based on a particular moral order. Governmentality, as Foucault (1991) calls it, works through diverse discursive fields, institutions, practices, and agents (such as healthcare, social programmes, etc.) that are concerned with the welfare of the individual and that work within the institution of the family in order to control it. This family, rather than being a patriarchal *unit* for which ultimate control fell to its male head as was the case historically (this is from the perspective of French history, see Donzelot 1979, but could equally pertain to British history), is conceived of as comprised of *individuals* with certain rights, as discussed in the introduction. This conceptualization of the family allows for (or requires) a close control of the behaviour of individuals within the family unit, in how they act towards each other. It also allows for the creation of discursive fields, such as sociology and psychology, through which interactions of individuals within the family are studied, and the limits of good behaviour and proper familial interactions and relations are constructed (see Knowles 1996).

The general interest for the welfare of families grew out of an international concern, which began in the late 1920s and 30s as a result of fears of population decline and family disintegration. This involved concerns with population and fertility, as well as nutrition, especially for young children and nursing mothers, manifested throughout the European countries by the development of voluntary associations and government legislation and agencies dealing with these issues (Gauthier 1996). In 1924, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Children, also referred to as the Charter of Child Welfare, declared that “The child must be given all opportunities for spiritual and material development...it is entitled to be fed, clothed, taught to work and protected against exploitation” (League of Nations, 1924: 199 in Gauthier 1996: 27). In 1933, the Children and Young Person’s Act was passed in the United Kingdom, and the 1944 Royal Commission on Population made recommendations concerning family welfare. The British government concentrated on welfare of families, rather than on fertility (Gauthier 1996: 34-35). In 1946, the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF), originally set up as temporary relief for war-torn Europe, became permanent when the UN undertook programmes for women and children (ibid.: 67).

It was not until after the Royal Commission of 1938-39 that any real effort was made to improve conditions on a local level in the West Indies. The Commission made a series of recommendations to improve the general welfare of the population, with the perspective that alleviating poverty alone would not be sufficient to create a viable society. Transforming West Indian society was indeed the fundamental intention in the Commission’s recommendations, with the underlying assumption that there was a lack of any viable social relations or culture: “The bulk of the populations of the West Indies have lost their original cultures, and constructive efforts to provide a satisfactory alternative are long overdue” (Royal Commission 1945: 357-8, 429). The Royal Commission report pointed out that the problems with the education system persisted, including low attendance and illiteracy; there was widespread chronic sickness, due in part to the poverty of the governments as well as that of individuals, and that inadequate

and crowded homes provided the conditions for the proliferation of disease (Royal Commission 1945: 92, 139, 154, 174, cited in Simey 1946: 23). The solution was seen in taking a new approach to social welfare, one that would not simply be acts of charity, but would stimulate community involvement in self-improvement.

Recommendations of the Royal Commission were sweeping, and involved all aspects of West Indian society. The main recommendation was the creation of a Welfare and Development Fund with a Comptroller to carry out studies and develop schemes which he would then propose to the British Government for approval (Royal Commission 1945: 428). Two initial Social Welfare Training courses were held in 1943 and 1944, under the direction of T.S. Simey. The goal of these first courses was to determine the objectives of the schemes to be carried out through this new agency. (Simey 1946: 197-8). In subsequent years, training was made available to staff the Department of Welfare set up in each island (in Dominica, it was in 1945).

Because of the involvement of the sociologist T.S. Simey in initiating and setting the agenda for these courses, it is worth mentioning his approach to the question of social welfare in the West Indies. He pointed out that racial cleavages, as well as the lack of common culture made creating a unified society difficult. As well, supporting the views put forth by the Commission, he sees “the looseness of family structure is reflected in a striking weakness in social organization. The only social institution with any degree of stability or any command of popular support is the Church, which everywhere in the West Indies stands out as a rock round which the welter of disorganized human life surges” (ibid.: 18). He did not acknowledge already existing popular structures of authority, such as those discussed above.

He remarks that while the family is largely matrifocal, men have “superior rights,” a paradox, he holds, that is the root of many social problems. While this is a pertinent observation, and one that will be taken up later in this thesis, as it relates to the concept of *ambivalent patriarchy* (see Chapters 6, and 7), his

solution is to enforce patriarchal relations through the domestication of women, which serves only to exacerbate them. He advises, in this regard: "It may well be that no general advance towards giving women their due place in society and, in particular, in public life can be made until the value of their contribution as homemakers rather than as unskilled wage-labourers is more clearly understood in the West Indies" (ibid.). Rather than calling for equity between men and women at work, he calls for a shift that would locate women in the home, rather than in the field, and to place men at the head of the household. Simey's perspective is reflected in recommendations for educational reforms and adult education that prepare women for the home, and men for work outside the home. This 'houwewife-ization' of women (see Green 1998; Rheddock and Huggins 1997) already begun through the relations of race, class and gender that existed since slavery, where domestic work was considered as more prestigious than field labour, was to influence many women's life directions. Keeping women in the home was considered better for the health of the family and the community, as well. It also corresponds to the educational reforms that had been previously recommended.

One Dominican who was to become prominent, Henckell Christian, took the Welfare course in Jamaica in 1947, with the hope of becoming District Welfare Officer in Dominica. The position was eliminated, and much to his chagrin, Christian was sent to La Plaine as headmaster of the school in 1948, with the expectation that through this position, he would carry out social reforms that were perceived as much needed there. He muses in his memoirs: "I was later to find out that my transfer to La Plaine was a sort of administrative conspiracy... to have me re-orient the La Plaine Government School and to rejuvenate the school and community life of the village..." (Christian: 1992: 61). According to Christian, the village and the region were experiencing economic difficulties, which lasted into the 1960s. He approached his task by inaugurating adult programmes and overhauling the school curriculum and staff, most of whom were under-qualified, and extracted materials from the supply stores in Roseau, that

had to be carried part of the way from Roseau over land on foot (*ibid.*: 62). He introduced the “Food for Family Fitness” program he had seen in practice in Jamaica, known as the “3F Campaign,” in order to promote nutrition and health in addition to stable family life, both important for the creation of a healthy and productive population, with the assumption that a healthy body produces well, and a healthy family (i.e. a male-headed family) reproduces well. The program was carried out in three stages, over the first three years: the growing of vegetables, then raising of small stock, and finally, improvement of the home environment. He had noticed that vegetables and proteins were lacking in the diet, and that the houses were small and overcrowded, which, he surmised, afforded little privacy and may have led to sexual precocity of teens (*ibid.*: 68). He also inaugurated a village choir and an adult literacy class. In the school, he introduced incentives to learning through the creation of competitive prizes, rather than resorting to corporal punishment, except on rare occasions. As well, sports became part of the curriculum, and he had the children raise a pig as part of their agricultural training.

Christian’s success in La Plaine was in part due to his personal motivation to create reform, but also reflected the integrative approach called for in the numerous reports of Commissions in the 1930s. His influence in the village as headmaster of the school – a well-respected position – and the fact that he was a local boy from a neighbouring village, allowed him to gain the confidence of the members of the somewhat sceptical population, who were usually wary of government officials who might be trying to find new ways to impose and exact tax. He was able to exploit this position in order to effectuate integrated social reforms at a community level, following recommendations that included the improvement of nutrition and health, housing, and the level of education with hoped-for repercussions in the sexual morality of the population, through programmes of self-development that would also promote self-esteem – and eventually self-government. This new approach of the colonial government,

reaching out to the population, involved a drastic shift from previous methods of governance that sought only to maintain the position of the planters and protect their interests through quelling resistance and preventing the small farmer from gaining access to lucrative markets. Christian's mandate in La Plaine ended in 1956, when he took up the post of Assistant Social Welfare Officer in Roseau, a post he held until 1970 when he became Minister of Education.

Another prominent Dominican also influenced transformations in La Plaine through her position as school principal, bringing with her a vision of society and propriety that had some impact, especially on women in the area. I had the privilege of interviewing the Honorable Gertrude Roberts, at the time Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, which comprised the Welfare Department, the Women's Bureau, as well as other agencies. Roberts spoke to me about her time spent as principal of the La Plaine school in the period from 1970 to 1979. Like Christian, she was sent to the community to do more than simply manage the school. She was sent in as a community worker: in her own words, "I was sent to La Plaine to transform it" (interview, 1999). She worked closely with the school children, encouraging them to obtain the school-leaving certificate so they would have better chances to find work, even recruiting children who had already left school so they could earn their school-leaving certificate. Villagers who remember her as school principal told me she would make sure that children would come to school, enforcing the rule of compulsory attendance by going herself into the road to round up stragglers. She involved children in the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, and started a woman's group, bringing in different activities for them, especially cooking, straw plaiting, and first aid, through the Red Cross. As well, she was in charge of the Church choir. Robert's involvement aimed to create more domestic gender roles for women, geared towards the 'softer' tasks, rather than food production.

Both Roberts and Christian, as agents of social reform in Dominica, worked with the precepts first put forth in the 1930s by the Royal Commission, to transform not only social conditions, but as well, to make a change in how people

lived their lives, through education and literacy, the use of “proper” English, community involvement, the aspiration to ‘improve’ themselves, and the creation of family and gender roles based on ideas put forth through the recommendations discussed above. At least two discursive frames were being operated here by these two agents of change. One was the development of society based on the family, which included a restructuring of gender roles and relations, with the goal of creating the nuclear, male-headed family and of firmly entrenching women in the domestic sphere; another was instilling the importance of education (and English) and its relation to improvement of social and economic status. It must be said here that part of Christian’s approach was to instill self-esteem and pride in being black, in an attempt to weaken the class/race boundaries. At the same time as the Government was attempting to create a satisfied, productive, peasantry and labour force, these agents of change were attempting to bring people to ‘improve’. Christian prided himself on bringing the La Plaine school to par with the best Roseau school, and in his last year, eighteen of twenty-eight pupils who sat the common entrance exam for secondary school passed, the record for any school up to that time of numbers of children who both sat the exam and who passed it. These pupils had adopted his high expectations, and as he says, many went on to be employed in the civil service (Christian 1992). While working to develop the local people, they also instilled in them certain expectations, and the acceptance of their ability to succeed, over and above what the Colonial Government had anticipated. The Government, through the Welfare Department and the Department of Education continue to exert influence among Dominicans, in conjunction with international organizations and voluntary societies.

‘La ou bat zenfan ou, sé child abuse?’¹⁹

During my stay in La Plaine, a parenting course organized by the Welfare Department in conjunction with UNICEF was held at the village school, and drew on the principles of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* as the basis of

¹⁹ “When you beat your child, it’s child abuse?”

its themes. The course was given as a series of seminars by Welfare agents, teachers, and nurses on themes dealing with the 'proper' way to raise a child. These themes included: stages of development; self-esteem; sexuality; responsible parenthood; spirituality; managing anger and conflict; preventing child abuse; rights of the child. The course was offered to both men and women, but only one man attended one class, and never came back. This lack of interest on the part of men reflects gendered parenting practices and assumptions about parenting. Women are much more often than men responsible for the everyday care of children and it is understandable that they should have more interest in the topic than men. Some men, however, position themselves as the ones who have the ultimate knowledge regarding issues of parenting (and have nothing to learn on the matter): for example, during a Mother's Day service I attended in a local Pentecostal Church, women paid homage to their mothers while the men stood up and lectured on what women should do to become better mothers.

Not all village women attended the course, and it is significant that some women and not others attended the course. The women, approximately twenty in all (attendance was not regular), chose to do so because they were interested in improving their parenting skills. Many of the women who attended belonged to one of the two Pentecostal churches in the village, churches that promoted marriage and the nuclear family, so the values that were put forth during the course complemented and reinforced those to which they already ascribed. In fact, one of the instructors was a lay pastor at one of the churches, and his wife attended the course. Others were influential members of the community, including one member of the Village Council, a teacher, two women who worked at the Christian Children's Fund office, another who worked in the Village Council office. A handful were simply curious and interested, or thought that they had something to learn. Most of these women, through their church affiliation, through their occupation, or through some other means such as television, had already been exposed to some ideas about the family and child rearing that were counter to what they had experienced or saw around them. They were also, for the

most part, women who were striving to 'improve' their situation, either through their adherence to moral values of their Church, or through their careers.

The course culminated in a graduation ceremony which was attended by local dignitaries, including two government ministers (the Minister of Education, who was the local representative at the time, and the Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, Gertrude Roberts), a representative of UNICEF, and a Community Development officer responsible for the programme. The course participants prepared several performances for the ceremony; one wrote and read a poem, while another sang a calypso song she had written especially for the occasion. The participants put together a skit as a cooperative effort. Nothing was actually written: they simply decided what they were going to do, who should play which character, and then developed the dialogue as they performed, with suggestions from those women remaining on the sidelines. The whole thing was put together with the participation of all the women, as while they were practicing, comments would be shouted from the non-acting women in the audience.

The skit, in essence, reflected what they had retained or what was collectively important to them in the course they had just taken. Briefly, the characters in the skit, all played by women, were the Father, the Mother, the Daughter, a Boy, the Teacher, and the Participants. The skit opens with the Mother waiting in the house, having just prepared food for her family to eat when they come home. Then, the daughter, walking arm in arm with a Boy, makes her way home from school.

Meanwhile, the Father arrives from the garden in his dirty clothes, enraged, swinging his cutlass, and shouting that he has just seen his Daughter with her arm around a Boy. He complains, still angry, that he didn't pay for her schooling to have her go with some man. The Daughter comes in the house, and the Father begins to yell at her and beat her. The mother attempts to intervene, and the Father begins to beat her as well. When the Father finally calms down, the Mother suggests there is a different way to handle the problem, and invites him to

go with her to the parenting course. He is sceptical, but finally concedes. At the course, the Teacher begins to talk about child abuse. After she gives her definition, “physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligence, or maltreatment of a child under eighteen years of age by a person who is responsible for that child,” the Father says:

Let me ask you a question. Suppose one of your children, who you are sending to school, on who you are spending all your little money, you talk to the child and tell it what it should do, in spite of the fact that you pay for her education, in the end, she hugs a man in front of you, and kisses him. You hold her, you hit her, you don’t cut her, and that is child abuse?
[translated from Patwa]

The Teacher replies, not with a yes or a no, but with “you need to communicate with your child. Talk to your child. Find out the reasons why she did that.” The Teacher continues to say that the reason parents abuse their children is “lack of communication. Sometimes you find the child that is doing something that is so wrong, and some parents, they are so ignorant, they don’t even want to see their children talk to a member of the opposite sex. ... you beat your daughter, you go home and you abuse your spouse.” The teacher does not reject corporal punishment, but adds the element of communication. By letting the child explain, by opening dialogue, the position of the child has shifted from that of a total subordinate with no negotiating power, to a more ‘equal’ position vis-à-vis the adult, lessening the structural distance between the adult and the child. This reiterates the stance of Beatrice, in the previous section, reflecting an alteration that is occurring in popular discourse, at least in part, through the instrument of international and national organizations.

The graduation skit presented the women’s perspective on gender relations, family, child-rearing, and the transformation of particular cultural values. The family that was presented in the skit was a small nuclear family, including a man, a woman, and a child. The biological parents were shown as the ones caring for the child, even though a number of other situations could have been portrayed, as many children live with people other than their biological

parents (see Chapter 2). The Mother was at home, preparing the meal, while the Father was out at work in the garden, a particular rendition of gender roles that reflects what has been said previously regarding housewifization of women. These aspects, the nuclear family and the housewife-male provider model were not questioned in the skit – they were taken for granted, as though they were the accepted norm for all. What *was* shown to be unacceptable, and provided the focus for the play, was related to the theme of the parenting course, and was the father's (and not the mother's) attitude towards the child's supposed transgression. The father, fittingly for the role, was made out as an unschooled farmer, who spoke only Patwa. Symbolically, in this case, speaking Patwa is associated with backwardness and ignorance: in the short excerpt of his speech cited above, the Father expresses his idea about the proper way of raising children that is then also associated with backwardness, explicitly stated by the Teacher as "ignorant." The approach portrayed by the father is an example of what I have been describing as the economy of respect: the father, because he provides for the child, especially her education, expects her to obey him, and to not risk pregnancy, in which case she would be obliged to leave school. Her obedience is mandatory, because of her dependence on him. He should not need to question or discuss her behaviour with her: she is expected to know what she has to do, and since she did not do it, she must be punished. The Mother as well is subject to the Father's will, although less so. In the skit it is finally she who has her way as the Father attends the course and concedes to her way of approaching the Daughter's transgression.

Because of this outcome, it is the Mother who is depicted as the agent of change. It is she who protests against the Father's treatment of the Daughter. Her ability to persuade him, to entice the man to listen to what she and the Teacher had to say is both empowering for the woman, and instrumental in the shift in attitude towards the child. Both are acts of 'communication' and important in overcoming 'ignorance'. The old system of child-rearing, the extreme rigidity of the hierarchy between parents and children, is equated with being 'ignorant'. The

new discipline, as the promotion of communication through ‘talking to your child’, vies for an internalization of the values transmitted, rather than the strict maintenance of a hierarchy of roles. It fosters a different kind of interaction and softens the rigid distinction between parent and child. It is exactly this ‘softening’ that the older women critiqued.

This skit depicts change within the paradigm of gender relations and roles, with the man as a backward, Patwa-speaking, ignorant, rural farmer, adhering to the old paradigm of social relations that upheld village relations and hierarchies, while the woman is portrayed as progressive, English-speaking for the most part, and open to change that supports the project of the state and the international agencies that it works through, in this case UNICEF, and that create a shift in the structures of authority. The association of language to gender and a positive attitude towards change links women to nation and to the idea of ‘improving’ themselves. In this skit, the play of gender relations also speaks to the empowerment of women within the nuclear family, rather than outside it, thus supporting the family ideology that has been portrayed: one message of this skit would appear to be that the nuclear family works, through communication.

In the last segment of the course depicted in the skit, the Teacher tells the Participants to report to her, as a welfare agent, any cases of child abuse they know about. This recognition of, and acquiescence to, the falling out of the hand of the parents of the ultimate power over their children’s bodies that this signifies was presaged by Beatrice in the previous section: it reflects the objective of political technologies introduced through social reform, as discussed above, that would intervene within the family by regulating how family members interact with each other.

The Honorable Gertrude Roberts closed the session with a speech acknowledging the pertinence of the parenting seminar and skit, reiterating the discursive frame the women employed in their performance:

I was amazed to see the performance here of the father and mother beating their daughter because the daughter was seen talking to a young man. And this is really what used to happen at first and this is what happens even

today by those parents who are ignorant. You see today is a different world. Our people need to be educated that beating a child does not change the child. Beating a child in a decent way, you can spank a child, you can slap a child, but you come on a child to beat him, burn his fingers, leave him without food, close him in a room, neglect him entirely. (...) I think it has opened your minds, as young mothers.

While corporal discipline is still prevalent in child-rearing practices, it is obvious from the involvement of government and international agencies in parenting education and regulation that ultimate authority over children has passed out of the hands of parents. As well, the questioning of parental authority by both giving voice to the child and control to the state, works to undermine the village level social relations that were based on an economy of respect, as described above.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to elicit the perceptions of change in social values through the discursive frameworks engaged by women in their narratives of the past and link these perceptions to historical interventions by the colonial government, as well as to those of contemporary state and international agencies. Colonial interventions in the post-WWII period that demonstrated a concern with the reproduction of a viable workforce, ultimately for the benefit of the colonial government, created a shift in the relations of government to family. This shift sought to transform existing familial and village relations (what I have called an *economy of respect*), operating under the assumption that social relations were disorganized. Interventions through education included an emphasis on: developing gender roles and geographies that strove to remove women from the work and space of the garden and field and locate them in the home; instilling the desire for 'improvement' of one's social and economic position through speaking English; improving literacy; and over-riding the racial rift that was the bedrock of class relations throughout the colonial period.

In the first section, women's accounts of the past revealed a critical stance towards life in the present that emphasized a shift in relations from those of interdependency based on sharing of food and labour to the commodification of labour, a move that affected the interconnectedness of the social fabric and reflected an increased interest in money. Linked to this is an ethos of respectability, which for lower-class women meant being on a par with others and being able to present oneself well through dress. Scarcity of cash and of clothing meant that dressing appropriately to present oneself as respectable involved sharing, so that respectability and sharing were tied together. As well, showing oneself as better or having more than others, through the way one dressed, as symbolic of access to cash, was seen by some as inappropriate – an appearance of respectability was tied to one of equality and modesty. The ability to 'improve' due to greater access to cash, a breakdown of the race/class barrier, a greater emphasis on accumulation and commodification of labour, as well as greater access to education and the instilling of values of self-esteem and betterment, contributed to a shift in the ability of people to move up the socio-economic ladder. The meaning of 'respectability' for people of the rural lower class who formerly could not expect to gain status except through miscegenation or patronage, has shifted towards that portrayed by Wilson (1973), that is, the adherence to values of the dominant sectors.

Increasingly as well, social relations of authority have shifted, through the control of children and very explicitly, the discipline of their bodies. The development of welfare policies, first concerning education and then with regards to the rights of parents over their children's bodies have created a shift in the relations of authority, moving from the local village level to the state. Whereas previously the survival of the village and the community depended on its reproduction through relations of respect and responsibility, the survival of the newly formulated state has taken precedence, and the formation of children is for the reproduction of the state over the family. The shift in authority and in relations

between parent and child suggests a shift in the terms and attributes of subjectivity and the development of personhood.

CHAPTER 5

“I THE SISTER, I THE MOTHER, I THE ELDEST...”: GENERATIONS OF GENDERED BECOMINGS

The previous chapter illustrated that older women's perceptions of the past, held in contrast to the present, stood as both positive and negative statements about the material and social transformations that have occurred, couched in expressions of morality that disclose underlying discursive frames through which women position themselves. A connection was elucidated between decolonisation and the nation-making strategies of government and transforming subjectivities, as the location of authority shifted from the family and community to the state along with the values inherent to these subjectivities and relations. Two sets of values were found to be relevant to these narratives and to the changes: those that underlie and shape status hierarchies and the relations they define, first, those within the social group or community (respectability and egalitarianism, and the notion of 'improving' oneself) and second, those found within the family but that overlap onto community organization (the economy of respect, including responsibility, age, and social place, and the achievement of autonomy).

In this chapter, I will further develop these perspectives by examining narratives of childhood experiences of several women of different ages. These narratives show, first of all, how women's accounts of their experiences relate to the discursive frameworks developed in the previous chapter's analyses. They reveal how the women reconstruct their childhoods in terms of their present lives, experiences and concerns (and the context of narration), drawing into their narratives the discursive configurations of values discussed above, in respect to which they position themselves, creating a life trajectory that engages these frameworks in various manners. Secondly, the gendered nature of girls' activities will emerge through these narratives of growing up, revealing their attitudes towards gender roles. Special attention will be paid to changes in attitudes

towards education as they relate to both gender occupations and hierarchies of race and social class.

In this chapter, the following questions are posed. Are the childhood activities and themes around which they reconstruct their lives different for younger women, middle-aged women, and older women? Do these women of different generations and backgrounds engage different discursive frameworks/and or position themselves differently in relation to these discourses and the activities they recount? More generally, are these transformations affecting women's self-conceptualizations as evidenced through their narratives, and if so, how?

5.1 Down Memory Lane: Helena, Sophia, Eleanor

This section presents the childhood stories of three older women, Helena, seventy-two, Sophia, eighty, and Eleanor, seventy, as they were told to me. All three grew up within the wider village area, during roughly the same period, between the two World Wars. As described in Chapter 3, this period was one of much economic difficulty for the Caribbean in general and major social reforms had not yet occurred. The narratives of Helena and Sophia, while expressing some similar themes and engaging comparable discursive frameworks, render a different interpretation of their lived experiences through the way in which they position themselves within the framework, especially as expressed through their relations with different people mentioned in the narratives. The account by Eleanor provides a distinct perspective because of a unique experience – she became crippled – but again she couches her account within a framework that speaks of village social relations and how they affected her life.

Helena

Helena, who was seventy-two at the time of my sojourn in the village, was the first child of her mother, born before she was married. Not long afterwards, her mother met the man she was to marry, and had nine more children with him.

Helena grew up during the 1930s, an extremely difficult period; cash was hard to come by, due in part to the collapse of the lime-growing industry, as elaborated in previous chapters. With twelve mouths to feed and no cash income, Helena's family endured extreme hardship. As the eldest girl, Helena was often kept out of school to care for the younger siblings and do housework while her mother and stepfather went about procuring food, either gardening or foraging for wild foods in the surrounding rainforest. Helena recounted, or rather dramatized for me, the extent to which they were dependent on their local surroundings, showing me the way in which her mother created thread from the leaves of a pineapple plant, how they would wash clothing using a kind of (red) leaf as soap, and how they made 'meat' out of a little flour and one egg, to feed twelve hungry mouths. She regretted very much not having gone to school (she attended sometimes, but not always), although she learned to speak English quite well, probably learned during her time spent in town as an adult, and was able to read enough to take in some passages of scripture which she read over and over, and which she held very dear. Here is a short excerpt of her narrative:

...I the mother, I the sister, I the eldest to stay inside the house to mind them for them to go all about in bush to hunt for the yam, as if dog hunting, for agouti.¹ But it is not agouti they going for, they going and see if they get yam that raise in bush for them to come back and cook. I used to stay there, and cook their food for them, wash their little clothes, clean the house, when they come from school for them to get for them to eat, to back to school. I would work for her and the man, for the man is not my father. Time for me to go to school, school close already. If I go this week, next week I don't go. That is how I raise up.

As a young girl, probably a teenager, she was sent away to another village to work as a domestic, sending the little money she earned to help out her mother's household.

¹ The agouti (*Dasyprocta antillensis*) is a brown-haired, short-eared, tailless rodent which resembles a guinea pig, but is much larger. The agouti is indigenous to South America, and apparently arrived in Dominica via the Caribs.

Helena: When I leave, I go and work for that lady from six o'clock in the morning, okay, and the little change, I sending it down for my mother.

Robbyn: So you didn't get any of the money you worked for?

Helena: No. I obedient.

Robbyn: How old were you?

Helena: I didn't married as yet. So I pass all that. I work there with her [the lady she worked for], and up to now, we are friends like that. Up to now we are one like that.

This account, short as it is, reveals Helena's difficult youth spent in the care of younger siblings, a task that befell many girls who happened to be the eldest, and then as a domestic for someone else. Her schooling was secondary to the duties that she had to assume in the household to help out her mother. She seems to look upon her childhood with some regret, but mostly acceptance of her situation, as though it was just what she had to do, without any choice in the matter. 'I obedient' she says, as if stating her compliance to her role as the mother, the sister, and the eldest, and her further role as domestic for another household. Helena's ethic is very much acceptance of place – a notion that comes through in the previous chapter, in the excerpt of her narrative where she disdains 'vari' and claims that people forget from where they come. Her assimilation of the model of respect is very evident – as well as that of humility and humbleness. She is obedient, and prides herself on it. Her acceptance of her state of poverty, and even a rejection of 'having' has guided her perception of who she is, or at least should be, throughout her life. She is very conscious now of having things such as clothing and household objects that were absent during her childhood years (from her account), even if she now lives extremely sparingly by present standards in the village. She lives in a small plywood shack, which was missing one wall, temporarily replaced by a scrap of galvanized, corrugated metal roofing. Within, she had electricity, but no running water and no refrigerator, radio, television, or telephone. She still did most of her cooking with wood, in an

outdoor kitchen. In order to emphasize her good fortune now in comparison to her childhood years, she proudly, but almost guiltily, told me she had two potties, and two beds, one of which she had given away. In fact she was always giving away her things, as if they created a burden for her. She even offered me some land on which to erect a little house, as she was not using it. Her childhood account thus provides a foundation upon which to build her self-narrative, and from which she can derive the ethic that informs her life choices, at least those she chose to tell me about. She underlines her position in relation to her mother and her siblings as an obedient and respectful daughter, who accepts her responsibilities and her role.

Sophia

Sophia turned eighty the year I met her. Like Helena, she grew up in the village, and while there are similarities in her story, she formulates her childhood self with a different twist. It is noteworthy that Sophia spent roughly thirty years in England, working as a nurse, a fact that may have had an impact on how she perceives her childhood years and her life in general. Sophia came from a family that was much better off than that of Helena, in spite of the fact that she also had numerous siblings, fourteen in all. As the eldest, and especially as a girl, she also often had several younger siblings in her care. However, that did not prevent her from attending school.

The following narrative was not tape recorded, but is an excerpt of her story as told to me with the intent of creating a document to send to her children. Sophia refused to let me tape her, as she was very conscious what she would say to whom, and was highly fearful that words not intended to be recorded would somehow get beyond my tape recorder and take on lives of their own. She was also very particular about what I wrote down, and would tell me when to write and when not to. The following is an excerpt from her story, as I transcribed it from notes I took during our conversations, and subsequently returned to her for her children.

As the eldest, Sophia was required to help care for her younger brothers and sisters. She always tried to be fair and never beat them but

reported their misbehaviours to their mother. However, even then, she would not always report what they did, even when it was directed towards her. Once a sister threw a stone at her and hit her head so hard she felt dizzy, but she did not report it. Their mother saw the bruise and scolded Sophia for not telling!

Sophia couches her account in a language of morality within which she positions herself as beneficiary of her own actions, especially in her interactions with those in authority, such her mother and teachers. In the first paragraph, she shows how she is 'fair' towards other people, yet she also shows her respect for those in authority. She did not take on authority herself with respect to the punishment of her younger brothers and sisters, but diverted it through her mother. The incident she recounts is one where she tried to avoid punishment of her younger sister by not telling her mother, which showed, paradoxically, that she did attempt to wield some decisional power over what punishment the children received.

Sophia started school at the age of four. One day, she was sent to do an errand at Mr. S's shop. She politely addressed the storekeeper in English. Little did she know that she was being carefully observed by one Z. J. who was headmaster of the school at that time. He was impressed with the way she expressed herself in English, and after asking her for her mother's name, visited her home to tell her mother to send her to school. Soon afterwards, Nurse L. took her to school. Mr. J. told her to come to him if she had any problems, and this has stayed with her throughout her life: she is not afraid to tell authorities what she thinks.

At the time Sophia began her schooling, there were not many girls in school. As well, the girls who were there did not progress well, which was made evident by the fact that they were unable to answer the questions posed to them. For this reason, she used to follow the boys, and even acted like them. She wanted to know what they knew, and when she sat the school-leaving exam, there were nine boys and one girl, herself. She had a good relationship with her teachers, and was not afraid of them - when you are afraid you will not learn, you will hide.

She is the only one of the older generation whom I interviewed to have spoken positively about her schooling. The others mentioned it only marginally, whereas for Sophia, it was very important, so important in fact that she virtually centres her childhood narrative on her schooling. She seems to speak with

immense pride when she recounts how the school headmaster solicited her early enrolment in school, at four years rather than five, the normal age for first grade in Dominica. In her schooling, she defied the typical female role – she recounted how she was more comfortable with the boys because they were higher achievers, and were more often present, in school (as an adult she did not conform totally to the typical domestic duties of a female, as her husband did most of the cooking).

As well, Sophia was a willing person, setting the example for others. One day, the children were asked to clean the toilet at school. She wanted to go home to change into her *boman* clothes and get a bucket to do the job. She carried the water, cleaned without complaint. The teacher saw how willing she was and never sent her to clean the toilet again.

Sophia used to enjoy taking her old blind grandfather around for a walk after school. The children would tease her, calling her by the old man's name as an insult, but it did not bring her down because she liked her grandfather. Meanwhile, her father had bought her a nice copybook written "manuscript" on the cover. Someone took her book out of her desk at school and wrote on every page "L. [the name of her grandfather], old man, *vyé nom*."² It was a handwriting she knew well – it belonged to the boy who sat next to her. She told the teacher and he was punished in front of the whole class, and no one teased her again. This, for Sophia, is a good example of justice being done.

Sophia positioned herself on the side of authority, as can be seen by the two events described in the segment above. In this section of her narrative, it also becomes evident that she is fairly well off, if we consider her account in the context of the story of Helena and the narratives in Chapter 4. The lack of clothing was an important theme in those narratives, especially in the accounts of Helena and Althea. Sophia, from her narrative here, apparently had clothing to change into for work. She also had a notebook, which was probably defiled because of jealousy: at that time slates were used by most children, and even later, notebooks were a rare commodity, sometimes cut in two to be shared between children. In this incident, she uses the official authoritative figure for her benefit, to punish those who were tormenting her, to re-establish order and respect. Her view of justice apparently passes through the hierarchy of local power relations,

² '*Vyé nom*' is derived from the French '*veil homme*' meaning old man.

wherein respect of authority is equated to justice. For Sophia, it was necessary to perform with obedience in order to obtain justice, and in her account, her obedience, as demonstrated by the way in which she willingly carried out the work assigned in school, was rewarded with clemency on the part of the teachers. Her obedience is thus a means to an end, rather than an acceptance of place.

In Sophia's reconstruction of her childhood, she positions herself on the side of authority, a theme which also appears later in her narrative. One must remember that this story was told to me with an audience other than myself in mind, namely her own grown children and her grandchildren, so she refashions her personal narrative in a way that positions her in what she considers to be a positive, morally correct perspective. Her narrative is constructed around behaviours and incidents that situate her favourably with respect to authority and that prevent her from succumbing to the pressures of her peers and to some (though not all) gender role imperatives. In this way she affirms both her consideration of the given order of respect and authority, but at the same time signals her independence and her agency. She indicates that playing *by* the rules allows one to play *with* the rules and locate oneself advantageously in relation to authority figures.

While both Helena and Sophia crafted their narratives around the theme of obedience, they did so in very different ways, with Helena expressing obedience and her subordinate position as something she does not contest but takes for granted, as though it was prescribed, while Sophia used her obedience to find favour with those in authority, and eventually to advance her position. Where Helena stresses submission, Sophia emphasizes agency.

Eleanor

Eleanor, seventy years of age, grew up in La Ronde (a hamlet on the margins of La Plaine) with her two parents, five sisters, and two brothers. Her mother, who married at age fourteen, had twenty-two children in all, but several died in childhood. Eleanor had a very particular hardship as she was growing up.

She became crippled just after her first communion. She was walking barefoot as did most children, when she injured her foot on the centre stalk of a coconut leaf, which is very sharp. The coconut leaf stalks are so rigid that people use them to make local brooms that are especially effective for sweeping debris and dust from the yard. From this wound, she developed a sore which would not heal, and which became systemic, creating sores that burst out all over her body. This lasted for ten years. The original sore on her foot ate away at her heel, deforming her foot and making it difficult for her to walk. This is the story Eleanor told me, as she sat on the sofa in her house, surrounded by grandchildren and with her eldest daughter present:

I got that foot when I was nine years. I was going to school, a coconut pricked me at the side of my foot. You know, the sticks. It pricked me at the side of my foot, and then, it hurt me a little, eh, but during the week it start to hurt me more, and then a month after, I couldn't go nowhere again because it start to make a big sore. At that time we didn't have, to say, doctors to give me treatment. It stay like that and then, just about six months after, I start to get more. All over my body start to get bobo.

That sore last ten years, and then my mother take me to hospital several times. But the last time, when my sister see I was dying, because I come so small, only bone and skin that remain, then she go down to doctor. So he send me a bottle of medicine to drink, and one to put on the foot. From the time I take the dose, the first dose in the night, when I get up the next day, all the sore I had, they was white, but all of them come out red, red, red, red, And then it start to cure, it start to cure. When the bottle of medicine, it remain about a quarter in it, I noticed the sore starting to go back, it opening. When the doctor give me, he said, if in case the medicine not help me, I have to come to Grand Bay hospital. They take me by boat because at that time they didn't had transport. Monday morning when he come up, he ask for me and they tell him I am there. So he tell me, okay, he going to give me an injection. So I have to sign my name five different places, and my mother have to sign six different places, if I am willing to die. Because he don't want, if in case I die, not to action him.

Anyway he give me the injection, the nurse hold my foot, my two foot, and a dispenser that was there, dispenser Dominique, he hold my paws [wrists] and the doctor giving it to me. The doctor stay twenty minutes in my bottom, pushing the oil, and it fighting with what I have inside of me, you know, it probably preventing it. Anyway, when he

finish, I didn't know nothing again. They said I come black, I just come black on the bed. You know, I was unconscious.

I stay in the hospital for six weeks, and then after the six weeks, they transfer the doctor, they send him Roseau, and then I go down to town. He finish give me treatment, and after the treatment he tell me he, I go to him and he tell me what was wrong with me. So I tell him, what? So he tell me I had evil in me, so when he take his book and he read everything, he saw it was evil and so he give me an injection that was evil. So the evil that was fighting with the evil that was in me, that's why it couldn't go through. His own was stronger than the one I had, so his own killed my own. Killed the one that was in me.

I asked Eleanor, "So where did the evil come from?" and she replied, with some hesitation:

Well ah, how to say, you know, old people before used to make *obeah*.³ And she said when she was dying, a lady, when I make my first communion, I was too pretty. You understand, because I make my first communion in April, I make my first communion in April, and I didn't go back to school in September when school opened. It's then I make first communion in April, and she say it's when I make my first communion I was too pretty. So probably it's around that time she do me something. But she die already and I still there, even though I still suffering, but she die, so God is love.

This is the story with which Eleanor began, to recount her life. It is evident that her life was very much affected by this accident and its sequel of suffering and handicap, as even to this day as she has difficulty walking on her totally deformed foot, and pieces of bone from her heel are working their way out through the skin. This is her story, it was her suffering, and became a part of who she explains herself to be, as a foundation to her life. As with Sophia's story, it is a story to be told, to any audience. Mine was not the only set of ears present at the time of telling, along with my tape recorder: several children, including her grandchildren, and her eldest daughter were present and listening. In this way, her story was her public self, her legacy to her children – and to whoever else would listen.

³ Obeah is the practice of magic, common throughout the Caribbean, and is usually considered to be black magic. In Dominica, obeah is associated with the Satan, and those thought to have been

Throughout this story, she appears to provide herself with a solid foundation upon which her narrated 'self' can be built. By telling this story, it becomes apparent that she considers her experience to be very much indicative of who she is today. She identifies herself through the physical suffering and deformity she had to bear: her wound, still visible, and still alive, as morsels of bone continue to work their way through to the surface of the skin, condenses into one image, as a metaphor for the suffering she had to endure her whole life. She does not affirm that because of her deformity, she had to suffer more: rather this story of suffering displaces onto her foot, as a signifier, all that she had to bear. Perhaps she is able to come to terms with her suffering more easily because, at least in part, it has taken a visible physical form, it can be seen and acknowledged by all.

In a slightly different perspective, Eleanor explains her accident within the framework of local beliefs of sorcery and black magic, that falls within the realm of what Wilson (1973) has called 'crab antics',⁴ which, as leveling devices, are acts used to keep someone from gaining higher status within the paradigm of statuses based largely on race, as discussed in the previous chapter. Eleanor was a very beautiful woman, even at the age of seventy. She was all the more beautiful, in local perceptions, that her features met criteria of social status associated with European-ness or whiteness. She had very fair skin, long black hair, and a relatively small nose and lips. Historically, the elite, the white colonists and light-skinned mulatto population, benefitted from higher status, because they had more economic and political power, and their physical traits came to represent, on their own, their higher status or at least a greater possibility of attaining it than their darker counterparts. Though Eleanor was raised just like other villagers on subsistence agriculture, she was descended from a French post-abolition settler and land-owner who disdained black people to the point where he would not

affected by obeah formerly would get the Catholic priest to undo the magic.

⁴ Note that Wilson (1973) contends that 'crab antics' are associated with 'reputation' which he posits as values that stand in opposition, and resistance to, 'respectability' which encompasses dominant values.

allow them into the hamlet he founded, according to her account. Her history and her looks, which acted both as a reminder of this impertinent man and of pre-abolition relations with white people, as well as the significance they held as a symbol of status, opened her to 'lowering', through an 'egalitarian' ethics. Her injury and subsequent suffering and deformity is thus explained through the work of obeah, the instigator of which is now conveniently dead. An ethic of egalitarianism, tempered by what local people qualify as jealousy and imposed through witchcraft, thus prevented her from engaging the potential that was symbolically inherent to her appearance to gain any of the attributes that could lead to higher status and position her 'above' other ordinary villagers. Her body was the locus of her symbolic superiority, and the object of the perceived attack.

Meanwhile, through her misery, Eleanor found her vocation:

God had sent a fortune for me I can say. When I was twelve years, I saw my mother was cutting a pant, and then when I watch her, she cut it, she tell me, I going and put up the two pockets, and after, she going and put her lunch on fire. So I watched and I take a piece of cloth and I cut it the same way I see she cut it, and I put the two pockets, that is when I have the support you know, I lie down on bed. Anyway, my dear, when she put the food on fire, when she come back she start to sew the pants again, she put the waistband and loops, and she close it up. And she tell me, I going and prepare lunch. So she go and prepare the lunch. When she go and prepare it, I put the waist, I put everything, all what I see she put, I put it, and then I close it up. When she come, after lunch, I tell her Mom, look at a pants I made. She was so surprised to see how I make the pants. And from that day I start to sew. I didn't go nowhere and sew. I start to make it. If I see somebody with a pants coming at my home, I see you have a nice pants on you, I just watching the pattern, how the style be, and then I cutting it. I tell you, it's a gift from God.

She lost one gift, but gained another, one she might never have known had she been away at school all day, and not home with her mother, watching her every move from her position on the bed. While she did not go to school past the age of nine, by the age of twelve, she began to earn a living sewing with her mother, a vocation which enabled her to support the children she would have as an adult.

Discussion

All three women whose narratives appear in this section framed their childhood accounts within the parameters of a discourse of prescribed behaviours and expectations, but they either positioned themselves differently with respect to the same discourse, or employed different ones. Helena and Sophia both recounted their experiences within the framework of an economy of respect, where responsibility towards younger siblings and to duties, based on obedience to teachers and parents, played the major role in their reconstruction of their childhood experiences. However, while Helena, in retrospect, positioned herself as the resigned, obedient daughter and servant, Sophia, on the other hand, used her obedience to gain favour among those who held authority over her. Where Helena's account shows her as acted upon, Sophia is very much the actor, taking charge of every event she recounts. Eleanor strikes a balance between the two: victim of her illness, she takes initiative in her attempt to emulate her mother's sewing. Neither Helena nor Eleanor question their role in terms of gender expectations, while Sophia, as well as positioning herself favourably in relation to those in authority, chose to emulate the boys rather than the girls, as they succeeded better in school at that time, according to her account.

In looking back on her life, both her interactions with people in authority and her education seemed instrumental in her life story, at least in the part of it she deemed worth telling. Sophia recounted her story within the theme of 'improving' oneself, notably through education and through manipulating authority of others to her advantage. Sophia interpreted her childhood in terms of her position as adult, emphasizing what she saw as important in relation to her life trajectory and her present situation. To do so, she engaged a framework within which she portrayed herself as making ethical choices in relation to people both within her family and outside, but mainly the latter, using anecdotal situations of interactions with other people for her self-characterization. In this way, one can see how she positions herself both in relation to moral discourses, as she engages them in her narrative, and how she creates herself, ethically, through narrative,

likely leaving out aspects that do not correspond to how she perceives the ‘right’ Sophia (as mentioned, she was very careful about what she let me write down). For Sophia, the transformations that so affected the lives of people who remained in La Plaine do not appear to have had such a profound effect on her, perhaps because she left before they occurred, around 1960, and was better positioned to begin with, coming from a fairly well-off family that owned a large tract of land. In her self-interpretation, ever since she was a young child, she sees herself as positioned on the side of greater opportunity and success, so she was not so downtrodden by the difficult times that make up the accounts of other women.

Eleanor, unlike Helena and Sophia, does not accentuate the ‘economy of respect’ paradigm in the representation of her childhood because she remained bed-ridden and unable to carry out most tasks that were the usual burden of children. Her understanding of her situation is formulated within a framework of statuses that emphasizes egalitarian ethos, and is played out negatively as jealousy against the advantages she possessed and through which she could position herself above others. The purported use of *obeah*, as a form of ‘crab antics’ (Wilson 1973) allows her to explain and justify her disability but also to frame her talent, her ability to sew which, in spite of her difficulties, allows her to participate in the economy of her family, and thus uphold her responsibility, garnering respect. The frameworks out of which these women’s self-accounts emerge involve their positioning in relation to other people: these women characterize themselves through how they interact with others, and this interaction follows (or does not follow) culturally derived expectations as to how one should act or react.

5.2 The Next Generation: Beatrice and Nicole

Beatrice

Eleanor’s daughter, Beatrice, is the eldest girl of six children, two boys and four girls. She grew up with her siblings, her mother, who never married, and her elderly and ailing grandparents. Her sisters are much younger than she, the

eldest of the three being about ten years her junior. Beatrice was born in 1951, prior to the completion of the trans-insular road, so she was raised in similar, although not altogether as difficult, circumstances as her mother. Because her mother was lame, and could not participate in the chores as she otherwise would have, more work befell the children, especially Beatrice as the eldest girl. Her mother, as we have seen, was a seamstress and worked making clothing to maintain her family. Beatrice, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, began to take care of her sick grandmother, who was incontinent, washing her bedclothes in the river every day, then cared for her grandfather, and finally, for her younger siblings.

Beatrice: When I was about thirteen or fourteen years, my grandmother was sick in bed. Although she had many children, it was unfair to me... I couldn't go to school. Sometimes I would go to school once for the week. I would have to stay to take care of my grandmother. In order to do her washing, I had to take it to the river. She would do everything in her bed. At that time no pampers. She was in her seventies. But maybe she had worked so hard, her body could not resist her age. She had, she was sick in her heart. She had twenty children, so maybe her body was weak. So, I had to go to the river, and soak the cloth that she used in the river, and go to school, sometimes if I can, when I'm passing back, wash it or I don't go to school. So one day an old lady say to me, "poor you, child, you're too small to handle old people's cloth, whatever they use. This is not good for you. They are too old for you." But I had no choice, I had to do it. Then she died in 1965.

Beatrice began her life account at the moment she took on responsibilities within the familial setting. Carrying out her duty, caring for grandparents and children, she laments her young days as being especially difficult and regrets not being able to attend school regularly. Because her mother was working to support the household, after the death of Beatrice's grandmother, she left Beatrice in charge of the three young children and her aging grandfather, who was blind.

My mother had three girls, I have three sisters, they were all small. She had to leave them because their father would not take care of them. He live with them for a while but yet he was wicked to my mother. And he wasn't taking care of them. So she had to leave them for me again, and my grandfather, my grandfather and the children for me, and to go to Roseau to work, to make money to feed the house. So you know as a young girl it

was hard on me. My mother was in Roseau, to work to maintain her children. So I have to do the work of my grandmother's children, and plus my mother's job, I have to care her children for her, and I have to care my grandfather. So I have to do two jobs. It was nothing easy. At that time we had to carry water, everything. I use a stove all the time, it was wood. Wood for coffee, wood for breakfast, wood for supper, wood for... it was a continuous thing.

Beatrice's narrative portrays hardships of the past in relation to the relative ease of life today, in keeping with the narratives discussed in Chapter 4. Without the amenities of today, caring for her people was an arduous task. Not only does her account describe the difficulties she experienced as a young girl, she infuses her depiction with bitterness. Her narrative was composed around her involvement in tasks that signaled her early responsibilities, an idiom used by several of the women. Beatrice states that she had to do the "job of her grandmother's children," taking care of their parents. Children are expected to be responsible for their aged parents, especially in their illness. Beatrice was particularly frustrated because although her grandparents had many children, none of them assisted in their care.

When I asked her what she did for fun, she laughed and remarked she never had time for fun or games. But in spite of her account of her life as being all work and no play, upon questioning, Beatrice was able to tell me about some amusements she had as a young girl. Even so, she *chose* to define her life in her narrative within the framework of the hardships she endured and the responsibilities she was obliged to assume. This theme recurs often, seen in the narratives of older women above, and it appears to comprise a frame of self-reference, that locates the narrator in relation to the moral and social structuring of respect and responsibility (as discussed in the previous chapter). Beatrice concentrates her account on the responsibilities she had to take on as a young woman, beginning her narrative when those responsibilities begin, at around age thirteen. Her childhood prior to that time appears to be irrelevant to her account of her life and activities and experiences. Even though she admits having had some amusements, she did not include them in her self-narrative because they do not

pertain to the framework within which she reinterprets her life, and seem unimportant in contrast to the toil of her daily life.

Beatrice experienced conflict between her duties to her family and the possibility of advancing her education. Several times in casual conversation, outside the interview setting, she expressed regret at having not been able to advance in school, and thus not being in a position to 'improve' in that way. Looking back on her life, she was frustrated at not being able to attain a certain status and standard of living in the way she might have had she attended high school.

Unlike the older women, whose narratives frequently expressed resolved dilemmas, as though they had worked out the contradictions in their lives,⁵ Beatrice had not, and was still striving to ameliorate her situation, to 'improve' herself. Her present circumstances, which will be described more in detail in the Chapter 7, belie this. She is married to the father of her six children, and she and her husband have recently constructed a spacious house using modern materials. Nevertheless, for Beatrice, life is still a struggle, as she does what she can to complement her husband's mediocre salary. She raises pigs to sell and sews for others to pay off the mortgage and gradually put the finishing touches on the house, as well as put the two youngest children through high school, in addition to producing food for household consumption. The hardships she draws upon in her self-narrative both contrast with her life of today (with television, refrigerator, propane stove, and indoor plumbing), showing the distance she has already traveled towards 'improving' herself, and disclose her continuing struggle to achieve a better socio-economic position.

Beatrice's account is not one of complacent obedience, as was Helena's, because although Beatrice was a child before the development of a coherent infrastructure in Dominica that reached La Plaine, she witnessed in her teen and young adult years many transformations that her position did not allow her to take advantage of, something that she is trying desperately to do now. Her young years

⁵ See McAdams (1996) for a discussion of middle aged and older women's narratives. Older

of toil are seen as a barrier to creating the person she would like to be, and the *raison d'être* of her present struggles. Yet, in her narrative, she prefers to emphasize those experiences, as though they are the ones through which she becomes valorized, as a person, in her narrative. Beatrice is very conscious and desirous of the advantages of today's life, as she mentioned when speaking of the changing values, (see Chapter 4) stating "although many of us are boarding on today's life...." She seems to express frustration and resentment towards the duty that kept her from an education and the possibilities it could have opened for her, yet her story develops precisely in relation to those beginnings: if she did not experience hardship, she could not 'improve'. Beatrice's account is oriented towards a particular goal: for her story to tell of her successes and failures, it must be contextualized within the hardships she experienced. She positions her self-narrative within both a framework of economy of respect and one of 'improvement', and for her they create a contradiction. She formulates her life course around the ethic of 'improvement', which was hampered by her participation in the household economy of respect and responsibility; it is precisely on this contradiction, however that pivots the emplotment of her narrative.

When she began her duties discussed in her narrative, at age thirteen, the road to La Plaine had just opened (1964), as had access to a world of possibilities. Nicole's story below can be read in the context of these transformations.

Nicole

Nicole was born in 1961, and is the penultimate of her mother's eight children (she has several other siblings through her father, with whom she interacts minimally). In her narrative, Nicole elaborated two distinct segments of her childhood, formulated through the circumstances and the location in which she lived. In the first segment of the narrative, she describes living with her mother on her family's land in a part of the village called Plaisance. As stated in

women, he contends, have a "concern for harmony and reconciliation" in the life story.

the introduction, La Plaine is actually an amalgamation of several small hamlets, spread out over approximately ten square kilometres. Plaisance is now contiguous to La Plaine Central, as are Fresh Island, Balizier, and Félicité, with no space and little bush between them, unlike during Nicole's childhood, when bush separated the sparse houses. All the hamlets formed one municipal unit, and used the same school and health services, had the same town council, etc., as they do now. However, because at that time there were no roads, only footpaths, and fewer houses and more bush, Nicole recounts that she felt like she was living in a "very different place" when she lived in Plaisance than when she moved to Fresh Island. Fresh Island and La Plaine Central, connected even then, were much more densely populated than Plaisance, with houses standing much closer together.

Nicole's narrative describes in detail her activities as a child. She begins when her sister left the family home to work for a lady in Roseau, and Nicole took over her responsibilities in the home, as she was now the eldest girl. Like the others, Nicole begins her story at the point when she became responsible, and this remains an important theme throughout the narrative, as she emphasizes her duties within the household economy and the skills she acquired working in the home and garden over school, an important point in her self-interpretation.

Nicole, as she was the second youngest, was not obliged to look after her siblings (although she had one younger brother, she does not talk about caring for him), so her responsibility involved being able to look after herself and the house, and eventually taking part in agricultural activities. In this section of her narrative, she describes how she and her older brother Bennett managed on their own.

When I was growing up as a child with my mother, there were seven of us. My mother had eight children but there were seven of us when my first brother left. After, when my sister was fourteen years she went to live with somebody in town, so that was when I started helping my mother, working with her, because I grew up with the rest.

My mother would wake up very early, 6:30, she would prepare our meals for us. So, my mother would prepare one meal, and then we would eat from it for breakfast and leave the rest of it for lunch. But she would leave it by the fire so it was always warm.

So at six-thirty we would go to the river to collect water, Bennett and I. At that time, I couldn't carry a bucket (usually five gallons). We

would carry buoys. People would go by the bay and collect them, and they would cut off a hole so you could take it. That would be my load, I would have two. You would push your two fingers in it and hold it so, and carry it in your hand. They had different sizes so the smaller child would carry the smaller size. So we would go to collect water in the river. We had to make two or three trips before nine o'clock. Pour it into a drum, make another trip, pour it in the drum, and the two others we would leave in the kitchen. Last trip, we would take our bath [in the river], go home and dress ready for school. And when we would come back to go to school, Bennett and I, my mother was in the bush so we would dress, and off we go. Since I was nine years, I knew to do everything for myself. Go to school, and close the house, and when it was twelve o'clock, we would go back home, take our meals, dish it out, share it between us, Bennett and I. The others were big already - either they would go in the bush with my mother or they would be doing some work somewhere. So we would take our meal, go back to school. At that time we did not know snacks, our snack was mango, tangerine, orange, that was what we had for our snack. We would take a plastic bag⁶ and put it in it and that was our snack for school.

Bennett is two years older than Nicole, and is her closest sibling. Her sister, six years her senior, is the next closest in age, and the rest, all brothers, are older, with the exception of one younger brother. Bennett and Nicole were the only ones in school after her sister left, as children left school at fifteen, at the latest, if they did not go to high school in town. The older brothers were working or had left the home: the eldest went to England when Nicole was still a baby. In this section of her narrative, she emphasizes the fact that she and Bennett had household tasks, and by the age of eight or nine, were responsible for themselves, without adult supervision during the day. Carrying water from the river was a daily task of children as there was still no piped-in water at that time. The river ran through a valley a fair distance from the house, so the walk to and from the river, coming back to the house with the bouys or *bolis* full, could take about a half hour along uneven, sometimes steep and slippery, footpaths.

In this next narrative segment, Nicole again evokes the theme of responsibilities and skills that she acquired, describing as well her brother Bennett's occupations.

⁶ Plastic bags were not readily available in La Plaine: they were acquired if one bought or received something in Roseau (although paper bags were more common) or from relatives overseas. They

At that time now, I learned to do work very early, to wash, wash dishes, clean house, everything my sister used to do before she left, and every day my mother had somewhere to go, because she was the mother, she was the father. She used to raise animal, we had goats, we had sheep, and we had the cows in the yard, you know. So when I would wake up my mother would go very early, she would go to the bush. So I learn to wash dishes, sweep the yard, even scrub the house. She would put a basin of water, at that time it was wooden house we had. We didn't have a lino on the floor, just the bare floor, bare wood, and she would give me a scrubbing brush or a coconut bark. If you had a scrubbing brush and it finish and you couldn't buy one until, you use a coconut bark. I learned how to cook, I learned how to do all these things.

At the time now, my brother Bennett knew how to fend for food already, how to fend for meat. If you had no meat, once the trees were flowering, you would make traps, you would make things to catch birds, you would use that bird for a meal. When it is September and October the doves, the doves come close up to the village. All here was dark and bushy, all here was cinammon trees. The doves would come here to eat the cinammon grains [seeds], so they would make traps, all about a dozen traps in the bush. So every morning, as soon as you get up, before you do anything, as soon as you take your coffee, you go straight to your trap, to see if there was anything in the trap. So if you did not have, you would take, set it back, so you would look at the trap two-three times for the day, just to catch the ground dove. When you catch it you take it for a meal. That is a meal, you know. And crabs.

Nicole's and her brother's duties differed when growing up: Nicole's duties were mainly household chores, while Bennett learned to "fend for food." Although boys also learned how carry out household chores, and girls to catch some wildlife, especially crabs and certain types of fish, domestic work was, and still is, mainly relegated to girls and women, while hunting was a boy's domain. This division of labour is reflected in the practice of keeping girls in the home, and discouraging them from running about. Besides fetching water, girls had to spend much of their spare time after school and on weekends carrying out domestic chores, helping and sometimes replacing their mothers. As has been seen from the other narratives, older girls were often put in charge of younger siblings while the mother worked or went to the garden. Boys, on the other hand, were usually left much freedom of movement. They had chores and responsibilities, as did the

were not disposed of but used repeatedly.

girls, but were allowed to venture much further afield, setting traps for birds and hunting the *manicou* and *agouti*, two small indigenous mammals,⁷ meeting up with other boys all the while.

Nicole reiterates several times throughout her narrative that they lived on what they produced. As with the accounts of poverty in Chapter 4, she states this not as an individual experience, but something that most children went through. The poverty she elicits is not a lack of food, as will be expressed further in the narrative, but a lack of cash to purchase goods that cannot be produced, such as shoes. Other villagers in the same age group, and even those several years younger, recounted going to school without shoes, and in addition told me that they used to chop pencils and notebooks in half, so that two children could have what was intended for one.

Sometimes we were going to school with no shoes. We would go barefooted, at that time we didn't used to wear close up shoe, we had plastic shoe, and if you had a plastic shoe and it was all ripped up, your mother could not afford one for you, you would go two, three months barefooted. But it was not a problem, because most of the children went to school barefooted also.

Here Nicole generalizes poverty as a common state experienced by most, while in the following section, she particularizes her experience of poverty and asserts that her family was poorer than most. The theme of poverty, that is, lack of material goods that must be bought, rather than produced, resonates within the framework of the discourse of respectability and egalitarianism. It was acceptable to be poor as long as all were at the same level, but as soon as disparity appeared, then jealousy, on the one hand, and fear of humiliation, on the other, appeared.

Central to Nicole's narrative is the idea that they were not well off and were indeed "less fortunate than everybody," to which she attributes her lack of friends as a young child. She links poverty to the fact that her mother "had no husband, she was the father, she was the mother" because her mother carried out

⁷ The *manicou* (*Didelphis marsupialis*) is a cat-sized, tree-dwelling marsupial, a subspecies of the opossum found in the lesser Antilles, thought to have been introduced in the 18th century. The *agouti* is described in note 1.

the expected tasks of both, caring for the children and getting the food. This emphasis on the 'lack' of a father/husband, and the fulfillment of his role by another portrays expectations with regards to a gendered division of labour and the constitution of the family. Other narratives show the same expression of lack with the role fulfilled by another person, either the mother, the brother, or another relative. This reveals an ambivalence with regards to the nuclear family and patriarchy: while the family ideally comprises a supporting male who is father and husband, it is by no means the most common family composition, yet the expectation remains. The expression of the lack reflects this ambivalence between an ideal and the lived reality of most people. This point will be taken up in further discussions of gender and sexuality.

When I grew up at that time, I didn't have a lot of friends, you know, because my mother, we were less fortunate than everybody. My mother had no husband, she was the father, she was the mother, she had to take care of us, everything. She went early morning, she was just surviving on what she plant, so she was the mother, she was the father. She would not let us go at the neighbours' home because she know we was poor, and she know thing was bad, and she didn't want, she didn't want the neighbours to look down on us, to have pity on us, so you know to say that we are hungry, that we coming to get meals. So she would keep us, let us stay home, always after school, stay home, stay in the yard, stay around the area. That's how we were raised.

Nicole's mother was proud and kept the children away from the neighbours so that they would not 'have pity' on them and give them food.⁸ While they could not gain 'respectability' in the sense it is being used in this study, as they were not 'on a level' with others, they could at least retain a certain amount of self-respect, by proudly bearing their poverty through its concealment.

The valorization of hardship balances the lack of respectability, and serves to complement it within the context of the narrative plot, as it is from hardship and poverty that one can 'improve'. In self-narrativization, an ethic of self

⁸ Accepting food can be humiliating if one really needs it, but other factors come into play here that Nicole did not mention, and the humiliation may be related to who offers the food – if someone with whom the mother is not on good terms feeds her children, it is not only insulting, but potentially dangerous for witchcraft or poisoning. Later in her account, it becomes obvious that Nicole's mother was not on good terms with her brother, who lived adjacent to them.

emerges from this movement, as a trajectory through which the self is formulated. The link between their poverty, her mother's situation as a single mother with several children to feed, and her lack of friends is important for her self-understanding, and central to this narrative, reflecting moral discourses entwined within the narrative in an ethics of the self. The following section will further illustrate this point, as Nicole presents a comparison of Plaisance and Fresh Island. Nicole has interpreted her isolation as a result of being poorer than others. This reflects a concern discussed in the previous chapter with the necessity of appearing to have at least equivalent status as others, shown through one's ability to dress appropriately, and the concern with a balance between egalitarianism and respectability of many older women, especially noted in Helena's narrative.

In the following narrative segments, Nicole explains the effects of the move, after her mother's marriage, to Fresh Island. These excerpts illustrate the transformation that Nicole perceives to have occurred, largely due to increased access to wealth, especially the ability to sell agricultural products for cash, and their relation to Nicole's social life. Through this, some contradictions emerge, which will be illustrated below.

When we moved to Fresh Island, that is the central part of La Plaine, we moved there when my mother got married. When she met Lewis now [her husband], Lewis had cows. When she got married she moved there, then I moved with her. Johnny [Nicole's younger brother, son of Lewis] was about a two years child when they got married. They started to make garden together and everything and he had cows. He had cows, then she took her goats and bring them, and things were plenty better. Because that time we had cow's milk, and it was at that time that we start to make money. We started to earn money, because when she was making garden before, she had to cross a river to carry her produce, so she would not think of planting plantain to sell, it was only dasheen, tannia. So she decided to plant plantain there, plant dasheen and sell dasheen.

Significant here are the links Nicole makes between her mother's marriage, the move to Fresh Island, and the making of money. The land they farmed near Fresh Island had easier access to the road than the land her mother farmed previously, facilitating the marketing of goods. As well, the combined forces of husband and

wife, who each had livestock and began to farm together, created a greater economic base. Her mother now had a husband, which facilitated their access to wealth: having a husband is more associated with material well-being than morality, except inasmuch as being poorer than other people positions one negatively within a paradigm of respectability. However, the advent of, and their proximity to, the road is a very important factor, one that would have made a difference whether or not she was married.

Nicole began at that time to help out in the garden, even missing school sometimes, as did many children, to help harvest and carry produce on the day the huckster (buyer) came to the village.

At that time now, I started to go to the garden. Every Saturday I would go to the garden. The same land, the same land she has now, both of them had, but now they bought it. I remember when I was a child they were renting still. So, every Saturday I would go to the garden to carry food, or to do things in the garden. We used to collect the cow shit, collect it in heaps, to plant the dasheen. On Saturdays we would collect it in heaps, take an old cutlass, a piece of bag, put it underneath the cow shit, and put it in the bag and put them in heaps, so my mother would get that to put on the dasheen, you know and things so. And on our way home I would have a load, my mother would have a load, food for the week, to bring home for the week. Who carry plantain, who carry dasheen, tannia, whatever, you know, for the home. Then when things start to get better again, my mother plant more plantain, I would go every Wednesday, I would lose a day of school to carry plantain to the agricultural station to sell, because the person that was buying plantain would come on Wednesday and Saturdays, so I would have to lose a day of school to carry the plantain down there. That's when we started to make some money.

Nicole stresses her role in farming, making only passing mention of school, as though she locates herself within the realm of the home economy more than school – her responsibilities are more important to her description of her life than school. Significant as well are the links both to increased status and, for Nicole, new-found friendships. Not only did their lives become easier because of more access to cash, their social standing improved, as both their new economic status and marriage contributed to gaining respectability. Nicole, who had been isolated before the move, found that her social life improved enormously, because there were more children her age around the area where she lived, and because

they were on the “same level” now. In a prior segment, she had remarked that her mother prohibited her from going out because of their poverty, and that is why she had no friends. Here, she describes how things changed for her when they moved, attributing her new-found social life to the multitude of children. This seems to contradict Nicole’s impression that they were the poorest family, and opens the door to consider that her isolation from other children might be due, at least in part, to other reasons and circumstances. The feeling of isolation that Nicole expresses in the previous section, being kept at home, may be not so much the effect of poverty as of gender socialization. Her isolation was exacerbated by the fact that they lived in a fairly remote area of the village, and that their poverty, manifest in her lack of even a dress to wear on Sundays to church, prevented her from going to public places. First of all, daughters were kept close to home to carry out household chores, and for their own ‘safety’, as can be seen in the narratives of Helena and Beatrice. As there were few neighbours around the area, there were barely any children in the immediate vicinity, and her mother and one neighbour, who was her uncle, did not get along. Nevertheless, she places the most importance on the fact that they were poor to account for her lack of friends.

When we started to live here, Fresh Island, I gained new friends, all around here. Because most of my friends around here they were in my age group. You know they were in the same class with me. When I come from school, the same road, the same activity we were doing, all of us were in the same playing field we had to meet each other again. In any case, we had to. It was a bit different, you know still a bit different. Around here had more children, in my area had more children. You know Plaisance the neighbours I had is about three houses that was close to me, and the people, lower, my mother’s brother, and they were not talking to each other so which meant I would never be friends with their children. Higher up was only one daughter he had and she was always alone. That is why we never had a lot of friends in Plaisance. But around here, when I started to live around here, a lot of people, a lot of girls, and most of them were in the same class with me. We would go to school together, we would go back together, we would play in the same playing field, and at the time things was much better than in Plaisance. Because we were at about the same level with everybody else, but behind we were real poor. When I tell you poor, real poor. Real poor. My mother was the less fortunate one there.

And I didn't know to go out, I didn't know to play, I didn't know to go out because things were bad, and we had it hard, so even if there were activities around La Plaine, she wouldn't bring us, she would not take us because if she don't have a cent to buy something for us by the playing field, she would just stay with us. They would have things in the playing field like cricket whatever, rounders. Cricket, even more often than now. Even to church, as a child, I didn't know to go to church. My mother couldn't afford to buy clothes. You see, she wasn't working, and you could not take one dress to go to church every Sunday. If I would have two dresses, but I could not go to church every Sunday with the same dress. So, she herself couldn't afford to have them, so we would stay home.

It's when we started to live here, I knew people. You see, I live around the area, and go out different places, but otherwise, staying in Plaisance, we were living by ourselves. That is just how we were. Eating what we produced. My bigger brothers would go hunting, get crab, get birds, manicou, agouti, frogs, you know. That was our meal. And every fête time, like Easter, Carnival, you know, Christmas, we'd have kill our animals, you know, for the home. That's how we know. That's how I raised.

A transformation occurred in Nicole's life after her move to Plaisance. This transformation comprises three facets: the marriage of her mother; the increase in wealth and access to money; and her increased ability to socialize. She links the three together, and all contribute to the obtaining of 'respectability' as 'improving' oneself, not to become wealthy, but intertwined and balanced with the ethic of egalitarianism, as they came to be "at the same level" as others. Wealth and her social standing are in part connected to the marriage of her mother in this account, as though they came about because of it, although she also mentions the proximity of the road as a factor. However, if she had not married and moved, she would not have begun to farm near the road where she could easily sell her produce to hucksters. The gaining of friends, for Nicole, is mainly due to the increased status, being "at the same level." However, there are other factors, namely that where she was there were fewer children, and as a young girl, she was kept close to home. Nevertheless, of these three threads, she chose most strongly the first one to represent herself, as it corresponds to the other factors in the narrative, that is, her mother's marriage and increased wealth. Her self-

representation falls along these two conscious threads, that of wealth and to a lesser extent, the fact that there were more children, while the gender factor remains unexpressed. She is more aware of her socio-economic position than that of gender: while the discourses that emerge from the concern with poverty and self-respect, improving socio-economic status and social acceptance form the conscious level of her narrative, her gendered self remains a subtext.

Prevalent also in this account is Nicole's concern with her responsibilities acquired in learning to work, which apparently for her, are more important than the knowledge she acquired in school. The importance of responsibility for adults recounting their childhood is similarly prevalent in several of the other narratives, where women tell of the duties they had to carry out when they were growing up, often caring for elderly grandparents or, as the eldest girl at home, taking care of younger siblings. It would seem that these women perceive their learning, their formation, to be largely grounded in these activities, and subsequently, their sense of who they are. Contrasted to this is Sophia, for whom participation in school and interaction with other children and teachers took precedence in her account over familial duties and learning.

Both Beatrice and Nicole construct their narratives around their responsibilities. For Beatrice, a contradiction arose between outside relations, school, and fun, and familial relations and the duties attached to them, while for Nicole, the transformation apparent in her narrative appears to resolve any contradiction between the outside world and her confinement to home.

5.3 *Young Women's Childhood Memories: Molly, Magdalene, and Janelle*

Women in their late teens to twenties presented a variety of experiences that reflect both their personal situations and the social, political, and economic context into which they were born and raised: much changed since the childhoods of their forebears. The experiences of these women reflect the variety of experiences of children within the context of the last quarter century in La Plaine.

Their self-representations demonstrated less concern with hardship than previous narratives examined in this chapter; although in some cases they effectively described difficulties they experienced in their narratives, these were framed differently. Generally, the younger women are less involved in agriculture or any kind of food-getting activity (gardening or foraging) than the middle-aged and older women interviewed. Of the three women presented in this section, only one of them mentioned doing any household-related food-getting activities as a child and none of them do so as adults. While certain transformations had occurred economically and infrastructurally by the time they were growing up, not all went to high school: only one of them, the youngest, completed high school, and went on to post-secondary training.

Molly

Molly, a young woman of twenty-nine, grew up in the care of her mother's parents. Her mother migrated to one of the Dutch colonies when Molly was still a baby, about one year old, in order to work so she could provide for Molly and her two brothers who were still at home. Molly's experience is similar to that of the older women interviewed, in that she took care of her aging grandparents. However, she does not interpret her experience within a conceptual framework of hardship, but rather presents it as having been 'fun'.⁹

Molly: So I'll tell you, a friend and I, we would go to the river on Saturdays, take our basin of clothes, go by the river, wash, and while it's washing, break, you know, coconuts, and then eat that, just for a little snack or so. Then take, catch some fishes, after that come home, cook some food.

Robbyn : How old were you?

Molly: I was just eight, nine.

Robbyn: Eight, Nine? At that time you would do all that?

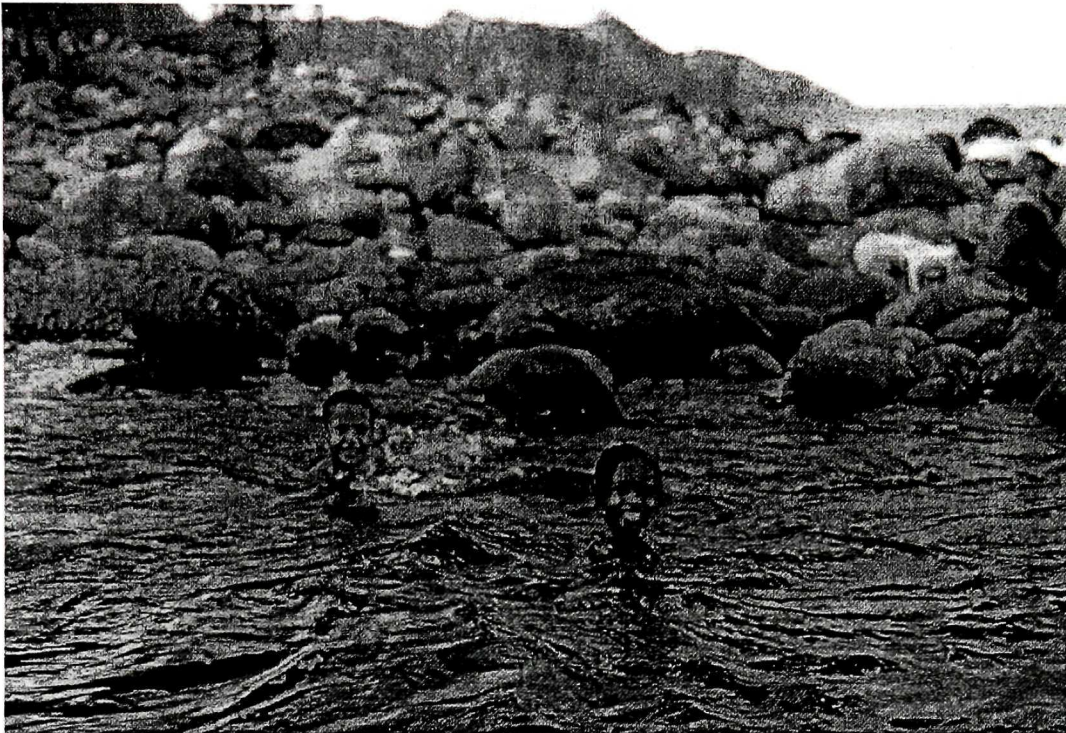
⁹ Molly was very shy and did not open up easily, so I felt obliged to prompt her with questions much more than some other research participants.

Molly: Yes, yes, yes. And then, I had some friend of mine, you know, used to go on holidays, down to the river to bathe, take down my curtains to wash, in that way she would help me with my yard, and I would help her with hers. And then at school, we would have some fun, running in the bush, hiding each other, playing hide and seek, you know, and then coming home for lunch, under the banana trees, eat any ripe banana that there. When we reach home, we used to deal a lot on the street you know, before we reach home.

Like other narratives examined in this chapter so far, Molly's remembering begins with chores she had to carry out, when she began to take on responsibilities, and have some independence. Like Nicole she chose to begin her narrative to show when she acquired some self-sufficiency (responsibility and autonomy) – she was able not only to wash clothes at the river, but also to get her own food and to cook, as well as carry out other household chores. She does not consider her work as something that prevented her from enjoying herself. Molly's chores are intimately tied to her relations to friends, in contrast to some, especially Beatrice, for whom chores were perceived to impede friendship and fun. Molly appears to have had relatively more freedom of movement at a young age than other women interviewed, easily combining her friendships and her tasks, through sharing the work with her friend, especially work around the yard and washing. She couches her account within the framework of responsibilities and her social life, like Nicole and Beatrice, but whereas Nicole felt a lack that was only fulfilled once she moved, and Beatrice retained a frustration because her burden of work prevented her from having amusements, Molly's story is one of happy complementarity between work and play.

Washing, in fact, was a social event, as most women with their children or older children by themselves would go to the river where they would sit and wash, often cooking a little lunch on the rocks next to the water. The small children would play in the river, the older ones would help with the laundry. Clothes would be spread over the stones and bushes to dry in the sun, while the women relaxed and chatted. Now, with running water in the village at standpipes and more and more in the home, many women do their washing at home, either

by hand in basins or by machine. One woman remarked to me that she missed this opportunity to socialize, and that it was one of the main ways that local and island news was previously spread.



Children playing in the mouth of the Tabieri River, La Plaine, 1999.

Molly continued her narrative, recounting how she grew up with her grandparents, and was eventually obliged to leave school to take care of her sick grandmother. Note that she calls her grandmother ‘mom’. Even though she was unable to continue her schooling, Molly apparently has no regrets, but seems to have enjoyed looking after her grandmother. She is a little unclear about her life in between – it appears she and her grandmother moved to Roseau to live with the grandmother’s son – Molly’s uncle – until the grandmother fell sick.

And then on, while I was growing up, you know, I took care of my granny. I grew up with my granny and my grandfather. My mother left me – a baby also one year. So from that, I was with my grandparents, they raise me up, they send me to school, and then I didn’t take all my schooling. I came back up and taking care of my mom, you know, my sick

granny and so. It was fun, it was fun taking care of them, you know, really fun.

Molly apparently assumed her role as caretaker of her grandmother with neither resignation nor resentment, but with simple acceptance, as though that is the way things were to be, naturally. While not openly stated, it becomes obvious here as in other accounts that the physical care of both children and seniors is usually left up to the girls and women. She implicitly accepts her role and responsibilities. The two brothers were not involved in caring for their grandparents, as she stated, saying “not that they cared” (meaning not taking care of). She did not state whether or not her brothers helped to provide food for the family.¹⁰

Molly’s experience does not differ much from that of the older women described above. Her open acceptance of it, and the absence of an idiom that foregrounds hardship, however, distinguishes her account from the preceding ones. She does not perceive her present life in contrast to her earlier experiences, and does not express a transformation from difficult to easier times, as in the narrative of Nicole. Her intertwining of amusement with friends and chores sheds a different light on life growing up in La Plaine than the narratives of Beatrice and Helena (and Nicole, although she does talk about amusement) – she does not have the preoccupation with difficulties experienced in the past, as she was born after the major changes in the village had already taken place. While Molly’s experience resembles very much the experience of older women, she does not reconstruct her lived past as difficult, to be compared to today. Perhaps her young age accounts for this: she may not see the necessity to use the past in critical relation to the present, because she has not experienced the economic, infrastructural, and social transformations that, for the most part, had already occurred by the time of her birth.

¹⁰ In only one instance did I hear of boys caring for their elderly grandmother. In this case, there was only one sister, and she lived in Roseau with a large family of her own to raise, so the brothers, who were still living with the grandmother who had raised them in the absence of their mother, took care of her during her illness and final days.

Nevertheless, her story bears similarities to those of older women because they demonstrate a pre-occupation with responsibilities in self-definition, tasks that were highly gender-specific, including household chores and caring for others. Like most of the other women whose accounts have been examined here, school was less important than her ties to family and her accruing role therein, even though she attended high school for a time, she willingly left school – though she would have had to even if she did not want to – to fulfill her role in the family.

Magdalene

Magdalene, twenty-seven at the time of our interview, had an unstable childhood, moving between various relatives and caretakers. Her mother, who had several children with different fathers, placed her with her maternal grandparents and uncle when she went to live in Roseau with a new boyfriend. Magdalene had a difficult time with her uncle, of whom she was terribly afraid – she was even afraid to enter the house, and would sometimes remain hidden underneath it. When Hurricane David hit in 1979,¹¹ the house was destroyed, and Magdalene went to live temporarily with a neighbour woman and her grandchild, until her mother returned. From that time, she began to live with her mother again.

Magdalene: And my mom was with me for a while, up to about when I was about eight years, and she left. She left me with my grandfather and my grandmother. And well from there I can remember, well not really my grandparents but my uncle. He used to do a lot of wickedness. He is deaf and dumb.

Robbyn: What did he do to you?

Magdalene: Well, beating me, I used to run, I used to sleep under house.

Robbyn: He wouldn't let you come in the house?

¹¹ Hurricane David devastated the island in 1979, razing houses and crops throughout the island. Many people lost their homes in La Plaine. Hurricane David is often used as a marker of time, as people will remember if something occurred before or after the hurricane.

Magdalene: I used to be afraid of him, so that's what caused me to you know, like, I would see him from afar and then I'd run. I was very scared of him at that time.

Robbyn: So you were too scared to even go inside the house.

Magdalene: Yes, yes with my grandparents. And then, at that time, Hurricane David happened in 79. So then, a well, from my grandparents, I lived with another lady, you know the lady, she sellin' the peanuts in the bus stop. Helena. I used to live with her. I cannot remember exactly for how long I lived with her. Because after Hurricane David, my mother came back up to La Plaine. Like during Hurricane David, yes, she came back up. We were together from that time...

Robbyn: But how old were you when your mother went up to Roseau?

Magdalene: I was small. Even if I wasn't exactly like two-three years, because all the time before Hurricane David I was with my grandparents.

Robbyn: Was their house broken down?

Magdalene: Yes, but during hurricane David she was there because I can recall because she had her last child, that's my sister. She was born in 78, and Hurricane David happened in 79. So all 78 she was in town.

Robbyn: And sometime between then and Hurricane David you lived with Helena?

Magdalene: Yes. She had a grandson. Well, we used to pipi in bed a lot. [laughter] And she used to beat us. She used to beat us and so. Well, I pass a lot of tribulation.

Magdalene begins her life story, in contrast with others, by talking about how she was treated, rather than when she began to take on responsibilities. She says that she was beaten, but positions herself as a victim of bad treatment, rather than situating herself within a system of values, especially that of respect, as did Althea or Eleanor, when they spoke about corporal discipline. Of all the women, she is the only one to refer to beatings she received as "tribulation"; she clearly does not draw on the same values of respect nor of responsibility that others before her incorporated in their narratives.

Magdalene: And I, um, but still during my, when my mother wasn't there in the young days again, I can remember I used to go to school, well if she was there, I would never be like that. Any time your parents are with you, I mean they try their best to help you do what they can for you. But not much as she wasn't there. I used to go to school untidy, dirty clothes, dirty shoes, plastic for my school bag, put my things in a plastic. I can remember, it have a lady up the road that she used to kind of iron for me and all also clean me up, you know, and thing

Magdalene feels that because her mother was not there, she did not receive the care she otherwise would have: she went to school dirty and unkempt, while mothers take pride in the cleanliness of their children, which contributes to their prestige. She perceives herself, within this moral discourse, as being on the negative side.

Magdalene: In all her six children I am the only one who went through that terrible experience, you know.

Robbyn: The other children she kept with her?

Magdalene: Yes, two raised up with their father. And the others she raised them. Um, not really like she raised them, my mother is a loving mother, and even though ... I would not like to speak ill against her, but she is not, she was not a mother that would like, I cannot remember she really spend so much time with her children, like everybody grew up in a different place, environment like, you know, even it was in the same village, La Plaine, but my sister after me, she grew up with her grandmother, I grew up a certain time with my grandparents also, the two others grew up with their father, and the first one, he was first so, but he left long time, went to another village, you know. And well, it was the last one that was really raised with her, you know completely, through her whole childhood and teenage life. Still if I have to remember every little detail, and say every little detail of misery and.. it was not easy, especially when you are not raised with your mother, you know. It was not easy.

Magdalene attributes her hardship to the fact that her mother was not the mother she would have liked her to be, especially with her frequent absences. She implies that her treatment under other people, because they were not her parents, was worse than how her mother would have treated her. Yet, in the excerpt below, she

attributes her misery to her mother: even when she was with her mother, she did not receive the treatment she seems to have expected.

Magdalene: And my mother the kind of person like, you know like, when your child do something, and you will come and complain to the parent, she would not 'hear the two bells ring' [listen to the other side], like she would just give her children a beating one time. Up to now I was telling her that, I was telling her, I can remember when she would just beat us for anybody, anybody that come and say we do something wrong tell her, you know. Like she would not really give us right.

Robbyn: She would not question you?

Magdalene: No, like she just take what the person say and she would just give us wrong, you know.

While Magdalene deems it was unfair of her mother to discipline her without question when another person would tell her she had done wrong, what she describes in this segment concurs with the descriptions given by Althea and Eleanor, as normal practice of parents, when they were growing up, and that fit within the system of relations and values I have described as an economy of respect. While the cultural practice that this represents resonates with the past, Magdalene's interpretation of it does not, and reflects another system of values, one that questions the kind of treatment she had. This resonates with the transformations highlighted in the previous chapter.

Magdalene, like Molly, went to vocational high school in Roseau, in spite of the disrupted childhood she described to me. However, even though she was excelling, she was obliged to leave the school because of family problems.

Janelle

The youngest informant, Janelle, was nineteen at the time of our interview. She grew up with her mother in Plaisance. Her father had lived with her mother, but left when she was a young child. Her childhood was filled with friends and amusements, and she reluctantly attended school. In spite of her dislike of things academic, she excelled in school, and when she wrote the Common Entrance

Exam for high school, was awarded a bursary, which would pay for her books and bus fare to commute to and from Roseau every day. Janelle, like Magdalene, does not identify herself with work and responsibilities, but unlike Magdalene, frames her self-account through her social life, in keeping with Molly and to a certain extent Nicole, for whom being able to have friends was important. Her world appears to be one in which school filled an important place, more than for other women interviewed, with the exception of Sophia, but not necessarily for the academic aspect – she speaks more about her school friends than about school work.

Janelle: I had a lot of friends growing up, a little tomboy clique, and...

Robbyn: Tomboy?

Janelle: Yes, I was a tomboy. I used to climb all over, go all over in the bush and cook *drawts*,¹² stuff like that, cook food. Take little sausage cans, and cook *fig*, like banana, and steal codfish from our parents, and cook, like you know friends, cooking *drawts*, that's what they used to call it, *drawt*. Um, what else, basically, I know everybody in my community, everybody know each other. La Plaine is a very close-knit community, and Plaisance is too, kind of by themselves.

Janelle identifies herself in this passage as a tomboy, climbing about and roaming around freely. Her experience was not one of being kept close to home, as was Nicole, and in her freedom resembles that of Molly, but while Molly seems to have had quite a lot of freedom and time to spend with friends, it was passed in carrying out her duties to the household, rather than simply playing. Janelle's experience, or at least the manner in which she chooses to represent it, places her outside the gender role that most of the other women occupied without question, and also, from her lack of concern with responsibility, outside the economy of respect within which responsibility is important in defining one's position.

Janelle: Well I went to La Plaine, we used to call it La Plaine Government School, but now it's called Jones-Beaupierre. And I took seven years of

¹² 'Drawts' is a word that has come into use recently in Dominica, and I was told it is a Rasta word that means to cook food, usually outside. In Trinidad, both 'drawt' and an equivalent, 'jort' are used to refer to any kind of food (Winer 2003, personal communication).

primary school. I went to pre-school first. From three years, and I went to primary school at four or five, I can't remember. Okay, what I remember about my years in pre-school is like, I used to reach half way, eat my recess, come back home, because I did not like school. Most of my friends didn't really like school, we used to like more like play and all that stuff. We just didn't like school. I hated primary school. They chunked us in primary school. That's how I felt at the time. I didn't want to go to school. But I went to primary school, we went from grade one to grade seven.

Robbyn: But did you do well?

Janelle: I got a bursary, that's like you could get a pass, a bursary or a scholarship.

Although she did well in school, winning a bursary and going on to college after graduating from secondary school, she emphasizes her dislike of school, which, she says, began as early as pre-school. Her account of going to school in the capital emphasizes a concern with learning the social ropes and making friends rather than learning her school subjects.

Janelle: After leaving grade seven I went to secondary school, Convent High School in Roseau. Hmm, drastic change. From La Plaine to Roseau, dealing with Roseau, with students, or children, schoolmates from different schools, from different parts of Dominica, that was kind of difficult at first.

Robbyn: Why?

Janelle: They have so many different ways of acting or, you know, you are unfamiliar with them, and you're not, most of the things they say and do, most of the games they play, you are, I was not accustomed to it, because like some of my school friends used to play some games I had no idea what they were doing because they went to schools in town, and I went to school in country.

Robbyn: They were children from different parts of the country?

Janelle: Okay, some were from Morne Jaune, or some were from Grand Bay, or different parts all over the country, like the country areas, most of them were from, came from the schools that were in town, like St. Martin school, primary school, Convent Prep, that was a girls' school, and I mean basically they were from around town and they knew what they were doing, they knew what games the town children played. You know, so we

felt a little left out. But that didn't take me long to put myself in anyways and when I learned their games I learned how they operated basically, who were nice, who I deal with, who I couldn't deal with. And made some nice friends. And well I have some nice friends from high school.

Janelle completed secondary school and went on to Clifton Dupigny College, a preparatory institution for those who wish to continue in post-secondary studies in either a vocational or pre-university stream: Janelle followed the pre-university stream for one year, and then stopped to take on a job, saying she did not find college challenging enough. She has ambitions to one day go to university, but for the time is content to work for an offshore organization.

Janelle's narrative presents a break with the themes and moral discourses of the other women. While her concern with having fun corresponds to themes in Nicole's and Molly's narratives, as well as in Beatrice's frustration at doing so much work and having no play, the idea that she chose her social life as the most important aspect of her experience through which to frame herself, distinguishes her narrative from the others. In Janelle's narrative, her relation to friends takes primacy also over her relation to family. Learning how to 'deal' with peers and to position herself in their midst, to her, seemed more important than positioning herself within the structure of familial roles and responsibilities within which the other women framed their accounts of themselves. In fact, she does not speak at all about any tasks she had to do, in this narrative. In one of our other conversations, however, she admitted to me she that she detested doing laundry and did not want to have anything to do with gardening or farming.

Discussion

The childhood narratives of most of these women present a fundamental moral theme: all but Magdalene and Janelle frame their narrated selves by duties and responsibilities, which serve to define themselves both within the structures of social relations (economy of respect) and within gender roles, duties, and expectations. Magdalene's narrative did not use duties and responsibilities as a frame, but questioned the structures of authority that complement responsibilities

within the economy of respect, as though she interpreted them through a wholly different lens – one influenced by a new morality of abuse that recognized the treatment she received as unacceptable or abnormal. Janelle's narrative did not consider duties – rather she focussed on amusements. All of these women described themselves within a structure of relations that involved first and foremost the family, with friends as either absent from the account or secondary to it, with the exception of Janelle, for whom relations with friends were her preoccupation and who made little mention of family. The important frames of reference for most women were their immediate family, and the relations they described with them indicated cultural expectations of respect and authority, responsibility, and gendered tasks such as caring for others, carrying out domestic duties, working in the garden. The way in which the relations within this paradigm were expressed by each woman differed to some extent, revealing the manner in which she engaged with it: accepting, manipulative, or frustrated.

In the younger women's accounts, these frames of reference are differently interpreted, or not used at all, leading me to surmise that that transformations discussed in previous chapters have indeed influenced the subjectivity of individuals, made evident through the kinds of frameworks they engage in their self-accounts. Neither Magdalene nor Janelle made any reference to duty, with the exception of Janelle's disdain for school. Magdalene interpreted the authority of her elders as mistreatment, and found her mother unfair because she listened to what other adults had to say about her behaviour and not to her; later in her narrative she discusses her own treatment of her children within the framework of abuse, remarking that she treats her children sometimes in the same way she herself was treated, and saying that she had heard on television that people are more likely to abuse their children if that is the way their parents treated them. She obviously was influenced by discourse on parent-child relations that emanated from outside the village.

The other discursive framework that I have elaborated is that of respectability and egalitarianism, and the shift from an ethic of egalitarianism on

one of 'improving' as the basis for respectability. Three of the accounts utilized this perspective as a frame for self-experience: of these, Nicole's account engages it most centrally, as the pivotal point in her narrative. Eleanor also describes her experience of her illness in terms of these social relations – her injury and deformity are the result of social forces working against inequality that her physical appearance and history represented. This discursive frame will be taken up again in Chapter 6, in an examination of women's narratives of their relationships in adult years.

5.4 Shifting Spaces of Gender and Class

Through the way in which they describe themselves as girls growing up, these women have not only engaged particular discursive frameworks in their self-descriptions, but have positioned themselves with respect to them. These frames create a discursive 'space' that, in some ways, can be transposed analogically, to a more literal and geographical implication through the way in which the women are entreated to move and position themselves by the expectations the discourses present. If this is so, a change in the framing of narrative accounts would indicate a shift in how space is configured: as well, a redefinition of space presupposes a shift in subjectivity, a subjectivity that is cast by the political technologies developed through (or in spite of) changing forms of governance.

In this perspective, space is thus reconfigured through the transformations in 'political technologies' that affected the island, reorganizing positions and activities: a shift in governance that promoted peasant economic interests through land reforms, the endorsement of small holder farming, the creation of transportation infrastructures, political democracy, and social engineering, also blurred and upset the boundaries between peasant and plantation, dark and fair, rural and urban, self and society, shifting and creating new subjectivities as well as forging new frameworks for self-creation. Massey contends that a shift in economy creates a "spatial reorganization" and a "new spatial division of labour"

(Massey 1994: 91). While in the case at hand, any shift in economy must be seen in relation to a shift in governance, it can be understood to create both class and gender shifts. In Dominica, this is seen in the increase in availability and accessibility of secondary school education from 3% of the population in the 1940s and 50s, to approximately 45% in the 1980s overriding economic and race barriers, although it is still far from universal; the increase in jobs in the white collar, office and clerical sectors that employ mainly women and require secondary education; a decrease in the viability of agriculture as an export industry and the desire to carry it out; a shift in gendered attitudes towards education that privilege girls in the classroom.

Gendered tasks and roles of young people within the family economy have undergone shifts, due largely to decreased dependence on subsistence agriculture, education and other government interventions described in Chapter 4. In the past, prior to the 1960s, during the childhoods of Sophia, Helena, and Eleanor, and partially, Beatrice, when there was no electricity or running water, no refrigerators (or very few – one woman told me she had a kerosene refrigerator), and no television, children were very much engaged in helping the household to run smoothly. The main task of young school children was to carry water from the river. They also had to fetch wood and do dishes. A girl would be brought to the river with her mother on Saturdays to help with the wash. She would learn to sweep and scrub the house and the step, iron, if they had one (some people would place the clothes under the mattress at night to flatten them). As the girl grew older, she would learn to cook, and to care for younger siblings.

A young boy would also carry water and help out with dishes and sweeping, mostly the yard. However, as he grew older, local men told me, a boy's activities would shift to those involved in getting food – setting traps for birds, catching river fish and crayfish, land crabs and turtles. Young boys would go with older boys and men to cut wood, make charcoal, grind the manioc to make *fawin*, and other tasks related to providing sustenance. Sometimes, when the sea was calm, they would go to fish, using a line and keeping themselves afloat on a log.

Most children, both girls and boys would go to the garden with their parents, and learn to garden on their own. But here again a gendered division of labour was implemented: girls were more involved in weeding and harvesting, while boys and men were responsible for clearing and planting. Both would harvest and carry the food out to the road.

Teenage boys could be apprenticed to craftsmen such as ‘joiners’ (local term for furniture maker) so that they could learn a trade. Most did not go on to high school. Girls of the poorer stratum like Helena might have been sent as teens to work for other people as domestics. High school was out of the question for most, mainly because there were few places, and schools were in Roseau, so access was difficult due to lack of motorable roads, which meant that children from outlying areas would have to be boarded in town. Because only those who passed the entrance exams and could afford it went, this system privileged those who were better off economically or who already lived near a school, not the case for the majority of La Plaine people in the pre-1960s period. School acted as a space to reproduce the existing and quasi-endogamous elite that mainly resided in the capital, as well as village social hierarchies, discussed in Chapter 4.

Although today, spaces and activities retain a gendered quality, life for young people has become facilitated and the ‘spaces’ they occupy in relation to each other and within the reproduction of society differ from how they were previously, so that gender distinctions and race/class divisions have undergone alteration.

In a contemporary perspective, Chevanne’s study (2001) found that among young children in a locality outside Roseau, both boys and girls carry out domestic chores, but boys are more likely to be asked to do work outside the house, such as sweeping the yard and taking out garbage, while the girls are more involved in cleaning the inside of the house, and preparing food. Older boys and teens become less involved in carrying out domestic tasks, and spend much of their time involved in leisure activities outside the household, with other boys their age. Girls, Chevannes found, are kept closer to home, and are not generally

allowed to go out late at night, attending festivities, without an adult accompanying them.

While Chevannes' study was carried out in a more urban setting, in La Plaine, a rural, agricultural community, much the same gender division of children's and teen's tasks prevails, with some differences. Most children now have fewer and less arduous chores at home than during the childhoods of the older women in my study, and attend school more often and for longer periods. With running water in many homes, water does not have to be fetched, making laundry a much easier task, and many now have automatic or semi-automatic washing machines. Much of the food consumed these days is store-bought (rice, dried beans, bread, canned milk, etc.), and cooked on propane stoves, so wood does not have to be cut or gathered, and people are less reliant on garden produce and the labour to produce it.

Young girls are now seldom trained to work in the garden. Their chores are mainly domestic. Boys, who as teens are freed from many of the domestic chores they carried out as smaller children, no longer go into the bush to hunt or to cut wood. Many still follow their fathers or other relatives to the garden, helping out especially during the harvest, but many do not. They thus are much less active. The young teenage boys are often seen after school and in the evening standing on the road, and villagers complain that they spend too much time doing nothing, that they are lazy and do not want to work, and that young people in general no longer have respect for their elders. In fact, because they are no longer enjoined to participate in the household economy with the same level of implication as previous generations, the relations of responsibility and respect that served to maintain structure within the household and community no longer prevail. While boys have always had more freedom than girls to move about and do what they want, previously, rural adolescent boys would spend their 'free' time in activities such as hunting or fishing with other boys, activities that could contribute to the household economy.

Girls, generally from a young age are more carefully watched. Teenage girls, if they go out to attend leisure activities such as Sunday afternoon sports events or to bathe in the sea, usually do so in groups that may include older siblings. Spaces are gendered in the activities that are carried out within them and the way in which the space is 'controlled' – that is to say, the relative position of men, women, boys, and girls within it. While girls and women usually circulate outside the home with a purpose, going to the shop, to church, to school (although young people like to stop and play on their way, and both would play games outside together in the past, such as hide and seek in the moonlight), boys stay on the road to play, and teenage boys will just stand on the street corner in a group, something girls do not do unless attending a particular event. Girls are more often engaged in carrying out household duties within the home, and circulating in a restricted manner outside the home, whereas boys have less responsibility in the home and are free to circulate as they wish in the street.

More access to cash, the fact that much of people's diet is based on food purchased in local supermarkets, and that they rely much less on food that they grow or catch themselves, puts less pressure on young people to participate in agriculture, which is seen as a lowly and undesirable occupation, especially for girls, even though most farmers now are also land-owners. However, the decline in agricultural work is much more marked among young women than young men. In 1991, 13.3 % of males in the age group 15-19 years were gainfully employed in agriculture, fishing, or forestry; in age group 20-24, a higher percentage, 23.0% were so employed. Older men, in the 50-54 year age group, were employed in this field at a rate of 43.8 %. Only .5% of females 15-19 and 2.12 % of women in the 20-24 year age group were so employed, compared to 10.6% of women 50-54 years of age. These statistics are at the national level; for La Plaine, the numbers of both men and women involved in agriculture may be higher because of its rural location and the importance of agriculture to the local economy (Dominica, Statistical Division 1991).

Most La Plaine residents now have access to television where they see a material and practical lifestyle that does not correspond to the world of sweat, dirt, and hard work of many of their parents and especially their grandparents. They find themselves in a position where they feel they do not want to belong to their parents' world based largely on hard physical work and agriculture but cannot easily access the world they see on television. They are caught in the interstice of a world they feel is past, but that is still a part of the present and, and a world that is always slightly out of reach.

Recent profound transformations in Dominican society have entailed drastic effects on the gendered and classed landscape. Among these transformations are: a shifting economy which notably has produced a decrease in subsistence activity and involvement of children in the home economy; an increase in accessibility to education; the limited development in certain sectors of the economy that typically employ men; an increase in offshore businesses that typically employ women (especially banks and internet gambling).

Although the number of boys and girls attending secondary school in Dominica has increased tenfold over the last forty years, the majority of children still do not graduate from Secondary School and do not have access to good jobs. Schools serve as the space for the production (or reproduction) of labour, but in doing so also assist in the production and reinforcement of gendered space outside the school (Leo-Rhynie and Pencle 2002; Bailey 2002). As well as producing the gendered relations of labour, they are incipiently producing an overlapping of class with gender. The gendered space of the classroom is helping to create an increase in the number of women gainfully employed, and the development of an urbanized, middle class of rural dwellers who commute daily to their jobs in town.

However, while girls in general enter high school at higher rates than boys, and obtain more education, not all finish. This is evidenced in the narratives of young women in the previous section: of three women who attended high school, only one obtained her diploma. The other two left for circumstances

related to family situations, indicating the continuing importance of family considerations, although only Molly left to take part in the actual maintenance of the household.

Boys' apparent lack of success in school may stem from several directions: boys spend more time unsupervised, outside the home in leisure activities, and spend less time doing homework and housework than girls. Girls, kept in and supervised, have more encouragement to study. According to researchers, boys may be less interested in books because their male role models are involved in vocations that involve more physical labour, such as agriculture, construction, technical work – by far the majority of teachers are female (80% at the primary level and 70% in secondary school), so the classroom, like the home, becomes very much the space, not so much of women, but in which girls/women are regulated and shaped through the feminization of activities carried out there. Reading, an activity associated with girls, can be devalued by boys (Goldberg and Bruno 1999: 26-31), just as most come to resist housework as a female task. The gendered domestic space of housework thus includes homework as well. The analogy of school and schoolwork to the home may recreate similar gendered attitudes and relations: just as boys are not responsible for the work in the home, they do not take responsibility for school work. Women are responsible for running the household (even if there is a male head) and delegating chores to children. Not only is housework generally seen as women's work (although some men enjoy it), being told what to do by a woman is unacceptable to most men; teenage boys are learning to withdraw from the jurisdiction of women, at home as well as in the classroom.

Prior to the opening of more schools and easier access to them both financially and physically, the space of school perpetuated the extreme socio-economic distinctions that had grown out of the plantation economy: school was instrumental in the reproduction of a minute privileged elite, and the quasi-autonomous un-schooled peasantry, who did not need it anyway to succeed in their endeavours. It also favoured boys over girls, as girls were more often kept

out of school for household chores, although boys were also highly involved in economic tasks.

The relations created and played out in school have shifted – school has retained its role in the maintenance and production of socio-economic distinctions but has been key to their transformation (the creation of a middle class). The gendered relations of home and their replication in school has been reflected in the gendered nature of the workforce, and the increasing number of women who are filling the ranks of white-collar jobs at higher rates than men, who have tended to remain in skilled labour and agricultural roles (see Table 2 above). However, the relatively small success rate of both girls and boys, while it has perpetuated the existence of a lower socio-economic stratum, which is become increasingly under-employed.

The shift in gendered activities is accompanied by a shift in spatial organization as it relates to gender, class, and racial distinctions. According to McDowell (1996: 29), “all social relationships occur somewhere and result in connections between people and places.” Because education is becoming the primary vehicle of learning to be a productive person and the ‘production’ involves the reproduction of society as a state, over that of the family and the community, the shift in activities and spatial organization has taken place largely through a shift from farm to school. Narratives examined in this chapter demonstrated that self-accounts by older women were usually built upon their particular involvement in the household economy and the responsibilities they had to take on, with very little mention of school. The young women, while all did not define themselves through school as such, did not engage the same framework for their self-descriptions as did the older women. They did not define themselves through their responsibilities, but chose to either refute the ways of their parents, or to utilize another paradigm altogether for their self-narrative.

CHAPTER 6

SEXUALITY: BODY, LANGUAGE, HISTORY

To my teachers I seemed quiet and studious; I was modest, which is to say, I did not seem to them to have any interest in the world of my body or anyone else's body. This wearying demand was only one of many demands made on me simply because I was female (Kincaid 1996: 42).

This study has been organized to reflect the chronology of the life course. In keeping with that strategy, as a bridge between childhood and adulthood, I begin this chapter with a discussion of the developing sexuality of young girls through an examination of discourse concerning girls' sexuality and one woman's narrative of her experience as a teen. The chapter continues with a section on gender/sex identity, in an exploration of categories and how they emerge, highlighting the ways in which sexualities and gender roles are construed through the naming of deviance. It finishes with a discussion of the historical development of the 'regime' of sexuality in Dominica, traced back to relations of slavery and the development of kin structures that exist today. A concept that develops out of the discussion in this chapter is the notion of '*ambivalent patriarchy*' already nascent in the previous chapter. This ambivalence emerges from the historical underpinnings of kinship and gender relations and ideologies, as they were created in plantation society and slavery and subsequent colonial and postcolonial periods.

6.1 "*Going into life...*"

The normalizing discourse of sexuality pervades everyday action and interaction in words, images, and deeds, and acts upon individuals who do not have physical anomalies as well as upon those who do, and who, in adolescence, are moving from childhood to adulthood. While for a young man, coming into adult masculinity and sexualization is largely enacted through, first, a resistance to authority, especially the authority of women (mothers, sisters, teachers) and a demonstration of virility through verbal play, boasting, having sexual intercourse

and eventually producing children, for a young woman, it is much different. Kept closer to home and more restrained in her movements, as discussed in the previous chapter, the young woman is usually enjoined to be modest and to refrain from sexual encounters, even though the young men are encouraged to seek them. These ethical enactments are played out through the gendered spatial delineations discussed in the previous chapter, and the actions authorized within them. Within this perspective, the focus is no longer on the performance and positions within the space, but of the effects of the space on the body.

A young woman's experience of becoming a woman, or 'going into life', may be fraught with tensions and contradictions, as she learns to both control and express her sexuality. At the same time she is enticed, solicited, and made aware of her body by the looks and words of men. The quote at the beginning of this section from Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* expresses a paradox of becoming a woman experienced by young girls, who must take responsibility, through their modesty, of controlling the sexuality of men for whom the regime of sexuality allows full (heterosexual) expression, and of the consequences, children. While for women in the Caribbean, becoming a mother has been considered, in the past and still now to a certain extent, the first step towards womanhood, and most first children are born out of wedlock and accepted into the maternal home, pressure is still exerted upon them to remain chaste and they are often admonished and sometimes expelled from the household for becoming pregnant, even though the child is usually eventually accepted.

The graduation skit prepared by the women in the parenting course, described in detail in Chapter 4, has relevance here in relation to the themes of coming of age of teenage daughters, the body, and gender relations. To briefly reiterate the relevant section of the skit, the Daughter is spotted by the Father, walking arm in arm with a young man. He becomes angry and upset, and when the Daughter finally arrives home, he begins to shout at her and to beat her. The Mother intervenes, is beaten in her turn, and finally manages to calm the man and to convince him there is another way to handle the situation, and that he should

come with her to learn about parenting at the parenting course. He comes along, resists the teachings, but finally succumbs to the ideas put forth in the course. The main idea put forth by the Teacher is that parents should communicate with their children rather than simply punish them without question.

The Daughter in the skit is a young high school student, and the Father is with difficulty putting her through school. By going with a young man, she could be jeopardizing his investment in her future, if she were to become pregnant. The Daughter is enjoined to be obedient, respecting the authority of her father, without question, within the moral framework of the economy of respect. In this perspective, she does not need to know why she must stay away from young men, because she must obey her Father in all circumstances, without question. In her closing speech, Gertrude Roberts, Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, who was a guest at the ceremony, lauded the women's performance because it showed they disagreed with this approach. In the context of teen years, she remarked:

The child reaches the age of puberty, it is your duty to put the child to sit down and tell the child about his or her life, tell the child about her body, telling your young daughter about menstruation, her periods will come at a certain time, or whenever her periods come talking to her does not make her be wicked, it does not lead her to the bad way, but it opens her mind, and believe me when you train your child that way, whether she talks to a young man, mark you, she must have dates, she must fall in love, but when you talk to her, she will know when to say yes, when to say no.

Discussion of sexuality with one's children in the past, but still today, was unusual and seen as leading to the sexual act, as can be gathered from this comment. Girls were cautioned to be modest, and, as the example of the skit portrays, and were not told about their imminent menstruations before they occurred for the first time. Sexuality was not a topic of discussion between adults and children, especially girls. Instead, they usually learned about it from older siblings and friends and through early experimentation. Roberts suggested in this excerpt of her speech that girls be made aware of their bodily functions and the transformations their adolescent bodies go through, by opening up dialogue

between parents and children. She proposes this will enable young women to make the right choices.

This coming into awareness of her body by the adolescent shifts, to some extent, the authority over her body from the parent to herself, while it also places more of the responsibility for her chastity – that is, not becoming pregnant – on her as well. Reallocation of authority over her body invests the young woman with choice, yet the onus is nevertheless on the girl to control and regulate sexual encounters. I heard no discussion, at the parenting course or elsewhere, about the sexual education of young males (other than with respect to sexually transmitted diseases). Women are enjoined to both restrain themselves, and to submit to men, while men have little restriction on their heterosexual activities.

The title of this section, “Going into life...” is an expression used to denote young people, especially girls, becoming sexually active. The postponement of “going into life,” through the restraint of girls’ sexuality is not intended to save them for marriage (although that may be the ultimate goal of some), as motherhood, rather than marriage, signals adulthood for women. Girls’ chastity is preserved to allow them to ensure their financial security, either by finding a suitable mate who would be supportive of any children, especially true up to about twenty years ago. More recently, chastity is preferred so the girls will finish school and find a job before beginning their adult life of childbearing and rearing. The suppression of a girl’s sexual feelings is temporary, during adolescence: she is expected to engage in, and enjoy, sexual encounters in adulthood. Formerly, women were enjoined to simply find someone who would support their children, and more recently, the onus is on the girl to finish her schooling before she becomes a mother. A young woman has more chance of making a good living if she has her high school diploma, and if she has children, of supporting them alone if she does not find a suitable partner. From this perspective, it becomes evident that a girl’s sexuality is moulded within the framework of an economy that encourages both its suppression and its expression.

As mentioned above, adulthood for girls was in the past, and is still today, signalled by motherhood. At the same time, avoidance of sexual relations in order to finish school has recently become more crucial, since an increasing number of girls make it to high school and are expected to succeed and find a good job: until recently, few girls or boys attended school past the age of fifteen. The obtaining of a job is seen as an alternative to motherhood in the achievement of adulthood, and having children, then, as counter to obtaining the job. Schoolgirls who become pregnant must leave school, and it is the general understanding that they will not return to finish, even though there are some adult education programmes in place run through the Welfare Department,¹³ as their first responsibility is to their child. Boys, on the other hand, are not admonished for their sexual activity, but praised by peers, and young men are encouraged to boast about their conquests (real or imagined), even though recent changes to the laws pertaining to sexual offences increase the sanctions for sex with minors, and at least one judge has not hesitated to impose them. Nevertheless, this has not served as much of a deterrent for teenage pregnancies, since 20 percent of children are born to teens aged fifteen to nineteen. Abortion is both against the law and generally considered morally incorrect, as bordering on murder, although it is practised clandestinely by both medical doctors and through the administration of local herbal medicines. (Two recent cases in the village were brought to my attention, one of which involved a young teenaged girl.) And while contraception is now widely available, both promoted by the Dominica Planned Parenthood Association that also runs sex education programmes in some schools, as does the Social Centre (Social Centre 1998), and distributed free through the health clinics, girls under sixteen cannot access it without parental accord, and given the prevailing attitude towards even talking about sex with children, let alone sanctioning it through the use of contraceptives, use for young girls is not common. Another factor adds to the tension fostered by the contradiction between expressing and suppressing sex

¹³ An adult high school completion course was given in La Plaine when I was there: out of three enrolled students, only one graduated.

in young girls: the commonly accepted practice of a man ‘helping’ the woman with whom he is having sexual relations, sustained by the ideal (myth) of the ‘male breadwinner’ which, combined with the lack of cash resources of many women, makes this type of relationship inviting. Some girls are enticed into relations with older men because they can offer them material benefits their mother or father cannot, and with the expectation that the man will provide for them if they have a child. This positions the woman at the crux of ambivalence with respect to her own body and within a configuration of patriarchy that is, at the most, partial.

Ambivalent Bodies

...the sexualization of the female body is fundamental to the way in which women are socialized as individuals. The libidinal body is used to install a theory of desire and ambivalence into an understanding of how identity is constructed. The internalization of representations of the female body by women is fundamental to the formation of feminine identity but this process must not be understood as being straightforward and unproblematic (McNay 1993: 24).

The young girl becoming a woman experiences transformations of her body that create not only physical changes but a shift in her subjectivity, as social position determined through both age and gender (as well as class and race), her social function, and in the way her body is perceived both by others and by herself. While all through childhood, a girl’s identity is forged in relation to her bodily morphology, when she reaches puberty and beyond, her bodily transformations take on libidinal signification, and a re-identification, with images of a sexualized feminine body. The notion of a body image or an imaginary body has been explored in psychoanalysis, notably by Lacan (1982) as the ‘imaginary anatomy’. Grosz (1994: 39) interprets Lacan’s notion of the imaginary anatomy to mean “an internalized image or map of the meaning that the body has for the subject, for others in its social world, and for the symbolic order conceived in its generality (that is, for a culture as a whole). It is an individual and collective fantasy of the body’s forms and modes of action.” This is related to Lacan’s

notion of the ego, which derives from the initial ‘mirror stage’ where the child, seeing herself in the mirror, comes to both identify with and desire the image she beholds: this identificatory image is extended to include the images of others, through which one can imagine the self.

The imaginary anatomy or the body image stands at the intersection of a mind/body dichotomy that underlies a distinction between gender and sex, as the psychosocial and the biological respectively. In this way, it emphasizes the importance of the body to identity without essentializing it. Following Gatens (1996: 12-13), the ‘imaginary body’ is a historically and culturally produced signification of masculinity and femininity, as “biologies as lived in culture”: there is a “contingent, though not arbitrary, relation between the male body and masculinity and the female body and femininity,” which is neither essentialist, nor constructionist, but sees the body as already signified, readable, and meaningful.

The body image, then, is the internalized reflection of one’s own body, mediated and conditioned by historically and culturally contextualized notions of appropriate and inappropriate forms and functions. The sexualization of the body, through the adoption of a historically, socially, and culturally conditioned image of the body as representation of one’s own body occurs, through the projection onto the self of that image, as one’s own reflection.

Morphological transformations that are experienced at puberty thus initiate a re-identification that can be confusing and traumatic, especially if there is more than one image projected. In the case of young girls in Dominica, the ambivalence of teen sexual identity can incur great discomfort. One woman spoke to me about how she experienced her newly transformed and sexualized body as a teenager. The conversation began when I asked if she had a boyfriend as a teen. She responded:

No, I was very skinny when I was a child I was very skinny, skinny. I would never think of having a boyfriend. No man, I was very skinny and I don’t think I would be attractive in people eyes. I was not attractive in people eyes. I made breasts when I was about fourteen years, you know. That’s when I made breasts you know. I didn’t make breasts early. I make

breasts very late. If you don't have breasts, you feel – you cannot think of having a boyfriend, or wanting, having a man, you know.

For Frances, her young adolescent body was far from meeting the criteria she perceived as necessary for a sexualized body. She was “skinny,” and that made her undesirable, in her estimation, based on an imagined desirable body: with this body as her mirror, as the image through which to measure her own body, she envisioned its antithesis. A skinny body, in Dominica, is not reflective of health and beauty: in fact, telling someone they are ‘fat and nice’ is a compliment. While certain morphological changes happened late for Frances, her early puberty showed other physical transformations, especially the excessive growth of hair under her arms and elsewhere on her body. I was told by men that body hair is considered ‘sexy’ in Dominica. Women’s body hair that can be seen is a sign for hair in places that cannot be seen, for which it stands in metonymic relation, and by extension (also metonymically), for female sexual organs. Therefore women’s hair-covered legs, underarms, stomach and even face take on erotogenic signification. Frances’ experience of her transforming body and budding sexuality was shaped by these cultural understandings. She recounted, at another occasion, that when she was in school, she sat at the back of the class between two boys. She was thin and the sleeves of her uniform blouse large. She noticed that the boys would look at her armpits and whisper to one another. She felt so uncomfortable that she asked the teacher to move her. The watchful gaze of the boys reflected back to her a sexualized body image that she did not want to assume.

I was the most skinny girl in my class. I used to meet the uniform made already. My mother used to buy a size ten or a size twelve, it would fit me in the length but the body and the arms... you could see everything under my arms! Since I learned to sew with my hand I would stitch it.... It would fit me in the height and everything but not the body...I would not put a short pants on me, I would feel uncomfortable, I would not put a short pants or a short skirt. I wouldn't wear it. I would not wear it at all, at all, at all.

Frances was reluctant to show her body at all, not only when she felt she did not fulfill the criteria for a sexual body, but even afterwards. She was not at ease, at first, because her imaginary body did not reflect the image that was proposed to her; then, she could not accept her sexualized body image when her physiognomy finally changed, hiding it from view to avoid the reflective gaze of others, and the inevitable image of a fully sexed woman. She was caught within the ambivalence that characterizes teen years, described above. As a schoolgirl, she was enjoined to be modest and chaste, something that was easy at first, as she reached puberty late. But when she began to change, the reflection of her sexualized body placed her in an ambivalent situation: she had to continue to be modest, yet gazes solicited her sexuality. She chose to hide.

When I started to grow breasts now, I would not wear blouses that would put my bra strap outside. I would use blouses that you would not see my bra, my breasts. I would not want my breasts to show. The bra, even the mark of the bra. I would put a vest. After I put the blouse I would put a vest so you would not see the mark of the bra. That would not come in my mind for man to see, because it would be hard for me to open my body and so I would kind of hide, hide, I used to hide, hide my body. Hide it. I would go to the river and bathe when I started to grow breasts, and I would bathe with all my clothes. When I was younger, everybody naked, but as soon as I had breasts, I would wait till everybody gone and then I would bathe, because I would not want anyone to see my body, my whole body in particular. I didn't want somebody to see. I didn't want somebody to see me at all, at all, at all. To me I find that I was odd. I was skinny, I was odd. To me I was skinny, I feel like I was odd among people. That is how I used to feel.

Frances' experience was one of uneasiness with her body's transformations. She felt both un-sexual because her body did not conform to what she thought others would find attractive in a sexual way, and uncomfortable with the attributes she had, ashamed even, of the hair that attracted the eyes of the boys. Either way, she felt her body scrutinized, and controlled by the gaze of others, which reflected her own cultural understandings of the sexualized female body. Frances' experience reflects the ambivalence of the discourses that profess modesty within the context of dominant ideals of the nuclear family (etc.) and the

expression of sexuality that is called for in order to become a mother, a woman, and that operates through male virility.

The body image is produced through experiences that are mediated by, to re-engage with Foucault, political technologies that constrain positions, movements, and render good or bad certain body shapes, colours, and sizes, and that inform what it is to be sexualized as a female or male subject, how one is to interpret particular bodily attributes if one is male or female. These discursively modeled images are transmitted, as a critical mirror, through the eyes of others. In the case of Frances, who, like others her age, underwent a transformation of the body, her imaginary body was constrained and formulated through the perceptions of others – not being attractive sexually because she did not have breasts, and being sexually attractive to the boys because of the presence of body hair – as well as the onus to be modest and not reveal her sexuality, to the point of being ashamed of it. As a teen, she came to dislike her own body, paradoxically both because it did not meet the requirements of a proper sexualized woman's body, and because it did.

While this case is certainly not representative of the experience of all women, through her account of her feelings towards her body, Frances reveals some local understandings of femininity and sexualization. Her experience confirms and embodies the ambivalence discussed in the first portion of this section, an ambivalence that has two interconnected and interdependent facets: the sexualization of young women that provides a double message with regards to chastity and the entry into womanhood as mothers, and the expected support from the fathers of their children (to be discussed in the next chapter).

6.2 Crossing Categories of Sex and Gender

Terms used to designate sexual and gender-related behaviours serve both to label deviance and to mark it against the expected norm, defining at the same time the limits and character of that norm, as contained between the categories of

deviance. These terms also encapsulate and limit types of deviance that can be recognized.

Creating Categories

When Nicole was aged from thirteen to fifteen years, she attended vocational high school in Roseau while staying with an uncle who ran a pharmacy out of the first floor of his house. Another student, a boy two or three years her senior from the same village and who was related affinally through her uncle, was living in the house already and helping out in the house and shop. Nicole and he became good friends, and would do their homework together, as well as work together to do chores in the house. The boy would carry out many of the household chores usually done by women, to the extent that he was teased about it by others. The following narrative excerpt recounts Nicole's impressions:¹⁴

I used to have a friend. He had woman ways. He would do woman work, cook, wash, iron, you know those kind of things, ...even his sisters, fix their hair, you know those kind of thing, until they even used to call him *makoumè*,¹⁵ but he wasn't a *makoumè*. I tell you he was not a *makoumè* because he was very active. He just had woman ways and was fat, round, had a big bottom, you see, so at that time people used to assume... I can remember while I was there a guy came there, somebody accustomed of coming there came there, they saw me there, and like I'm new to them, ... tell him that they bring a girlfriend for you. You know, they bring a girlfriend for you, so they make a big joke with that.

All dinner, it was he who do it, not me. He would make dinner, everything. I met him doing those things, I met him doing it. He lived there two, three years before me. So he was so accustomed to do it. My aunt would tell, what you making for dinner tonight. He knows what she, what it is she is supposed to get for the meal, she was a diabetic. So he know what he supposed to make for her for dinner. So he would make the dinner, give me a tray to take up.

¹⁴ This narrative was recounted to me in response to my asking if the narrator had a boyfriend when she was a teen. She told me about a close friendship she had with a boy who was not her boyfriend. I have excluded most of the portions that deal specifically with that aspect.

¹⁵ The orthography for the Patwa terms used in this thesis is based on Fontaine and Roberts, 1991. Maurer (1991) spells it *makumé*. The term, which means effeminate or homosexual male, will be discussed below. It should also be noted that all the Patwa terms used here are used by speakers when speaking English, as well as Patwa.

He was a big boy. Everything, Robbyn, he could do everything, until sometimes, sometimes I would put food on the fire in the afternoon, I would put my laundry to soak to wash, because I had a lot of tasks to do inside the house, clean up, shine the house, you know, so I would wash my clothes in the afternoon. Saturday was ironing time, ironing time. He would iron. He more abreast than me, more accustomed than me, so he would be started to iron before me. And he would iron my shirts. I would meet the shirts iron already. I would not meet the skirts but I would meet the shirts iron already.

Nicole's narrative reveals both the association of certain tasks with women, and the attitude towards men who do not conform to society's expectations of their behaviour by carrying out those tasks. Fixing hair, cooking, washing, and ironing are the activities carried out by Nicole's friend which are considered women's occupations. While most boys learn to cook and wash, and will do so in certain circumstances, especially outdoors with other men and if they do not have a woman to do it, without eliciting judgement, this behaviour is not seen as normal for an older adolescent or adult male. For this young man, taking on these occupations, along with physical attributes usually associated with femininity – "a big round bottom" – procured him the qualification of one who has 'women's ways' and in local Patwa terminology, as a '*makoumè*'.

Dominicans have a lexical repertoire to denote certain behaviours that deviate from the accepted heterosexual norm. Several terms exist and different ones are employed for men and women. The term used above, *makoumè*, is usually used to refer to a male homosexual, although it can also refer to an effeminate man who does not, or is not known to, have sexual relations with men.¹⁶ Generally, the term is used to denote a man who routinely carries out what is considered to be feminine behaviour, and the term is emasculating, because it locates the man in the category of women, both sexually and with regards to other

¹⁶ While I cannot provide absolute verification of the historicity and etymology of these terms and their meanings, *makoumè*, because of its French origin, has likely been in use for quite a while, and derives from the French '*ma commère*' meaning 'my child's godmother', probably its original connotation in both French and Creole French (see Fontaine and Roberts 1991), and referring to the relation between the child's mother and the godmother. In Haitian Creole, a cognate for *makoumè* exists, according to lexical information gathered by Faine (1974) prior to his death in 1958, as *maconmè*, for the French term '*commère*'. According to this dictionary, "*Un homme*

behaviours, such as a preference for work that is typically considered feminine. Nicole's friend was called *makoumè* because he liked to do 'women's' work', thus putting himself in the position of a woman and his sexual preference therefore was questioned. Masculinity is largely construed within a male dominant, heterosexual norm, wherein male virility, as penetration and production of children are often the measure, and in opposition to femininity, which is stereotypically conceptualized, in sexual terms, as passive and penetrated. This is evident in the use of the verb 'to sex', used in the active (sex someone) when referring to penetration, and in the passive when referring to being penetrated (to be sexed by someone) – the latter being associated with femininity and by extension, male homosexuality. Men's reproductive failure is noted by the term '*mal papay*', which literally means 'male papaya', used in this sense because the male plant does not bear fruit. The use of the term *makoumè*, because it puts one's masculinity to question, is threatening, especially to a non-homosexual who identifies with the dominant heterosexual ideal.

Another, even more stigmatizing term for a male homosexual is 'anti-man.' The term 'anti-man,' reanalyzed from 'aunty-man,' is a neologism created from English terms, and so is likely of newer usage, owing to the more recent widespread use of English in the region¹⁷. The term 'aunty-man' or 'anti-man' was used in the village to denote men who had homosexual behaviour, although when asked, informants said it could also be used to describe a man who dressed like a woman. It was used in alternance with *makoumè*, but appears to be a stronger term. The strongest and most directly sexual term is 'bugger', used in

efféminé est appelé 'gaçon maconmè.'

¹⁷Winer (2002, personal communication) states that 'aunty-man' is a term that has been used since at least the beginning of the 20th century in the Caribbean, and referred originally to a man who acted like a woman, without necessarily carrying out homosexual behaviour. Maurer identifies another term, '*tanti-man*' which he says derives from the French for aunt (1991: 14), which is '*tante*'. However, put together with 'man' this term is a neologism, and would derive from the Patwa for aunt, which is '*tanti*', rather than from its French root. In the region where I carried out my research, the term '*tanti-man*' was not used, to my knowledge, and when asked, informants had not heard of it. The term was explained to Maurer by a child: "A tanti-man is so called, said one nine-year old boy, 'cos he's just like your auntie.'" (ibid.). This could be a regional term, one that is just coming into use and is therefore not yet widespread. The common appellation for 'aunt', even for non-creole speakers, is '*tanti*'.

alternance with the local Patwa term *boulami*. This term reflects the legal term ‘buggery’, used in the Sexual Offences Act, of which it is considered a violation. ‘Bugger’ in local usage refers to a man who engages in homosexual activity, whether or not he has any feminine characteristics or behaviours, although the legal signification of the term is likely more broad, to include all acts of homosexuality.¹⁸

Another word, *mako*, also refers to male behaviour that strays from the norm. This term appears to be etymologically related to *makoumè*, both in phonetic form and in meaning. However, it is also linked to the term ‘*makwel*’ which, for one of the significations of *mako*, is the female equivalent.¹⁹ The term ‘*mako*’ can be used to refer to a male homosexual or an otherwise effeminate male, but in La Plaine, is usually used to connote other types of stereotypically feminine behaviour or non-dominating male behaviour, such as minding other people’s business, especially keeping a close watch on one’s wife or girlfriend’s movements, or allowing oneself to be dominated by her or letting her tell him what to do. *Makwel* is the feminine version of *mako*, without the sexual

¹⁸ The legal definition of ‘buggery’ is not clear as the dictionary equates it with ‘sodomy’, which is defined both as copulation with a member of the same sex or with an animal and as noncoital (anal or oral) copulation with a member of the opposite sex (Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary 1983). In the first case it would refer only to homosexual activities and bestiality, whereas if the second definition is included, it also refers to any non-penetrative heterosexual activity. See Alexander (1997) for a discussion of the laws relating to sexual offences in the Bahamas.

¹⁹ The origin of the term *mako* is uncertain, but because of the two meanings it has, it may come from two phonetically distinct forms. The first one, *maquereau*, has in French, both the meaning of a type of fish and a person who lives on the revenues of the prostitution of someone else, and is rendered as ‘*macriau*’ in Haitian Creole, retaining both meanings, according to Faine (1974). In Patwa, ‘*mako*’ has the meaning described in the text, referring to someone who interferes in others’ business, especially their sexual affairs, and watches his wife closely, and also someone who has deviant sexual or gender behaviour. The feminine form of the word, ‘*makwel*’, refers to the first meaning, and appears to derive from the feminine French form ‘*maquerelle*’, which means a woman who lives off the prostitution of other women. The Diksyonnè has it as meaning ‘mackerel’ but that is the English word for the fish; the French word is ‘*maquereau*’ which is rendered in Patwa as ‘*makwéyo*’ according to an informant: the Diksyonnè defines *makweyo* as ‘a kind of fish’. It would seem that the first meaning of *mako* relates to the French word ‘*maquereau*’, because of the feminine counterpart which only has that connotation, while the second meaning, that is, as homosexual or effeminate male, may derive from the phonetic similarity to ‘*makoumè*’ and the analogy made between them. There is simply not enough information to derive the historical links between the terms. Suffice to say that they overlap semantically and phonetically, and perhaps the phonetic similarities are the key to the semantic convergence.

connotation. *Makwel* is usually used to refer to a woman who puts her nose in the business of others, especially their sexual affairs, usually those of her husband or boyfriend, and her children, especially with regards to being overly watchful of her daughter's sexual behaviour. This latter meaning, where *mako* and *makwel* overlap, is significant, because it signals another domain of behaviour that is not linked only to behaviours associated with men or women or to sexuality. It has to do with the way in which one conducts oneself with other people and interpersonal boundaries, surveillance, personal space, privacy, autonomy, and freedom, and hence refers to the boundaries of the self.

I heard men being called *mako* in the village because they interfered in their wife's or girlfriend's business. In one case, a man was qualified by another as *mako*, because he would go to find his girlfriend at her friend's house, quite consistently, and in another case, a woman complained that her husband was *mako* because he did not like her speaking to other men, especially in social gatherings, and did not want her to go out on her own. In these cases, the appellation had nothing to do with sexual orientation, but rather with interactions with one's partners, with the relationship itself, and limits to the control one partner should have over the other, in both cases male over female. These terms set the parameters of a kind of a morality of interaction that can then be drawn upon in formulating an ethics of the self, that works in setting boundaries and guiding interactions, notably between men and women. A certain paradox emerges here: while male control of women's sexuality is considered important, a man's surveillance of a woman for that purpose is not condoned (though the understanding is that he shouldn't *have* to watch her, because she shouldn't *want* to go with another man).

Some informants understood '*mako*' in this sense to be feminizing, because it does not represent preferred male behaviour, and possibly because of the overlap in meaning with *makoumè*. However, the existence of a feminine counterpart *makwel* suggests that the behaviour is not desirable in either men or women. Autonomy is valued, among both men and women, an autonomy hard

won within the context of slavery and colonization. The maintenance of autonomy, as freedom from the control of others within social relations is effected through several different means, and its maintenance is always carried out with the belief that it is constantly under threat. What one is doing, for example where one intends to go, or with whom, is not divulged, and relationships are often kept clandestine, even when there is no jealous partner to avoid, especially if there is no commitment or child. By keeping secret one's doings, gossip cannot be circulated that might reveal one's activities, and perhaps cause them to be misinterpreted, even though they are in perfect keeping with social norms, or leave one prey to someone who is jealous or wishes harm and who may invoke witchcraft to hinder the person's success.

In addition, self-responsibility, as a form of autonomy, is expressed through two other complementary idioms: 'don't feel no way' and 'that's you'. The first term implores the other to not be affected by what the speaker has done or is feeling him or herself, while the second entreats the listener to not to blame the speaker or others for whatever he or she is feeling. For example, one might say 'that's you' to someone who is dissatisfied with a particular situation in which they both find themselves, to absolve oneself of responsibility for the situation. Both of these idioms imply that behaviour and feelings are the responsibility of the individual and not related to or caused by the actions of others. These terms are used in all sorts of situations where conflict could arise and have the double action of both allowing one to elude responsibility for the effect of one's actions on others, and avoiding the control of others over one's own feelings and actions, thus maintaining autonomy. These two terms, *mako* and *makwel*, are significant within this cultural understanding. As well, within a system of gender relations where the male, in sexual terms at least, is dominant, these words reveal the existence of a modicum of equality in the interactions between the sexes (although 'that's you' can also be used to deny the consequences of one's actions upon others, and to avoid real responsibility for them).

Two more terms refer specifically to female behaviour: *malnom* and *zanmi*. The first word, *malnom*, refers to a woman who behaves as a man is expected to in Dominica, fulfilling typically male roles, especially work such as planting bananas or construction but does not refer to preference for same-sex relationships. One woman, born in 1922, declared that her older sister was a *malnom*,²⁰ because she had been a wood-cutter and had worn men's clothing. She also called the wood-cutter sister 'the father' because while she, my informant, looked after her sister's child, the sister helped to provide for both her own child and my informant's children. The use of the term 'father' when referring to people (male or female) other than the actual biological father is indicative of the prevalence of other people fulfilling the prescribed role of provider, reinforcing the paradox between the patriarchal ideal and the matrifocal reality – in what could be called partial or *ambivalent patriarchy*. A tension is revealed between the 'ideal' of the patriarchal nuclear family and the reality of everyday interactions – the ideal, projected onto the real, makes it out to be defective, as though the father was 'lacking' from the family and had to be replaced by someone else fulfilling his role. That person, as seen in the narratives in Chapter 4 and here, could be the brother, the mother, or even the aunt.

Maurer holds that the term *malnom* refers to "a well organized woman in some position of authority – characteristics usually associated with men in Dominica" (1991: 15). I did not hear the term used in that way, but it is very plausible, as, while women are expected to take charge, the men do not appreciate a woman who takes charge of them. Several men expressed their view that a woman should not be head of state, that was a man's job (even though Dominica had a woman prime minister for fifteen years); however, a woman could be a government minister. Also, a woman is only considered to be the head of a household if she does not have a male partner living with her (although she may effectively be running it and providing for her children). Rather than being

²⁰ I was also called a *malnom* once, because of the way I drove a car – or perhaps *because* I drove a car, as most women did not. Incidentally, the person who called me that was a man to whom I was giving a lift, and who did not own a vehicle.

derogatory, Maurer contends that the term can actually be a form of praise towards women who take on responsibilities considered to be those of a man. Men who take on women's roles and responsibilities, on the other hand, are demeaned, signifying that masculine behaviours and occupations are held in higher esteem than feminine ones. At the same time, a woman is expected to excel at 'women's' tasks, especially taking care of her children, making sure they are clean, clothes pressed and neatly coiffed, and her house and yard clean. A woman who prefers 'men's' tasks, however, is not looked down upon.

The other term, *zanmi* (from French *les ami(e)s*), refers to women who prefer female company, and usually connotes a sexual relationship between women, while the English term 'lesbian' is only used to refer to females who engage in same-sex relations. Maurer argues that *zanmi* does not refer to a sexual relation between women, because it also is the same term used to refer to friendship of a non-sexual nature between men or women, or a man and a woman (ibid.). While it does derive from the Patwa term *zanmi* meaning friend, it has been extended to mean a sexual relationship, so much so, that when I asked what the term meant, I was told the second meaning.²¹ However, rather than qualifying the *person*, as do the other terms discussed in this section, it qualifies the *relationship* between the women, so that a woman who has a sexual relationship with another woman is not labelled on that basis. The more recent usage of the English term 'lesbian', however, labels the person rather than the relationship.

In Maurer's perspective, men's sexuality is marked in relation to women's sexuality, which remains unacknowledged since the three terms, *makwel*,

²¹ A term related to *zanmi*, *zanmiyèz*, appears in the Diksyonnè (Fontaine and Roberts 1992) as the Patwa term for lesbian, while the first term is denoted as meaning 'friend' or 'lesbianism'. Obviously the origin is the same French 'les ami(e)s' but it would seem that the first term, while it keeps the meaning of 'friend' in Patwa, as in *M. sé zanmi mwen* (M. is my friend), it would be rendered in Patwa for the second meaning as '*dé fanm sa yo ka fé zanmi*' (those two women are practicing lesbianism). The second term would then be '*dé fanm sa yo sé zanmiyèz*' (those two women are lesbians). Upon verification with an adult male speaker from the region of La Plaine, however, he does not recognize the second term, and states '*zanmi*' is used in the same way for both meanings. There may, therefore, be regional distinctions that are not covered in the dictionary, or there is a mistake. If this linguistic distinction is true, then, while minor, it is enough to signal that the expansion of the term is more than by extension of meaning, but grammatical usage has been transformed with the second meaning of the first term, and the second term, though

malnom, and *zanmi* do not have overt sexual connotations.²² I have shown that *zanmi* does refer to sexual interactions between women in contemporary La Plaine, but that it does not refer to a person, and therefore not to habitual actions by which that person can be qualified, whereas the terms used for men do. However, this does not mean that women's sexuality is unacknowledged: rather that it is *mainly* (but not totally) construed within a paradigm based on male sexual concerns. Terms used to denote women's promiscuity, such as '*salap*' (from French *salope*) show that women's sexuality is acknowledged, inasmuch as it is outside expected behaviour, and notably, puts a man's control of her sexuality – and his virility – at risk. Since some men measure their virility by both their control of women's sexuality (in competition with other men) and the birth of children, if a woman is having sexual relations with other men, both of these criteria are violated. Men thus do not see women's homoerotic behaviour as threatening to their identity, since most women who have relations with women, have them with men as well (and in principle, a woman cannot 'sex' another woman, through penetration, in the same way as a man). A woman who is characterized as a lesbian, however, is usually seen as one who does not 'deal' with men.

grammatically the same as the first one in the first sense, is phonetically distinct.

²² As well, Maurer contends that Dominican male sexuality is construed along a continuum, between, at the negative extreme, the 'anti-man' or full-fledged homosexual, and at the more positive end, the 'exceptionally virile... known for their often violent sexual conquests.' This end of the continuum is hard, becoming softer as it reaches the anti-man end. While this paradigm is plausible, given that men are considered 'harder' than women, in that they can endure more difficult physical labour, the term he considers to represent the 'exceptionally virile' is '*gwo gwen*', to which he ascribes the meaning "fat wheat" (Maurer 1991: 13), is not corroborated by any of my sources. '*Gwo*,' derived from the French '*gros*', simply means big, large, or fat. The first meaning of '*gwenn*' in Patwa is seed (from French *graine* = seed), extended to refer to testicles (also used in this way in Québec colloquial French). The expression '*Gwo gwenn*' refers to an inflammation or enlargement of the testicles, usually caused by a hernia (put references – Faine, diksyonné). Since many of Maurer's informants were high school students who probably do not speak as much Patwa as their parents, having been schooled in English and very likely discouraged from speaking Patwa as children, they may not have known the Patwa meaning, ascribing it the signification they thought it could have through translating the Patwa '*gwenn*' from the English 'grain', of which wheat is one of the most common types. As well, the term could take on new connotations, invented by the younger generation, or it could be a regional particularity, but it is not used in that way in the region I researched.

A man's overly zealous sexual behaviour is also labelled, but with more humour than disdain. A man with this behaviour might be called a '*kok savann*', (from French "*cocque de la savanne*"), which is the Kwéyòl term for a rooster that runs freely about the village – the metaphor is obvious. Some men are so fearful their girlfriends are 'interfering' with other men that they have concocted all sorts of scenarios of possible ways in which she could carry out the act without being detected. These scenarios, as the fabrication of male fantasy, reflect a phallo-centric sexuality. However, they also acknowledge women's ability to seek sexual pleasure, and reflect men's absence of any real control over women's sexuality, although certain male practices such as claiming paternity of a child and thus being liable to claims for maintenance provide men with some control over women that is supported through the legal system in the form of laws of inheritance and maintenance. If a woman is thought to be seeing more than one man, the man she says is the father may refuse to claim the child as his, thus depriving the mother of his support, and any right to inherit from him, especially with regards to land. However, because kinship is bilateral and land can be inherited through the mother, the patronym is not *necessary* but *preferable*. One is not an outcast without the patronym, but there is a certain amount of shame associated with it, especially for the mother, and the child will not have the financial support and advantages he or she may otherwise have had.

The women I spoke with did not discuss sex in detail if at all, but one woman, whose husband was out of state, told me that she still needed to 'get her thing' and in his absence, entertained a clandestine casual relationship. Talking about sex among adults in mixed company was common, as was joking about it, but discussion of one's own sexual experiences publicly in mixed company was rare, and while men liked to boast about their adventures (real or imagined!), women remained discreet. Engaging in sexual relations, however, is considered healthy, curative almost, especially for someone who is suffering emotionally. A person, especially a woman, who is alone is considered to be lonely, and therefore, in local people's perceptions, must have a man to provide what she

‘needs’ – including sex. The apparent radiant health and happiness (seen in, for example, weight gain) of a woman can be attributed to the ability of her partner to provide just that – sex, sometimes metaphorically referred to as ‘good milk’. However, both women and men appear to perceive men’s sexual needs as more imperative than women’s and tacitly, though begrudgingly most times, women accept their men having other sexual partners: sexual fidelity is not as important for most women as the economic maintenance of the household by her partner.

The above account paints a rather complex picture that includes both male domination and women’s autonomy, revealing the importance of images of virility for men’s identity, yet not total domination or control of women’s sexuality. As well, while women do not give open verbal expression to their sexuality, except in joking response to men’s teasing, public display of sexually explicit dancing is widespread. Dancing, especially at carnival time, is an occasion for self-expression that sometimes becomes overtly sexual displays, especially among women. ‘Wining’ (from ‘winding’), dancing with the hips gyrating, sometimes rubbing up against another person or several people together, men or women indiscriminately, mates, friends, or strangers is common during this period. Even married women become involved. Miller (1994) has claimed women’s ‘wining’ in Trinidad to be the expression of “autosexuality” as a “sexuality which does not require men” and is not an expression of lesbianism either: “The women in Carnival, as they become involved in the dance, are not tremendously interested in who or what they are wining upon, they will wine on men, they will wine on each other, most often on no one at all, but the object of wining is in most cases really themselves. It is the expression of a free sexuality which has no object but itself” (Miller 1994: 123). Miller describes men’s interpretations of women’s wining behaviour in Trinidadian newspapers “more as a threat than an invitation” (ibid. 124). If wining is a demonstration of a woman’s sexuality, it is also a demonstration of her autonomy, especially her sexual autonomy, free from the control of anyone including men.

In Maurer's (1991) rendition, a binary image emerges where men's sexuality in Dominica is acknowledged and women's is not. From this he draws an analogy between the lack of acknowledgment of women's sexuality and the lack of recognition, and devalorization, of women's labour in relation to men's, separating sexuality from labour to then recombine them. He does this within a synchronic framework. However, this situation is more nuanced, complex, and historically shaped than his portrayal. I propose a different rendition that locates these expressions within a broader framework, contextualizing them both historically and theoretically, bringing into the account the complexity and the tensions to which Caribbean history bears witness. Women's sexuality is not totally unacknowledged, but is acknowledged at times within the framework of a male sexuality that would control it, especially in connection to discourses tied to the legal system and dominant religious discourse that promote marriage, as well as middle class family values, (all of which promote patriarchy), and at times outside that framework. This ambivalence developed historically, as will be seen in the next section.

Missed Categories

The normalizing effect of sexuality as a regime that provides bodies with characteristics and deviant bodies with names, such as *makoumè*, at the same time produces marginalized spaces within which those who do not conform to normalcy can acquire an identity through which to express themselves, and within which they are confined and socially defined in relation to the heterosexual norm. Those who accept to live within this marginalized space are accepted as such, as almost carnivalesque figures parading through everyday life. The following account of 'Johnny Mako' illustrates this.

Roaming through Roseau with Nicole, we happened upon a rather large woman selling fruits from a cart by the road. "That's Johnny Mako" whispered Nicole. Then, turning to the person, she loudly jibed "Johnny Mako, Johnny Mako, are you a man or are you a woman," to which s/he glibly replied. "I am a

woman now, I had the operation. Didn't you read the newspaper?" S/he added, "and my name is Joanna." Later, Nicole recounted the story of Johnny Mako. S/he was apparently born with both male and female sexual organs, a hermaphrodite. As Johnny, s/he had been brought up as a boy, but decided to assume her/his feminine identity later on. Nicole first met her/him when she was going to school in Roseau, and Johnny/Joanna was working as a market-woman selling produce.

Johnny/Joanna fully assumed her/his marginality, only later choosing to assume a 'normal' gender/sex identity as a woman, through surgically removing the 'masculinity'. Whether or not s/he suffered psychologically is another question, only to be answered through an interview, which I unfortunately did not have the occasion to carry out. It is important to note that s/he was able to fulfill a productive social role, as a woman, and even prior to the operation as Johnny Mako: as a labelled, categorized marginalized person, s/he had her/his place.

Not all can accept themselves as marginal, though: a contemporary of Nicole, a young girl going to school, committed suicide because, anatomically, she had features of both sexes. Brought up as a girl, she was unable to come to terms with her abnormality when she reached adolescence and sexual maturity, as she did not conform to the image of a woman. Johnny, who was raised as a boy, could become 'Johnny Mako' as an intermediary step to becoming 'Joanna' – the category of feminized, sexually active, man exists. However, for the girl, no category would permit her to even assume a normalized, marginal identity: there is only *malnom*, which, as discussed above, does not refer to female homosexuality but to other, masculine behaviours, and could not be applied to this girl. There was no existing identifying discourse, no position for her to occupy as woman, with the appearance of a woman, and socialized to think of herself as such that would correspond to her morphology, and allow a transition phase in which she could rectify her identity. She could not be '*mako*' or '*makoumè*' or 'anti-man' because she had been raised as a girl – she was already 'female' and not a male with female characteristics. The Patwa word for hermaphrodite, *kolé fimèl*, describes the physical anomaly (body morphology) but does not describe a

social role, in that there are no masculine or feminine traits associated with it. *Makoumè* is associated with a body morphology (male), *and* a social position that is related to that morphology, both sexual and in as far as division of labour and behaviours are concerned (a morphologically female person cannot be a *makoumè*). There was no category that would allow this girl to accept her physical anomaly, as there was for Johnny/Joanna.

These two examples are cited to provide an illustration of the importance of the conceptualizations represented by these categories in providing a discursive framework for identity, a mark of identification. They support the notions that, *first*, sex is not a biological fact (that discourse itself is socially construed), but is socially conditioned, created through regimes of sexuality, and *second*, that, while sex is not a biological given, the morphological differences of bodies (sex and race) are brought into the signifying practices of sex and sexuality. The salience of this will be elaborated upon in the next section, intertwined with a discussion of the genealogy of sexuality and gender relations in the Caribbean.

6.3 Sexuality as Regime

For Foucault, sex is not a biological given, a pre-condition for sexuality (or for gender), but operates the other way round. Sexuality, constructed and maintained through discourse and institutions – for example the judicial system with laws pertaining to incest, marriage, rape, and in some cases, homosexuality – precedes and creates sex. According to Foucault, “sexuality is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology” (Foucault 1990[1978]: 127). This denies the biological origin of sexuality, situating it rather as a product of relations of power, through which ideas and discourses about sexuality are configured, disseminated within and through various institutions to control and regulate social relations between men and women, and their bodily pleasures. The notion of biological sex, as automatically and fundamentally linked to heterosexuality, is also a product of this ‘complex political technology’ rather

than its origin or cause. Butler describes the production of sexuality through discourse in the following passage:

Sexuality is here viewed as a discursively constructed and highly regulated network of pleasures and bodily exchanges, produced through prohibitions and sanctions that quite literally give form and directionality to pleasure and sensation. As such a network or regime, sexuality does not emerge from bodies as their prior cause; sexuality takes bodies as its instrument and its object, the site at which it consolidates, networks, and extends its power. As a regulatory regime, sexuality operates primarily by investing bodies with the category of sex, that is, making bodies into the bearers of a principle of identity (Butler 1996: 66).

Sexuality, in this perspective, is an organizing force that directs and fosters certain kinds of behaviours and relationships, denying or condemning others. Through its work on the body, sexuality as a regime produces sex as an identificatory mark or as a primary identification, through which “each individual must pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility” (Foucault 1978: 155).

However, absent from Foucault’s work is any discussion of sexuality in the organization of sex as the manifestation and maintenance of particular differences, notably between men and women. As well, while he rightly suggests that regimes of sexuality are normalizing, centring and condoning certain types of sexuality and marginalizing and condemning others, and that there can be differences between *classes* in the effects of sexuality, because of the deployment of the ‘political technologies’ that regulate it and the effects that result are different (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 127), he does not entertain the idea that there can be contrasting or complementary discourses of sexuality that can enter into a same configuration or regime, as is the case in the Caribbean.

In keeping with this, while he contends that sexuality as a regime operates on the body and the way it functions in society, acting as an identificatory mark, there is no mention of the differential discursive frameworks for men and women, that, while not based upon some original biological distinction, take into account and use *morphological* differences (the perceptible physical attributes, such as shape and colour that are used to signify difference, in sex as in race) in producing

power relations. “ ‘Sex’ refers to the domain of sexual difference, to the question of the *morphologies of bodies*” (Grosz 1995:213). The body’s morphology, while not in and of itself determinant, is signified and it is this signification which indicates difference and the ways in which bodies are to be understood, and even experienced. Sexuality, in the Foucauldian sense, creates the subject, and this subject is a sexed subject. Meanwhile, subjectification is different based on the morphological characteristics, which are recuperated into signification, in the formulation of both sex and race as identificatory marks, within a political, historical, social, and cultural context. From this viewpoint, the terms discussed in the previous section are key to understanding the differentially constituted sexuality of men and women, and its importance socially and historically, within and through other differentiating and identifying discourses and ‘political technologies’. As well, to understand the importance of race within this regime of sexuality, one must give attention to the historical development of Dominican society (and its similarities to other islands within the region).

In Foucault’s work, the development of regimes of sexuality begins with the advance of what he calls ‘biopower’ where the regulation of life itself became a political project (ibid: 143). Sex was at the intersection of the ‘political technology of life’ that disciplined bodies to control movements and energies, and regulated populations through census-taking, public health and welfare, etc. In Europe, especially France, this is situated historically in the 19th century. (In the Caribbean, the vested interest in the population of descendents of slaves began only after WWII, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, with the shift in colonial policy and the development of welfare. Although census taking began in the mid-19th century, attempts to regulate family life were not begun until much later.)

For Foucault, the regulation of people through regimes of sexuality is a fairly recent development: prior to the preponderance of biopower and sexuality as a regime, the regulation of social relations rested on “blood,” according to Foucault. The relations of blood were prevalent within “systems of alliance, the

political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the value of descent lines” (1990: 147).²³

In plantation society such as that of pre-emancipation Dominica, political and economic power, and freedom were determined by blood, most manifest in the discourse on race, for the hierarchical organization of social relations. (Foucault, however, discusses race under the regime of sexuality rather than blood, as the concept of eugenics and the control of race.) While social status was reckoned by blood, and denoted by the designation of distinctions based upon ‘race’ through colonial domination of the white plantocracy over the black slaves, miscegenation and the freeing of coloured offspring who were then able to gain some economic and political power, created a colour hierarchy, configured through a particular regime of sexuality. For Dominican and other Caribbean societies (and feasibly all societies), sexuality did not arrive as an organizing regime to replace a system based on blood, but a certain sexual regime developed within, through, and even against it, creating and maintaining not only racial hierarchization but one that was intertwined and configured with the relations between men and women, serving to regulate heterosexual and homosexual relations and behaviours.

As noted in Chapter 2, concern with the variable conjugal relations in the Caribbean has been the cause of much contemplation. Of these, R. T. Smith, provides a plausible historical explanation for the existence of several types of heterosexual relations within a ‘dual marriage hierarchy’ (Smith 1987) that complements the Foucauldian approach, with the added dimension of both differential configurations of sexuality based on sex and on class/race. This, combined with the development of bilaterally reckoned kinship that reflects the effects of plantation society patriarchy and slave maternal inheritance of status. Smith attributes the different existing forms of union in the Caribbean to socio-historical factors including: 1. marriage to status equals only; 2. the laws

²³ Foucault denies the importance, or even the existence of sexual regimes in Europe prior to the Enlightenment period, using as example the impunity with which a young girl could be raped. This, on the contrary, shows that there was indeed a regime that permitted the abuse of women.

governing slavery (no marriage); 3. the social conditions of slaves (men and women often could not live together, families could be split up); and 4. sexual unions between planters and other white men with coloured and black women.

In Smith's schema, the system of relations was created through the relations of slavery, from the top down, with the ideology of marriage and the nuclear family voiced by the new middle class. In the discussion of gender relations in Chapter 2 it was made apparent that a slave woman's sexuality was part and parcel of her labour – her whole body was available for use by the dominant men, whether she wanted to or not, and whether the men enacted their ability to forcefully have sexual intercourse with her or not. However, some women could find advantage in such relations: better treatment, manumission, freedom, or perhaps economic benefit for children of unions with masters and overseers. In any case, her sexuality became something that could, at times, be manipulated to her advantage. She could obtain prestige, monetary benefit, or improved social status through having sexual relations with men occupying higher social positions (see Chapter 2). Sexuality, defined and regulated through a white or coloured male-dominated system, was not an important *symbol* in itself for women, but served as a *vehicle* through which the symbols of status could be obtained, and those who could or would, used it to their benefit.

Men, on the other hand, were in competition with each other over women, to some extent. Men of higher status, lighter in colour and with more access to resources could feasibly attract more women, as they could offer them prestige and economic benefit, and 'whiten' their children. The colonial system in the Caribbean was thus instrumental in moulding both women's and men's sexuality, within a paradigm of race that overlapped with class. Higher status men's ability to control the sexuality of women through providing access to economic and social benefits also allowed them to control the sexuality of others, especially lower status men, because they had access to more of the women. Heterosexuality thus became symbolic of men's status and identity, and a threat to a man's heterosexuality stands as a threat to his 'maleness' or his masculine identity. A

man who is dominated by another man is, in a sense, feminized. Rather than men's sexuality simply being marked in relation to women's, both are formulated within an economy of relations of power that developed historically through colonial relations and an ideology of colour, in which sexuality was construed in terms of male penetration, and in relation to deviant or undesirable behaviours, for men, that are threatening to a male identity that hinges on virility.

In considering Smith's schema, I would like to bring to bear another perspective that takes into account kinship and descent, rather than emphasizing only the type of sexual union. The white planter, married to a woman of his own racial and socio-economic status, followed the rule of patriarchy: his legitimate children would inherit from him, both his property and his status. He was the head of the household, and the ultimate decision-maker. As a whole, the plantation system was based on a patriarchal, almost feudal model, as a kind of 'family' with the white father as the head, especially on the smaller plantations in Dominica (slaves took on the patronym of the owner). However, children born to slave women in the British colonies, even if the father was white, inherited their *mother's* status, by default, probably because slave children were all illegitimate according to a legal definition (because slaves could not marry), unless the father decided to free them or provide them with some economic benefit, but that decision was wholly voluntary, and not inscribed in British colonial law. So not only was a dual marriage hierarchy introduced: importantly, only those children of legal marriages or legally recognized in a testament could inherit from their free fathers. Other children inherited from their mothers. Laws have now been changed in Dominica, so that all children officially recognized (through baptism or civil registration) by the father have a right to inherit from him whether or not he is married to their mother, although children from a legal marriage have precedence if there is dispute.

In this perspective, an important contributor to the development of a 'dual marriage hierarchy' was the legal status of the patriarchal family. The *dominance* of the patriarchal family with a legal union and legitimate children, was tied to

political, economic, and social (race) status. This was combined with unions of lower status women with upper status men, out of which were born illegitimate children who, legally, inherited from their mothers (unless the father was indulgent), as well as unions of middle and lower status men and women with each other, legal or otherwise. At the same time, the *predominance* of non-legalized unions and illegitimate children, reinforced ties to the maternal family, by default, so the father only *chose* to be present. However, the *expectation* of patriarchy, was, and still is, in a watered down form, as the nuclear family, always present, reinforced through colonial programmes and policies, such as education, development and welfare, and more recently through international interventions by organizations such as UNICEF, local NGOs, the Catholic Church, and especially some of the fundamentalist Christian movements.

It is within these sets of relations, through which status systems (hierarchies) and kinship were created, that we can see interwoven the 'regime' of sexuality. It is also within these relations that we can understand the differential constitution of male and female heterosexuality and likewise, homosexuality, as well as the *ambivalence* with regards to patriarchal, male dominant model of family and relationship. For women, sexual relationships with men have until recently, with easy access to contraception, inevitably produced children who, also inevitably, had to be supported. In a situation where marriage and support were not guaranteed, women were enjoined to position themselves in the best possible stance to receive support. This perspective was reinforced by the ideal of the 'male provider' of the patriarchal family, which was not always actualized for many lower strata women. By engaging in relationships with men from whom they were more certain to obtain some support, and who could also, within the hierarchy of race conflated with social status, ensure the 'whitening' of the child and thus an increase in status, women were positioning themselves favourably. However, picking the right man was a gamble; as one informant put it, if you did not, you were just unlucky. Now, the focus is shifting for women, from picking the right man to getting an education. Women's sexuality, therefore, has not been

so much under the *domination* of men, as at the *whim* of men, especially once she produces children.

Men, on the other hand, were not in a position to gain economically through their sexual relations, except perhaps through a marriage to a wealthy bride.²⁴ In a non-legal union, it was usually the man who ‘provided’ for the woman, if anyone did. What was the advantage, then? For men, the ability to control a woman’s sexuality was proof of one’s status in that one was able to ‘provide’ for her, and of one’s virility if there were children – each of these reinforced the other. Heterosexual relations, for men, became associated strongly with masculinity, so much so that children took on a symbolic status as proof of these unions.

Thus construed, men’s and women’s sexuality have been configured historically, through the relations of slavery, political technologies such as the laws governing marriage and inheritance, legal status of slaves, and ideologies of race and sexuality, discussed in Chapter 2.

The historical disjunction posited by Foucault, while helping us to understand the coming into discourse of sexuality and its effects, was thought of only in relation to European society and its historical development, and so, while the idea that there are historically different ways in which power is deployed and different discourses that develop in relation to it is insightful, the particular power relations and discourses within the context in question must be examined. While Foucault provides us with a useful analytical tool, each situation, just as each historical period, must be examined to see the particular relations of power, the political technologies that are used and the discursive manifestations that permeate it. In the context of Dominica and the Caribbean, sexuality as a regime of the body that creates differentiated and positioned subjects has operated *in conjunction* with a regime of ‘blood,’ through multiple, historical layerings of

²⁴ Under British Law, a woman’s property was transferred to her husband in Dominica, until the passing of the Married Women’s Property Act in 1887, which states: “Any woman who marries after the commencement of this Act shall be entitled to have and to hold as her separate property... all real and personal property which belongs to her at the time of marriage, or is acquired by or devolves upon her after marriage...” (Chapt. 35:60, para. 4).

slavery, post-emancipation colonialism, the subsequent creation of the Dominican state, and the institutions and expressions that developed within and in response to these different contexts.

CHAPTER 7

THE LABOUR OF LOVE: RELATIONSHIPS, SELF, AND EMPOWERMENT

The previous chapter illustrated the cultural and historical construction of sexuality, and the importance of sexuality in the production and maintenance of social relations not only between men and women, but also between different socio-economic sectors of society, as intertwined with an ideology and practice of race. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on women's perceptions of their relationships with men as expressed in their narratives, building on ideas brought forth in previous chapters, especially those of the *ambivalence of patriarchy* and the break from an egalitarian ethos to one of 'improving' oneself. Questions that emerge here are: do the discursive frameworks that are employed in the narratives differ for, or are they used differently by women of different ages? Do other factors, such as social status, make a difference in how women perceive themselves? How have women's perceptions of their relationships, and their role therein, changed through the generations, and why? Are women becoming more autonomous and more empowered? Intertwined with the discussion of relationships is a consideration of younger women's perceptions of their future.

Women who spoke about their relationships with men were usually those who were dissatisfied: they spoke, at least in part, to express this dissatisfaction. Generally, those women who were married or with a partner did not speak much about their relationships with men when I interviewed them in their home, especially if the man was present. Two married women who were still with their husbands spoke to me about them in rather derogatory terms. For some women, talking about their partner or former partner was spontaneous and unsolicited by me, or anyone else. For others, it was told as part of their life narrative, but unsolicited as such. For example, after seeing the father of most of her children briefly when we were together, one woman told me about how he left her to

marry someone else and provided little support for the children she had with him. I overheard her telling virtually the same story again, a few days later, to someone else. Another woman, once introduced to me, offered me details about her relationship and her dissatisfaction with her husband. She invited me to her house on that pretext. These women's descriptions of their experiences demonstrate that they had certain expectations of their male partners that were not fulfilled. This dissatisfaction with relationships, on the part of women, is frequently expressed, and provides the theme or the frame for most of their accounts of relationships. It reflects the kind of ambivalence that I was attempting to describe in the previous chapter: while women are largely self-sufficient, and are usually close to their family of origin, expectations that men with whom they have relationships will, or at least should, fulfill the role of provider are still prevalent for most women. Narratives of women who have had long-term relationships and children show the extent to which their relationships with men have or have not fulfilled their expectations.

Sexuality is a historically constituted, culturally and socially particular regime that employs various political technologies to mould spaces, bodies, behaviours, and expectations, causing women's and men's respective moral and ethical choices to diverge. In Dominica, the *ambivalence of patriarchy*, as a set of expectations, plays out in the contradictions, frustrations and resolutions of relationships. While men's and women's expectations, positions, and spatial movements differ, they are in some areas complementary, such as in the division of labour within a given household. In others, they are conflictual or antagonistic, as when the expectations of women towards men to fulfill responsibilities towards children and themselves are not met. Yet, in others, they are simply autonomous, as women go about making their lives with or without the input of men. Kandiyoti (1988) has described what she calls a 'patriarchal bargain' as the particular arrangement of rights and responsibilities that are negotiated between men and women. This 'bargain' can shift power towards one or the other; in the narratives below, the negotiation or 'bargain' in relations with men is an important part of

women's self accounts and self-ethics. While women's autonomy and empowerment are the goals implied, or at least the outcome, in most of the narratives, the struggle to achieve this outcome takes place through a mesh of expectations, many of which remain unfulfilled. Women position themselves in their narratives in relation to other people, according to their culturally conditioned expectations of what those relations should be, including: the rights and obligations each party has towards the other; the emotional/affective tone of the relationship; and what the relationships are, in respect of the anticipated outcome. In their narratives of relationships with men, women recreate their negotiation of their position in relation to their hopes and to how they perceive those of their partner.

For all the women whose narratives are discussed below, reflections on their relationships were an important component of their self-account. How they position (or positioned) themselves in relation to the men in their lives is indeed fundamental to their self-perceptions, and to how they engage with moral discourses and formulate their self trajectory.

7.1 Speaking from Experience

Melanie

Melanie is a widow, aged sixty-seven, from a family that owned fairly large tracts of land. She told me that her family had once been the proprietors of a nearby estate, but had been cheated out of it by forebears of the present owner.¹ Melanie's family still possesses several acres of land in another area, and previously owned a fair amount of land in the village, much of which has been sold. Her father was a skilled tradesman and did not farm the land himself, but had other people work it for him. Their socio-economic status in the village, while they were not wealthy, was higher than that of many. Melanie is very light-skinned, with long, now greyed, wavy hair, and chose to differentiate herself from people with very dark skin, who she called 'black', reflecting concern, no longer

¹ This estate has not been in operation for several years, but parts of it were rented or squatted, and

very high in general in Dominica, with race as a criterion for status.² She portrays herself as a very autonomous person who does not accept bad treatment. Her relatively privileged upbringing may account in part for her reactions as she describes them in her narrative, but it has not prevented her from experiencing the lot of many women, poor and rich, in her interactions with men. She may have been better positioned socially and economically, and thus able to act more autonomously, as indeed she did. Here is her story:

So it happen now I get a child, I was twenty-two years when I get my first son. I wasn't lucky with the man because he said people tell him I have other person. But I didn't have no other person. It was he I knew. He didn't claim, but when the child born, I let him know the child born. Now the same day he send money for me and he went to his family, and when Christmas, January, he come and see the child. When he come he tell me about christening the child. I tell him my child christened already, don't worry about him is just what you have give him. I finish with him right away. I don't have nothing to do with him again. That's how I am, I like to be free. You have it? I don't like people to trouble me, I don't like nonsense. Okay. He go.

Melanie was living at her family's home when she had her first child, and remained there until after the third one. It is common for a young woman to remain at home with her first and sometimes the second child, even though at first she might be shamed by her family for having the children, especially if the man does not support her in any way. However, it was usual for a woman with several children to be expected to have her own household, alone, or with the father of some of the children, although she might remain close to the family home, perhaps establishing her household adjacent, in the same 'yard' (see discussion in Chapter 2).

subsequently sold as small-holdings to local farmers.

²Discrimination based on skin colour is still present, but the correlation of skin colour to real socio-economic distinctions, have softened considerably, so that there is no longer an exclusively light-skinned elite, as a large middle class emerges. However, skin colour terms are used widely as descriptors and features, such as hair, nose, and lips are considered beautiful or ugly based on their Europeaness (straight hair, a thin nose and lips are considered desirable, while 'dry' hair, a wide nose and thick lips are not). As well, someone with very dark skin can be called 'black and ugly', as though the two words are synonymous. Some older women have told me they would not 'go' with a black man, meaning they would not have sexual relations with someone with skin much darker than theirs.

The father of Melanie's first child did not 'claim' the child, meaning he did not recognize it as his own, and thus did not claim paternity or give the child his surname. Recognition of paternity is carried out symbolically (and legally, when the child is registered) in Dominica by the attribution to the child of the father's surname. The recognition of paternity appears, on the surface, as the recognition of (the belief in) a biological relation to the child. This is especially important when children and father do not co-reside, so that children know who they are related to (and can subsequently enter into a relationship with). Kin is thus reckoned bilaterally: all children of the same father are considered siblings, while the same is true for children of the same mother. Reckoning kin becomes a confusing task; when asked to name their siblings many adults could not name all or named most of them one time, then another time, named others that they had forgotten to include the first time.

Because recognition of paternity implies (ideally) the responsibility to maintain the child, and is tied to the law in that it allows the woman to legally sue for maintenance,³ it is implicated in the maintenance of gendered relations and hierarchies, and sexuality and statuses thus derived. It is in the woman's interest, as well as the child's, that a man (presumably and preferably the biological father) recognize the child as his own so that she may have hope of some support for the child's needs.

Recognition of paternity is also acknowledgement of having had a sexual relationship with the mother of the child in question. Men may be reluctant to officially recognize the child as their own because of the possible consequences it may have on another relationship or marriage (while women usually tolerate men's promiscuity, they do not like their economic support going elsewhere), the feeling of obligation to support a child on an already tight budget. (Men usually contribute to the maternal home, help other relatives and support other children they may have with other women.) Some men may also not want to admit

³ Dominica's Maintenance Act (Chap. 35:61) passed in 1982, provides for the maintenance of children, by both the mother and the father, and of elderly parents by children, up to the amount of \$30 EC for each person.

paternity because of the mother's sexual reputation; they would not want it known in the village that they had engaged in sexual relations with the woman. An attempt to tarnish the mother's reputation may also be made in order to avoid paternity. The father may argue that the woman was seeing other men, and that she cannot prove the child to be his. In Melanie's case, the father did not want the child at first, stating that he could not be sure it was his, either believing she had another man or simply using it as an excuse not to take on the responsibility.⁴ A woman, on the other hand, if she had more than one relationship, may try to get the man she feels more likely to support the child to claim paternity, even if he is not the biological father.⁵

Melanie's attitude may not have been the same as she portrayed it in her narrative at the actual time of the birth of her child, as when the father does not claim paternity, the child and mother are somewhat stigmatized. However, rather than represent the situation in this way, Melanie turns it around, and uses it to express her empowerment as an independent person. Her situation was not one of dire poverty, though, where she needed the man's support for her child; she appears to have been content to remain at home with her parents, and was able to do so without the man's support as her family had the means to support her.

A few years later, she met another man, Joseph, with whom she would have her four other children. She had a first child, then a second with him, still living at her parent's home (she calls it her father's home). She continues her story:

Melanie: After a few years again, two years again, I happen to get Joseph. And first day I go there, I get a child.

Robbyn: Oh, first day!

⁴ In another case, the man did not want to recognize a child he had with a woman because his main girlfriend had just given birth as well, and it would lead to trouble. He refused to claim the child as his, stating that she had other men and he had not been with her, until his older sister saw the child and said it was indeed his. Paternity, in this way, can be 'enforced' by pressure from other family members who, based on the appearance of the child, will claim it.

⁵ Local newspapers run ads regularly for DNA paternity testing. Of course, the man would have to have the means to pay for such a service.

Melanie: I get the child. So it happened, I go back there I make Cecilia. When I come there, my father tell me go.

Robbyn: He sent you out of the house?

Melanie: Yes, he send me out. So I had to go, with the two children and meet him [Joseph]. And then I stay there.

Robbyn: The two children, what did you do with the first one?

Melanie: The first one, well I left it at home. But the two what I make with Joseph, I take them and go.

Her father refused to continue to support the two children of the man she was still involved with, so he sent her out to establish her own household. It is not clear if he sent her to live with him so he would assume his responsibility, or if he simply sent her out of the house and she chose to go there. She went with the two children he had fathered, and left her first child behind because she did not expect the other man to support him. But for Melanie and Joseph, the new living arrangements gave rise to some difficult tensions:

Melanie: So when I reach there, I stay there for one, two months. He go and drink his rum and he come back, he hit me a blow *there*! The thing come high so and I don't do nothing. I say but why you hitting me, I don't do *nothing*. He was drunk. I just do that: I take grip – at my father house!

Robbyn: Same day?

Melanie: Yeah, in the night, eleven o'clock in the night. I left him and go my father's house.

Robbyn: Did you bring the children?

Melanie: I leave his children for him, and I met my father. You see. That's the kind of person I am. You hit me I hit you back. That is me. Okay. I leave the child and go at my father. It was two weeks, and I get a pass for Curaçao. Curaçao! That's the kind of person I am! I'm not joking.

Melanie recounts her reaction to Joseph's violence with the same sense of autonomy and independence towards him as she did towards the father of her first child when he did not want to claim paternity. The ease with which she returns to

her family of origin belies a stronger connection there than to her partner, even though she had children with him. She left the children with their father (who took them to his mother in another village) because she could not return home with them – she had been asked to leave because of them. However, she managed to get her passage to Curaçao (where she obtained the money is not stated, but she could feasibly have been given it by her father) to try another alternative, work as a domestic. She only returned to Dominica when her parents fell ill, in order to care for them. She does not state whether she sent money to her children or to her parents; in her narrative, she emphasizes an interpretation of her experiences that positions her as independent and autonomous, revealing at the same time, though downplaying, the important role men related to her consanguinally fulfilled in her life.

After she returned to Dominica to care for her parents, she moved back with Joseph, and they had two more children. They got married, and her father gave them a piece of land on which to construct their house. Her husband, suffering from lung cancer, died at the age of forty, before he could even finish building the house. Melanie, still a young woman in her thirties, was then approached by other men, and met one with whom she became involved for a time. However, that relationship was short lived, because the man was seeing other women, and had asked her to marry him but was not serious.

After he [Joseph] die, a police ask me to married. [A person said] I hear you marrying before Christmas, he tell her “so many Christmas!” When he come here with a parcel of clothes for me to wash for him, [I tell him] so many Christmas that have, bring it for the one you love more. And he take it and he go. A police. That is nonsense, that is, go about your business. And still I still live me alone, and alone, and alone.

This last adventure was the deciding factor for Melanie. After that, she told me, she wanted no more relationships. She did not want, or need, a man badly enough to accept what she considered poor treatment. She preferred to remain on her own. An older brother, who continued to live in the familial home after her parents died, helped her, gardening and providing food and other

assistance. She and her brother remained close, and now that he is old and blind (he is approximately fifteen years older than her) he lives with her and she cares for him.

While Melanie professed not having any need for men, and her narrative shows her rejecting them more than once, she turned to her father and brother, who were very important sources of support. This reveals the importance consanguinal ties can have over affinal ones, and corroborates other research discussed in Chapter 2. Her father encouraged her to leave the nest, once she had her own family, yet her strongest ties were to her natal family, at least until she was married herself. Her mother is not mentioned in her narrative, except to say that she became ill. The father is the one who allowed her to stay (she lived at her 'father's home') and who kicked her out, and as well, to whom she returned. Matrilocality, then is absent from her account of her family of origin, and takes a back seat to the importance of consanguinal (bilateral) relations.⁶ The strength of those familial bonds, and the fact that her family was not poor, allowed her to haughtily express her disparagement of ill treatment by men, and to act on it (at least in the telling). As well, her experience of the ambivalence of patriarchy is played out between her family home and her relationships with men: her family of origin, from her account, is based on a patriarchal/nuclear model, with her father at the head of the household, and it is he who apparently made the decisions regarding her staying or leaving. At the same time, she absolves herself from any control by men other than her father, preferring to assert her autonomy.

Paradoxically, while she frames herself in a discourse of autonomy, especially in respect to her interactions with men, she creates her narrative persona through her description of her relationships to men, both negatively, towards men with whom she had sexual relationships, and positively, towards men to whom she is related. While she condemns all of the men with whom she had been in a relationship in her narrative, she uses them in her account – indeed

⁶ Conceivably, had her father not been present in her family house, she would have called it her mother's home, as her mother would have been head of the household. Women are household heads in the *absence* of a man – if she has a conjugal partner he is automatically seen as the head.

needs them – to prove her independence, her empowerment, and her agency which make up her self-ethic, and to serve as the ultimate frame of her self-account.

She was very proud to tell me that because her husband died before finishing the house, she finished it herself, or at least paid for the materials and labour through the money she made sewing or selling spice (cinnamon). Her ability to maintain her self-respect, and herself, in spite of the men she encountered, was very important in her account. She portrayed herself as the agent, rather than the victim. Her account shows her refusal to be victimized, as she left as soon as there was a show of bad treatment, in all three cases. She even goes so far as to defy some of the common criteria for respectability to preserve her autonomy: for example, she disdained the father of her first child when he came to finally claim the child. Her life involves strategic options for self-support that reflect a striving for autonomy, notably with respect to men with whom she has been in relationships: staying with the family of origin, migration for paid labour, and working as a seamstress, are all used as alternatives to dependency on a man. Melanie still sews for a living, and sells cinnamon from her land. Occasionally, she rents out a room in her house. Her brother can no longer help her, as he is almost totally blind, and so she cares for him. Her life choices have thus been derived from both economic considerations and ethical aims, conditioned by her relatively high socio-economic standing.

Helena

Another woman, Helena, who was seventy-two at the time of my interview with her, recounted, as part of her life story, her marriage gone wrong and how she reacted to it. Helena, whose account is also referred to in Chapter 4, was raised in a poor family of ten children, with few resources. She was the eldest of her mother's children, and grew up having a great deal of responsibility for her younger siblings, which prevented her from obtaining much schooling. Her

This confirms again the expectations, often unfulfilled, of patriarchy.

mother's husband, the father of her siblings, was not her biological father and she does not describe a warm relation with him. She was sent out as a young woman to do domestic work in order to help support the household, and then she went to Roseau, where she had a first child before she met her husband. She and her husband remained in Roseau where they ran a bakery, and Helena had two more children with him. The story she recounts of her relationship with her husband is brief – she spends more time describing her reaction when they broke off the relationship.⁷

Little by little, I improved a bit. I went to Roseau, I met a man, he asked me to love⁸ him. We got married, and I made two children with him. When I left here to go to Roseau, my mother had so many children, I took a young one with me to send to school, and I sent my mother money, before she died.

Helena repeats several times in her narrative that she 'improved'. In the beginning of the narrative segment and in the middle of the section where she explains what happened in her family – she tells how her husband treated her, then talks about being 'improved' and her situation as a baker and as one who could afford to be generous to those in need. This juxtaposition of her explanation of her improved situation, which begins with her going to Roseau, followed by her marriage and having her children (I don't know in which order), in addition to running a successful business is important to understanding her subsequent reaction to what happened. In Chapter 4, Helena's narrative revealed that she had grown up in a situation where cash was effectively unavailable, where even thread had to be made of local fibres, and clothing was fashioned out of old cotton flour sacks. She had virtually no schooling, having been obliged to remain at home to care for younger siblings, and to work outside the home from an early age. To move to Roseau, marry, have children, and become financially successful was quite an achievement for her. The idea of improving or bettering oneself, by increasing one's socio-economic status, by marrying and adhering to values of

⁷ Helena recounted this portion of her narrative to me in Patwa, interspersed with a few English words and phrases. The quoted text is my translation.

⁸ To 'love' in this context means to begin a sexual relationship with a person.

‘respectability’, along with the ability to provide for others less fortunate through sharing, thus promoting egalitarian behaviour, appear to be the values that Helena ascribed to, and within which she formulated her self-ethics. She attained a higher socio-economic status than she had before, and the fact that she was married only served to emphasize her ‘respectability’. However, this event in her life brought about a turning point (Bruner 1994) where she was led to re-evaluate her life.

My husband never beat me, he never raised a hand on me, but he beat me without ever touching me. Okay. Right. I had people who worked for me, for me to survive. I improved a little, like that I had people working for me night and day, I was making bread, I improved my situation. I made bread, I gave people bags,⁹ I gave them flour, bread that I couldn’t sell, that I couldn’t keep, I gave to those who needed it. Okay, right. My little sister who was going to school, when my husband’s and my last child was three months old and suckling, my husband got my little sister pregnant. That is a big lash. I could crazy. I could mad. Understand me?

When this event occurred, Helena’s life turned around. Her husband left her and the three children, and she developed an eating disorder (although it is not clear in which order these events occurred). Her self-image and her self-ethics, portrayed in her narrative, brusquely transformed. Helena was manifestly devastated. In another interview, she described to me how she lived, and told me her husband liked to drink and ‘run women’. She put up with this, even though she experienced it as violence, being hit without being touched, as she says. But when her husband impregnated her little sister, she could not accept it. She began to eat uncooked rice, and *toluma* (arrowroot). This appears to be a self-punishment, though I do not want to speculate on the symbolic nor the psychoanalytic significance of this behaviour. I will, however, try to understand the social implications, according to moral precepts that were important to her. While she was able to put up with some behaviours of her husband, the fact that he impregnated her sister, who was under her care and who she was sending to

⁹ Flour bags were used to make clothing by people who could not afford to buy cloth.

school, was too much for her to cope with. This contravened at least one moral precept: a young girl should not become impregnated, especially while attending school. That it was her own husband and sister made it even less bearable, especially given the socio-economic position that she had come to occupy, finding herself 'improved'. She had been able to endure the behaviour of her husband up to a certain point, as it was still within acceptable social limits in spite of how she may have felt, and did not undermine her self-respect or her respectability. But when her sister became pregnant, Helena felt she had failed in her task as guardian, betraying her mother's trust. That it should be her husband who put her in that position was again a betrayal, this time of the trust she held in her husband, who embarrassed her by impregnating her sister. Her descent was complete when her husband left her.

I could go crazy... understand me?. God helped me. I don't drink rum. I don't drink poison, I don't smoke. But I used to do something, I will tell you. You see rice, rice. I couldn't boil it to eat it. I ate it raw. More it have *saloperie* [dirt] in it, is more I eat it. I telling you. You see *toloman*, you make arrowroot from it. I could eat a pint, a '*chopine*', like that, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Okay. When I went poopoo, it was like when a bird goes poopoo, *caca* then, *wespè visay ou* [with all due respect], it was whiter than the blouse you have on. True. I telling you. It was white. It was only *toloman* with rice that I could eat. It was white as if when it mixed with water, it melted. You understand me. I pray, I pray.

Helena found solace and the resolution to her problem in her faith. She would walk to one of three Catholic churches in the Roseau area almost every day, to pray or just to sit.

Helena: I would go into the church, make the sign of the cross. I would not go to confess, but I like to pray. The children go to school for me to come back for me to meet them. Sometimes I don't know what I go and do as if I walk too much, I tired, I don't what for me to do. I was embarrassed, you understand. I had no mother for me to talk to, I hadn't got big sister for me to talk to, you understand me. Because of all this, I embarrassed. I just go and pray. Sometimes I pray, and sometimes I don't say nothing. I was just sitting down, I was tired. I just sitting there and I resting, then I going back.

Robbyn: You didn't try to talk to the priest?

Helena: I don't tell the priest nothing. I talk in my heart. I never sit there and confess to no one. When you sit down and you confess to people, tell them your trouble, tomorrow something happen to you and they can tell you, you were like that, you were like that, you were like that, with disdain, with your words after. You talk to God. God will understand.

Helena felt 'embarrassed' by what had happened to her, humiliated and ashamed. Telling someone – other than a close family member like her mother or elder sister – would only put her in an even more vulnerable position and she would risk further humiliation. Her pride drove her to 'conceal' her problem from the damage it could cause her through gossip. The concealment helped to preserve not only her self-esteem and respect, but also her autonomy. Her only solace was her faith.

So anyway, one day I kneel down, I say, When I eat it, I eat it, I eat it, I say '*Bon Dieu*' – for me alone you know. Tell me Lord, why do I eat rice like that now. Help me. I ask God, I don't know why I eating it like that. If it is necessary for me to eat it, let me continue eat it. If it is not necessary for me to eat it, make me stop to eat it. You understand me. Okay. And Miss, it get away from me. I forget that. I don't eating it again. Neither the rice – I eating rice when it cooked – but I don't eat *toloman* again! [laughter].

I go with it like that, I go with it like that, I go with it like that. And I have strength now. I have strength, I have strength. You see I well now, and the way I used to feel before, I am stronger. Plenty, plenty, plenty better. So that is why you have to have faith.

Her illness was a test of her faith, and by reinvigorating her faith, she regained her strength. It is thus through this transformational experience that Helena became empowered. She decided to renounce her life in town, going back to living a life of poverty in her natal village, and admonished people who flaunted their material wealth, forgetting from where they came (see her narrative in Chapter 4). She refused to continue to use her husband's surname, even though they were still legally married. She reverted to her maiden name after they were separated, as though in a move to reappropriate her 'self', as she had been prior to

her marriage to him, shedding the life that had become so painful to her. She moved back to La Plaine, to live virtually alone on some land she purchased after the sale of the bakery, although when she was younger, she would take in children, including her own grandchild who lived with her in the 1980s. She made a little money selling sweets and drinks by the bus stop and by the Police Station when the magistrate came for the bi-weekly court day in La Plaine, somehow eking out a living. Her two daughters lived in Roseau, one working as a store manager. I do not know if the children helped her financially; they may have given her money, but there was no material evidence to that effect, as she did not spend money on herself or on improving her residence, and did not eat well.

The narrated experiences of Melanie and Helena both diverge and overlap, in the way in which they position themselves, as agent or as victim, and in the moral statements they make, which indicate the way they locate themselves in relation to men. This positioning enters into the formulation of a self-ethics, narrated in retrospect, as they reconstruct the events that they find important to their respective lives' unravelling. Helena tells of a much different experience than Melanie: unlike the latter, she endured poor treatment from her husband for several years, probably out of both economic necessity and pride – she had children to support, and had 'improved' her socio-economic position. But more important in her self-construction was the aspect of duty: as a child she had always been compliant, according to her childhood account (see Chapter 5), and until this turn of events, she had continued to fulfill her duty towards her mother by taking in her sister, and towards her husband by remaining as his wife, even though he treated her unfairly. Fulfilling her duty within an economy of respect that involved first her family of origin and then her husband was ultimately, for Helena, the driving force behind her remaining with her husband. When she could no longer do so, she became ill. Her situation had 'improved', but at the cost of her duty. She was therefore obliged to choose between a self-ethic of 'improvement' in which she would be focussed on grooming her socio-economic status, and her sense of duty and respect which had been honed throughout her

childhood and had conditioned her relations within her natal family and towards her husband, as well as, once in a position of economic ease, towards those worse off than herself. This contradiction was too much for her to bear.

Melanie, in contrast to Helena, construed herself as agent of her own life, in control of her destiny. According to her narrative, it was she who made choices to leave or stay with men. She prized her ability to choose, especially to reject men, and builds her narrative and her self-ethic around the cultivation of autonomy and self-will. Even though Melanie was (and still is) obliged to work for a living, first as a domestic when she went abroad, then sewing and selling some produce from the land, her autonomy came more easily than that of others and was more readily maintained because of her origins in a relatively well-off family. In spite of how she describes herself, however, she was not totally in control of the path her life took, as the relations she had with men incited her to take particular actions she might otherwise not have taken (especially migrating to another island). Family obligations, in the form of duty towards her parents, caused her to return. She did not engage a discourse of 'improving' herself, as she is already of a relatively higher socio-economic status than many in the village. Because of this, she is able to foster an ethic of autonomy and freedom from both a necessity to adhere to rules that would 'improve' one's standing, and from the control of a man, other than her father.

For women of this period – those who grew up in the pre-World War II years – their choices were limited, given that most had little education. Few were able to go into a career such as nursing, because most did not finish elementary school let alone obtain a high school education, and there were few places in such training programmes. For most women, having children was inevitable, and their subsequent actions were usually constrained by the necessity to procure means for supporting their children and themselves. The lot in life of women depended on their socio-economic class, often confounded with race; hard work in the fields, as a domestic, or as an entrepreneur like Helena; the support of men; or migration to work elsewhere, usually as a domestic. These choices were constrained and

supported by moral discourses of behaviour, including gender roles and expectations, as well as configurations of kin relations, consanguinal and affinal, and the expectations, rights and duties that characterize them.

Althea

The preceding two narratives tell of difficult relationships. To reiterate a point mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the women who talked about their relationships were mostly those who were or had at one time been very dissatisfied. However, not all women were unhappy in their relationships with conjugal partners. Althea, who had all but the last of her children on her own, married the father of her last child, and over thirty years later, they are still together. They even renewed their vows some years ago. Althea married fairly late – she was about forty years old when they married, and her husband was a few years older. Another long-lasting marriage is that of Sophia, who is several years older than her husband and is still with him after over forty years of marriage. And there are many more ‘seasoned’ couples that may have had rough spots along the way, or perhaps married late, but who are still together.

Althea’s life was difficult, as she already had seven children, five of whom were grown or in their teens when she met her husband. She had raised these children on her own, she recounted, with help from her mother and sometimes a sister, as well as from the older children. She bore five of her children with one man who left her to marry another woman, and did not provide support for his children afterwards. Althea maintained her family with what she could grow and catch. I asked her if it was more difficult for a woman to find someone to marry once she had several children, especially with different men. Both she and her husband were present while we were talking, and both responded:

Althea: Let me tell you something. You loving the person, you never know that the person will not marry with you. The man give you five children and never married with you. You understand, leaving you there. And go and get another person and married with. And then at that time another person would pick you up. Even at that time two men make children with you, three men, and they never married you.

Robbyn: Why is that?

Her husband interjected:

Lewis: Because you are unlucky.

Althea: Unlucky that is all.

Lewis: Unlucky that is all.

Althea: You are unlucky not to get married, the person fool you.

Althea and her husband concur that when a man does not marry the woman with whom he has several children, it is a matter of bad luck, of being with a person who would 'fool' you, one who would turn around and go with someone else. There is no fault attributed to the woman by either Lewis or Althea, it simply comes down to a matter of chance in choosing the right person. I wondered if having several children with different men would make the chances of the woman finding a permanent mate even more difficult, as other sources had suggested this, but Althea and Lewis did not corroborate it, possibly because their own situation belied it.

Robbyn: Is it that after you have two or three children a man doesn't want to marry you?

Althea: Yes, if you are lucky enough you will find a man married you. Men that time ... no good you married then divorced next time. You have seen misery already, so many of them, you does respect your husband more because you have seen misery. But the person more independent. She [the woman] meet you [the husband] with no children so she can do whatever she feel like with you. Cause she meet you with no children. More independent. But if the person meet you with many children, so you respect the man that married you, some of them, not all of them. Some of them, like my husband, because I know how he meet me. I know my misery. But some of them forget their 'marks of foot' [the path they trod]. I don't forget that because I know my misery. I know where I was, and I had my own children, so I had to respect him, and love him more than I should. He raise up my children with me. Not the big children, he don't raise up my big children.

Althea replied that she felt that when one has raised children, and has experienced a difficult life, one appreciates more one's spouse. Althea still had two young children with her when she met Lewis, and then had another child with him. He helped her to raise all three, including the two who were not his. Because her life had been so difficult before, she commented that it was easier for her to respect her husband now. While marriage is desirable, especially with the father of one's children, it is not necessary to marry the same man one had children with, and one may even appreciate the husband more when one has been through a rough time with other men who fathered children but did not continue to support them after the relationship ended. As well, marriage is not something to be taken lightly, only to end in divorce. While divorce is becoming more frequent, marriage is still anticipated as a lifelong choice.

Althea: But I enjoy my good life. I never enjoy good life with my children's father. When I meet him [husband], I make good time. If I say thing that is bad against him, God will punish me. No, no, no. God will punish me. He raise up Bennett and Nicole. Is how I meet him, with these children, like your son. You understand, he send them to school. But the others were big.

For Althea, even though there may have been difficulties with her husband, she had to overlook them because of the fact that he was there for her, that he helped to raise two children that were not his own when their own father would not, and that her life had been much worse, economically, before. Marriage late in life, after going through the harsh experiences of raising children alone, made one appreciate it more, and be more committed to making it work. Althea's perspective on relationships is one of quiet acceptance of the man's decision to stay or to go – the woman is just there, and must endure, raising her children on her own, unless she is lucky and finds a man who would stay with her, and marry her. Marriage in her view is not so much a matter of respectability, as of making life a little less difficult from an economic point of view. Marriage is also not something a woman has much choice about, in Althea's perspective, especially once she has children with a man. It is more a question of 'luck', or, phrased

another way, the man's choice to stay. Althea's perception differs from that of Melanie, who conferred herself, rather than the men, with agency and therefore assumed power over her own destiny in her self-narrative. For Althea, autonomy is not something to which she aspired: rather, autonomy is something that was enforced upon her in the sense that she was left to raise her children virtually on her own.

For both of these women, their experience with partners and other men was an important, even central aspect of their self-accounts. Through their discussion of their relationships with men, these women positioned themselves with respect to their own expectations and disappointments, laying out what they perceived to be the 'patriarchal bargain', or simply, the way in which gender relations should be negotiated, and the result, positive or negative, of this negotiation. For these women, this negotiation was played out along several lines that have already been discussed, including autonomy, the importance of consanguinity over affinal relations, an economy of respect, and the onus to 'improve' one's situation. These negotiations of gender relations reveal the partiality or ambivalence of patriarchal relations within the family as the men these women encountered declined the role that would position them as family head and provider, or indeed, refuse its imposition.

7.2 Striving for Empowerment

Beatrice

The following narrative, unlike the previous three, portrays a woman's successful relationship, in which she recounts the long and difficult path she travelled, and the her trepidations, hardships, and subsequent empowerment she experienced.

Beatrice, younger than the three previous women, was forty-eight when I interviewed her. She was the eldest girl of her mother's six children. Like Helena, she had to care for her young siblings as well as for her aging grandparents while her mother was working as a seamstress (see her narrative in Chapter 5). Beatrice

reports that she made a conscious decision not to repeat her mother's experience, but to have all her children with one man, which, she surmised, would afford her respect and ensure maintenance by the father. Her road to obtain the goal she held was a difficult one. She had her first child at the age of nineteen, while she was still living at home – in fact, she had the first four while living with her mother. By the time she gave birth to the fifth child, she had acquired her own house, on family land adjacent to her mother's house.

At first, all was well in her relationship. She gave birth to one child, and soon a second was on the way. While she was pregnant with her second child, however, her partner let her know that he was also expecting a child with another woman.

I fell in love with Clayton, and I had a first child two months less twenty years. Nineteen and ten months I was when I made Lionel. He was nice to me for the first child. When I got pregnant with Kerwin, one day he said to me, do you know that Agnes is pregnant. I looked at him, I said 'what'. He said okay, I joking, I joking, it was just a joke. But I realized there was something going on, so I questioned him until yes. And from that, he started pulling away, sometimes home, sometimes not home. So from that I have hard times.

With two families on the go, it was difficult for the father to devote himself full-time to either; at this point, he began to spend more time with the other woman and provided very little support for his child with Beatrice. He did not totally abandon the relationship, but Beatrice was left to take care of and support her first child, while pregnant with the second. What Beatrice does not mention here is that, as she was still living at her mother's, she continued to care for her younger sisters. At the time Beatrice's first child was born, the oldest was just six, and the youngest was but one year old!

Beatrice had two more children with the same man, and soon became pregnant with their fifth child. In the same period, the father had two children with other women, one with the same woman as previously, and the other with a different woman.

Beatrice: After that, he got back again, and I make Alice and Katia. But when I was pregnant with Kervel, that was my fifth child, oh boy.

Robbyn: He made one child with Agnes?

Beatrice: Two. One while I was pregnant with Kerwin and Frank. Frank is just before Kervel. A year before Kervel. Just imagine, I have two children, in a year and six months, Alice and Katia, and he had three, so he had another girl. Three in a year and six months.

With four young children and a fifth on the way, Beatrice recounted some of the difficulties she faced. She is not clear about whether the father of her children was present for some periods, as she only recounts the times he treated her badly. For her to have had so many children with him, he must have been present and providing in some way for the children, at least part of the time. However, his interests were still divided, and Beatrice felt she was not receiving the help she needed or deserved from him. She was left to care for her children and to provide their food, doing all the heavy work herself in spite of her pregnancy, sometimes getting others to help her.

Beatrice: When I was pregnant with Kervel, he happened to be still in love with Agnes. He would not take me on. He would not do things for me. I had to go cut the wood to cook the food. Lionel and Kerwin were smaller, so they would come with me to help me. Because I could not carry load, but I would go and try to cut the wood to cook the food. I saw what you would call misery, but I would not tell anybody.

Robbyn: All this time he was seeing Agnes too?

Beatrice: No. He had stopped, but after a long time, he went back again with Agnes. And one day, a friend who visit the house, a friend said to Clayton, you know Clayton, wouldn't you be ashamed to have to get a friend to call the nurse for her? He started sleeping at home again. I made a garden, he never helped me. When I had big stomach, I asked people, I made a garden, people helped me too. And I make Kervel that Saturday morning, he was the first person to go to that garden, to get food to cook that day. Because he had no choice, because nobody to prepare it. I had Kervel Saturday morning, Saturday he stayed home, Sunday he gone.

Beatrice stresses the fact that the father of her children would not do anything for her – she had to get wood herself, and get other people to make her garden with her. It is expected that the man with whom one is in a relationship will be the one

who will help out with different tasks for the woman – to the point that, when a man is seen doing things around the yard for a woman, gossip will spread about them, as though they are having a relationship. Her frustration was not so much the fact that he had another relationship, but that it prevented him from fulfilling what she perceived, through her cultural understandings, as his role towards her.

Beatrice: And he would stay days not coming home, just passing. What happened, I did not know it but Agnes had a bus to carry passengers, for him to drive. So he had his bus, so he had nothing to do with me, because I had nothing to give him, only children.

Robbyn: Agnes bought him a bus!

Beatrice: But not for himself, to make money for her. Like she was using him. For him to drive it.

The other woman had found a way to employ Beatrice's children's father, to manipulate him so that his loyalty would shift to her. Beatrice had nothing to entice him with, only the children he had made with her. He seldom slept at her house any more, and when he did, it was on a mattress in the sitting room. He had little to do with his children, and would refuse to give them any money. He would only bring some of the necessities to Beatrice and her children. She had to make him a list, and wait for the bus to pass in the morning on its way to Roseau. He would stop, and take the list, without a word, dropping the goods off on the way back in the afternoon. For him, he was fulfilling his role of maintaining his children, but for Beatrice, it was not enough.

So he keep on driving a bus for Agnes, he wouldn't take us on, sometimes I have to get up in the early hours when I hear him passing to go Boetica to pick up passengers, to make a little list, sugar, flour and so on, what are basic needs because I cannot ask him what I would like to for the children, just little things. He would not even a dollar for me in my hands. So I have to get up and bring that list for him, on the street, and then if he would see something was going on he would stop, and I would give it to him, I wouldn't even greet anybody. I would just give it to him and he would drive off. But one thing again, if he goes somewhere and gets meat, gets fresh meat, or fish, somebody gives him a nice yam, or a dasheen, he would not take it to Agnes's house. He would bring it to my house.

Because at that time I was living at my house. I had a little wooden house, I had.

Providing maintenance for one's children is expected of men. Men and women are often at odds about the meaning of 'maintenance'. For men, it usually means providing for their children certain necessities, when they are able. The main responsibility for children's well-being still falls on the mother, however. As Lazarus-Black (1995) has stated, fathering is very much carried out as an event, rather than an everyday practice. In La Plaine, this takes the form of school clothing, shoes for the children, or food, but some men hesitate to give money for fear that the mother will spend it on something or someone other than his children. Beatrice's children's father supplied much of the food, but refused to furnish any cash for other commodities. This way of distributing goods for the maintenance of children both places the man in control, as the woman is kept in a state of expectation, which is never fulfilled, in anticipation that the 'male provider' ideal will become a reality, and at the same time limits his responsibility towards his children because the assurance of their survival depends ultimately on the mother. For Beatrice, who did not wish to fall into the same predicament as her mother and whose expectations were to have a nuclear family, deliberately had all her children with the same man, but his part-time participation was not adequate.

The turning point in her account of her relationship happens when she spoke to him in a prophetic manner, telling him he would come home to her, humiliated. This turning point represents a transformation in Beatrice's life that is implicitly expressed as a shift in the relations of power between them.

So I said to him to one day, when I saw him carry his clothes, that he would come in the night, when he come from Roseau, pass, take a shirt and a pants, put it on the bus, and go. So that he would take it to Agnes's house. And I said to him. You have a vehicle to carry your clothes away. But when you are ready to come back, you won't have a vehicle, you will pass Kako Kabrit, a track by the river, a precipice, you see, you pass across, you go down to the river, and you come up the hill. I said to him, you will pass Kako Kabrit, because you won't have a vehicle to drive

when you want to come back. Man, that was the biggest curse I ever gave to him. I did not believe that going to happen, I just said that. He just look at me. Robbyn, after a long while, running the bus, he started coming home a little more often, he come more often like he was moving closer to us, you understand. He would not stay so long by that girl again, he would sleep there, but he would not stay as much as he used to.

The children's father began to spend more time with her. During carnival, one night, she went out to enjoy the music and dancing in the main part of the village. He was there as well, and wanted to bring her back home in the bus when he was going, along with some other people from the same area. She told him since she did not come with him, she did not need to go back with him, and stayed at the festivities. He was angry and jerked the bus, so that those riding in it were sure something would happen to the bus. The next week, the bus broke down, and then the driver, her children's father, fell sick. He remained with Beatrice, and she nursed him back to health. His son from a previous relationship came to visit when he heard his father was sick.

I told him if he knows all that I am going through with his father. He tell me yes, yes he knows everything. So I said, let me tell you, after all that I went through, today he brought all his joy and all he had for the woman. And he bring for me sickness. I am still taking care of him, *but*, tell him if he go again, I am over, Agnes will take care of him. Never in my life again. Clayton have not turn back.

At this point, it is Beatrice who takes control of the relationship. Up to this point, she was at the whim of her children's father, who came and went as he pleased, as she was dependent on him for whatever he chose to provide. After this incident, her decision to not endure his treatment any more both helped her to fulfill her ethical aim (to have her family, husband and children together) and to relinquish it. As long as her self-fulfillment and perception were embedded in the idea of having the father of her children present and meeting her expectations as a provider at all costs, Beatrice felt disempowered. Paradoxically, once she let go of this ideal, her dependency ended, and her partner became more reliable. At the same time, she asserted herself within another ethic of self, that of autonomy, finding a balance between the two.

When he went there for underpants, for underwears of his, he came down with a *Chronicle*, wrapped in a *Chronicle*, and you know *Chronicle* paper is not strong. So you know it is going to tear and you going to see it. When he went back for, he had somebody's vehicle he went back for his clothes, she met him on the street, she didn't go back and give him his clothes. You know who brought down his clothes for him, Kervel my son. I told him, you know I said to you, when you ready to bring your clothes down, you will not have a vehicle, you will pass in the valley. When you reach at her home, you will not have a vehicle. And from since then, I have to say he become one of the good husbands.

Beatrice and Clayton married, and have since have made their life together as partners, pooling their resources and building a beautiful new house. While Beatrice depicts herself as not having enough support from her husband in the earlier days of their relationship, she was not unresourceful: she gardened herself, growing staple crops of dasheen and tannia as well as other garden crops. However, in spite of her ability to provide for her children and her relative autonomy, she did not value this 'ethical' choice, but preferred to position herself as a woman in need of the support of her man.

Yet, once she 'had' her man, she pursued objectives that placed her in a position of financial security, and possible autonomy. In the 1980s, she became involved in a pig raising project funded by the French government, and along with three other women, still participates in the pig cooperative, raising her pigs for slaughter to buy materials for the house. As well, while she is married, she undertook steps to ensure her security, following a seminar given by the Women's Bureau regarding women's rights, and subsequently making sure her house was in her own name. Now, she tells me, she is waiting for her mortgage to be paid off, and then she will be happy. Her husband, she says, brings all his money to *her* house now, and she manages all the financial matters. This compensates partially for her prior bad experience, but she still expresses hurt and resentment regarding the way her husband treated her in the past.

Beatrice built her life narrative around the ideal of 'improving' herself, in which she juxtaposed her adult life to her experience of her youth. This meant not

living in the way her mother had been obliged to, struggling to raise her children on her own. Beatrice's expectations grew both from seeing the difficulties her mother experienced and being part of them, and from dominant discourses about marriage and family that were evoked in understandings of class, religious preoccupations, etc. Rather than turn to another man for support and possibly have children with him, thus cutting off her chances of returning with the first man, she chose to set her sights on having her children with one man to better her chances of marriage to him and of achieving a higher, 'improved' socio-economic status in the village.

Only at the beginning of her narrative about her relationship does she mention 'love', when she says she fell in love with the man. However, her frustration throughout the relationship, while not explicitly stated as such, has to do with his lack of love towards her. 'Love' is expressed through 'treatment' in what could be called an 'economy of love': how one is treated, in keeping with local expectations of gender roles and fulfillment of obligations, is the measure of love, rather than an openly emotional expression of sentiments. When Clayton did not meet with Beatrice's expectations regarding his treatment of her, she began to feel frustrated. Her frustration was made worse because her expectations went beyond simple treatment. Many women in her place would have found another man to love, rather than put up with poor treatment. She was caught in her own web of contradictions, both because of her several children with him, and because her own expectations centred on an ideal of respectability that included financial improvement and the nuclear family that she was not at first ready to relinquish. Where for Melanie, autonomy was the driving aim of her narrative, for Beatrice, autonomy was at first perceived as a lack, as her unfortunately necessary condition because she lacked support. However, after her 'turning point' she came to perceive it as her empowerment.

Beatrice's relationship was very much tied to her family economy, as well as the symbolic capital, in terms of respectability, that it offered her. Relationships of all kinds were integrated with the economy: one cannot

dissociate love from economy, nor social relations from economic concerns – they are inextricably interwoven in these accounts. When one falls in ‘love’, one enters into an economic relationship, in the case of the women cited above, one that complements the economy of kin relations. ‘Love’ is equivalent to the sharing of material necessities and care, carrying with it the expectation of certain rights and obligations to be fulfilled by the self and by the other partner, as Beatrice remarked in a segment that appeared in Chapter 4, a paradigm that is disappearing with the accumulation of material things. However, there needs to be a balance between them: when the economic side takes precedence, some people are offended. Melanie seems to have felt that the ‘police’ she was seeing was taking advantage of her affections, and declined to do his laundry. Beatrice, on the other hand, felt that her boyfriend did not show enough love because he did not support his children according to her expectations.

Beatrice's narrative was coherent and well constructed, as though it was something she had told previously to others, or at least had thought about extensively. The narrative was developed in a perspective that left out the details and events that were not pertinent to how she *wanted* to portray herself. This became evident in the first part of her life narrative, explored in Chapter 5, where she only provided information that supported her self-portrayal as one who had lived a miserable life. Only when questioned did she speak of instances where she had some amusement.

Beatrice's adult life was built around the achievement of status, through marriage and the improvement of her socio-economic standing, a different kind of respectability than that of her predecessors, one that promoted the advancement of self over ‘being on a level’ with others. Her self-ethic, her guiding thread, as portrayed by this narrative, is in part the achievement of this goal, but her narrative is also about self-empowerment, through the appropriation of her autonomy, so that she is now in a position to leave her husband if she wants, or so she says. Beatrice moved from dependency and the expectation of patriarchy, to the achievement of her goal, and independence as the pending and possible

rejection of her husband if the occasion should arise – in other words, a shift in the power in the negotiation of the patriarchal bargain occurred.

A younger woman's experience and opinions are the focus of the next discussion. While her experience is much the same as the other women, her situation and choices differ from theirs.

7.3 Interstitial Locations

Betty

Betty was a young woman of thirty-one at the time of my interviews with her. Betty grew up in a different village and met Armstrong, the father of four of her five children, in Roseau. When she was pregnant with her second child with him, they moved to La Plaine. They have moved around considerably, living in various rented houses, and for a time in a dwelling he built on his land, far from the village, which was difficult as they did not own a vehicle. When her eldest daughter began school, they had to move back to the village. Her four children are young: the eldest was nine and the youngest just under one year. Betty had several health problems during and after her pregnancies, and spent time in hospital. When she was there, she adopted one of the evangelical faiths, she said, because the people prayed for her, came to see her in hospital, and were friendly and supportive. However she never gave up completely her Catholic background, and is raising her children in the Catholic Church. The following excerpts of my conversations with her reveal her opinions and beliefs regarding her relationship and marriage.

They [the evangelists] want you to get married and thing like that, they believe you cannot live in sin all the time. So they pushing me, and once they come up and see Armstrong to talk to him. He wouldn't stay there. He don't want nobody tell him when to get married. I say they can go and talk to you, is you, you know, you can hear what they have to say. When they come and talk to my sister, I listen what they saying, it's not bad they telling you.

While all churches encourage their members to marry, the so-called 'Christian' churches – those churches that are not of the mainstream denominations

(Catholic, Anglican, or Methodist) found in Dominica – strongly solicit marriage at a young age on the part of their congregations. Some even penalize their members if they are known to be actively engaged in a sexual relationship without being married. They will first talk to the members to encourage them to marry, then, if they continue to have the relationship out of wedlock, they may even prohibit them from attending services, or expel them from the church. Betty's partner did not even want to listen to what the evangelists had to say about marriage. While she believes that one should agree to hear what they have to say, Betty also thinks that she is not ready for marriage, because the conditions she feels necessary for marriage have not been met:

I haven't ready to get married. I don't want to be married and have to be renting. To married and have your own place. To have my own little shack, I have my own place, but to married and be renting, I don't like it.

Betty feels that in order to marry, the couple should have their house, and not be renting from someone else. Her views are in accordance with the discussion of literature on marriage and the family in Chapter 2. This pattern of marriage occurring once financial security is attained is common throughout the Caribbean. Late marriage is not simply a matter of economic security, however, it is also a matter of maturity and commitment to make it work, as Althea states in her narrative. Betty also admonishes hurrying into marriage before one is ready, because it is sure to fail. She gives the example of a friend.

A friend of mine she get married in Christian, and up to now, her husband can't see her, and she herself cannot see her husband, her husband go one way, and she herself going another way. And she say she regret, young Christian people who encourage her to marry. She regret she get married before she was ready. She can't see her husband, her husband can't see her. She say she regret her whole life. I don't want religion to force me to marry. They can talk to me about it, just tell me about this, but don't force me. And now she not even going to their Church. I don't want that. I want when you say I married, I live happy with my husband and my children. I don't want to see I there and my husband there. It not looking nice. That's why I say you have to take time always to marry.

Marriage, in her view, as in Althea's, is considered to be a permanent relationship, and the move to marry must be taken seriously. Marriage in this perspective becomes associated with not only with economic stability but also with a certain maturity, and corresponds to a part of the life course that does not necessarily include child-bearing.

While Betty's views are widespread, the 'Christian' churches are becoming more popular, gaining in membership every year. There are several denominations in La Plaine. Not all women or men share Betty's or Armstrong's opinions with respect to the church and marriage, but many do have a difficult time accepting or keeping to the morality of wedlock before sex, even though they do recognize the churches' other teachings, especially certain doctrines that differentiate them from Catholicism.

Betty's rejection of marriage except under certain circumstances reflects a concern with both autonomy and 'improvement' of her socio-economic situation. Marriage, for her, is a constraint that should only be enacted if the conditions are right, including economic stability and a good relationship. Further in her narrative, Betty expresses her concern with leaving her present relationship because three of her children are four girls. Remaining with their father, for her, would ensure that they would not be abused sexually by a stepfather. Her concern, however, does not reflect that of Beatrice, who remained with the father of her children for his support and her self-improvement.

Magdalene

Magdalene was twenty-seven, a single mother of three children. The oldest, a boy, was nine, and her two little girls were six and five years old. She lived in a rented house in the village, and did not work, except to sell a few items she brought back from trips off the island. She did not grow any of her own food either. The boy was from an early relationship that did not last, and her relationship with the father of the girls had been violent and finally ended when she retaliated. Neither father provides any support for their children. I asked

Magdalene why the fathers did not support the children and she responded as follows:

Magdalene: You know some guys, as long as you're not with them, they just stop maintaining the kids.

Robbyn: The father doesn't recognize them any more?

Magdalene: No, no. Not a sweetie, not a hello, nothing.

Robbyn: Why do they do that?

Magdalene: The boys? Well, some of them well, some of them they kind of, um, punish the kids because of the mother, they say like if they cannot get the mother then they don't give the kids anything.

She described the father's behaviour towards their children as a form of control: by retracting support, the man hopes to hurt the woman, as a kind of reverse blackmail. This correlates with the experience of Beatrice to some extent: when she felt dependent upon the support of her children's father, he was able to set the limits of his support and thereby exert some control over her.

Linda: And some parents, some women they fall for that because they really need what the man have to offer them for the kids so that they will do anything. They will still go with the man.

Robbyn: No matter how he treats them?

Linda: Oh yeah, because I mean they need the help. Because if I have to, I'll go to him, understand, because I need a five dollars from him to buy sugar for the kids, and with him, in order for him to give me the five dollars, then I'll have to be with him, or at least sleeping with him, but sometimes you have got to be tough.

Some women, she says, will stay in a bad relationship because of the economic support for their children, especially if they are afraid the man will stop supporting them if they break off the relationship. It is expected that a man will 'help' a woman with whom he is having a sexual relationship, in addition to supporting his own children. Paradoxically, while this is expected behaviour,

some men complain that women only want to go with them for the support they provide. Support becomes at times the axis along which the relationships between men and women are played out and the point of negotiation of love, autonomy, and responsibility. It also stands in metonymic relation to love: where there is support (money, food, or services), there is assumed to be love, and vice versa. While men provide material support and services, women provide services, such as cooking, laundry, sex, etc.

You know a talk that be like, your mouth split you will eat, your mouth split you will eat. Alright, so I mean my own, their mouth split they will eat. We in Dominica, we get fig all about for nothing. We don't really have to buy food if we don't want. I mean if you really want to buy the food in the shop you will go and buy it, but to me, besides that, the only toughness that is here is that it haven't got enough work, the money is not much. But otherwise, I just decide I'm not doing that again. You love your children, you want to maintain them, you maintain them. Not because of me you have to maintain your kids. You punishing them.

In Dominica, food is plentiful, as is land on which to grow it, hence the idiom 'your mouth split, you will eat'. However, it still requires labour to work the land, since one cannot live only on the bananas, avocados, or mangoes that one picks up off the ground. As well, while one can *survive* on subsistence farming, the way of life has changed, and people want access to commodities they can only procure with cash. While Magdalene iterates this proverb, she does not live only on what she finds on the ground. She told me her children do not like locally grown provisions, but prefer pasta and rice, both imported. So rather than depend on the man with whom she had her children, she has other boyfriends who 'help' her.

Robbyn: So how do you manage now?

Magdalene: Well um, I used to work, I mean if I get a days work I will do it. And well right, right now, I have somebody helping me, my boyfriend. I can't say nothing about him, he taking care of us. Yes mhmm. I mean it's good that I meet him. I can't say nothing right now about him. But he says that he does be tough, eh, tough, tough tough.

Magdalene, like many of the younger women, does not want to work in farming, because, she says, she does not like it. While she was fortunate to attend high school, she was forced to leave because of a family problem, and did not receive her diploma. She told me she would like to work, but that she has no qualifications. In order to improve her qualifications she could take continuing education courses, offered in Roseau, but she finds it difficult to do anything that would take her from home because of her young children.

Magdalene expresses a desire for autonomy in her account, at least from the grip of a bad relationship. However, she looks to men for support, in an 'economy of love' that develops out of deep seated cultural expectations, both of 'man the provider' from dominant discourses of gender relations, and from within local relations of gender and sharing as an exchange of services and goods that make up the social fabric. At the same time, she is caught in the breach created by social and economic transformations: she cannot or will not farm, yet she cannot get a good full-time job as she does not have her high school diploma. She could, as do many women, emigrate, leaving her children behind, but she does not want to leave them as her mother did her. Even then, it would be difficult for her to obtain papers, so she would likely have to work illegally, as do many, in the host country.

Magdalene has decided that she wants to have the amenities of modern life, to 'improve' her life materially, but without the accoutrement of social recognition (respectability). In fact, her solution, while it empowers her by removing her from the control of her children's father, earns her the disdain of the community, as she refuses to work but chooses to live solely from the 'help' of male friends. Magdalene has turned the table of 'love' to the side of economy, the inverse of Melanie's strategy. Her socio-economic position, the push to consume commodities and to have a lifestyle requiring cash, the devalorization of farming and farm products, all had an effect on Magdalene's choice of lifestyle. The regime of sexuality overlaps with that of class and positions women differently with respect to the choices they are able to make regarding their life course.

Janelle

When I met Janelle, she was eighteen and attending post-secondary college in Roseau in a pre-university programme. She would commute to town daily on the bus with other students and workers. She lived with her mother in La Plaine, and was the youngest of four girls and the last still to be living at home. She did not like the village, and some time after I interviewed her, she quit college, found an office job and moved in with her sister in Roseau. Being so young, her experience of relationships was not extensive, and she did not have any children. Nonetheless, she had very strong views on how women should be treated by men, at least in the initial stages of a relationship.

Janelle: From the few local guys I've been out with, it has not been a great experience.

Robbyn: Why?

Janelle: Okay, first of all, they don't know how, I don't know, from my point of view, local guys don't know how to treat local girls right.

Robbyn: Why, in what way?

Janelle: Like most of my friends, I go out with them, we go out to dinner, we go out to movies, and then we go somewhere nice and have a drink, I mean that's it, you bring me home, and call me up next day. But local guys, they expect when they bring you out they want something more from you that you don't want to give them, they want you to always be at their beck and call, is like they owning you. And I cannot deal with that. I don't want to deal with that because I'm just not that type of person. Maybe later, when I'm ready to settle down, somebody can come around and tell me they want me to do that, that... But not right now. So that is why I don't really go out with local guys.

She did not appreciate local young men because they did not meet her expectations of what a date should be. In fact, 'dating' in the way she describes it is not a common activity. Men go out on their own, and so do single women (although they are usually in groups), and they usually meet up at dances or other social events. A lot of the activity of young men consists in standing around, watching young women and speaking to them publicly, often in a joking manner.

If young men have girlfriends, they may have more than one, and it becomes a juggling act to maintain relationships without creating friction. As well, girls do not necessarily want it publicly known that they are seeing a particular man. Clearly, Janelle's view of how young men should treat young women does not correspond to local, especially village, mores. However, her wish to not be "at their beck and call" reflects the attitude of an older woman discussed in this chapter, Melanie, who refused to be dominated by men, and affirms the observations of Henriques (1973 [1949]) who found that women feared marriage would lead to domination by the man, and Cannon who quotes a woman in a visiting union stating "He don't pay the rent or keep his voice low, I'll be washing and ironing for another next week" (1970: 147).

Even though La Plaine doesn't have place to really go out and have a good time, but you could, you have a ride, you have a car or something, you bring, even though it's a place not far, you bring the person, you have a nice dinner, you have a nice drink, a glass of wine, and whatever, and you bring the person home, you call the person up, you tell the person I mean, you make the woman feel good, like she is going with somebody that has manners, that is a nice person. But those guys, from what I have seen, if they bring you out, after they don't want to show you in public, if they going out with you. They do not want people to see, they don't want to be seen with you, it's like they are ashamed of you, or they have too many girls with them, they going out with so many girls they don't want the other girls to see them with you. Not even their wives they want to bring out. It's terrible.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, people often conceal relationships from the public eye to avoid gossip, especially when the relationship is clandestine or even simply casual and the people involved do not want it to be made 'official' through public knowledge. It is often only once there is a child that the relationship becomes open public knowledge (although there may be gossip circulating). The concealment of relationships corresponds to cultural practices described in the previous chapter, and is used as a strategy to maintain the boundaries of self.

I posed the following question to Janelle, regarding young men taking out girls. Her response overrode the objection I made on the basis of cultural

practices, saying that even if there is no money, the man could take the girl for a walk. She complains of a lack of 'romance'.

Robbyn: So do you think that a lot of local young men can really afford to take women out to restaurants, or if that is even common practice here because people don't seem to be, I mean, even when people eat out, they pick up something at a stand, but going to a restaurant just doesn't seem to be part of local ways.

Janelle: I would say most guys, okay if you're not working, and you see a nice girl and you want to go out with the girl, but you haven't got much money, or you know you cannot afford to bring the person in a nice place, but as me, you have to, it doesn't mean you don't have to treat the person nice if you want to go out with the person. If you want to have a second date, go for a walk. Get to know the person, you haven't got to be around so many people. I have never been romanced by a La Plaine guy.

Janelle uses the term 'romance' in the way it has been used commonly in North American or European terms, and corresponds to what she may have seen on television. However, I heard the term 'romantic' used by a young man in La Plaine to mean in the mood for sex. The notion of 'romance' as she understands it is not a common concept for La Plaine people, especially men.

Janelle's expectations of her relationships with men certainly are not in keeping with local mores: the expectation of 'romance' is understood within a paradigm of courtship which is outside the parameters of local conceptions, at least until very recently. First, there are not many places to take young women, unless one has a vehicle, and most young men do not have money for either a vehicle or to treat a girl to a meal or a movie in town. 'Love' as discussed earlier in this study, has been embedded within an economy of sharing and exchange of support, so that courtship might involve a young man carrying out tasks for the young lady or her parents, or bringing her something good to eat, rather than taking her out, and he would expect to have sexual relations with her and eventually for her to carry out tasks for him, such as cooking and washing.

The 'patriarchal bargain' that Janelle projects is one that involves little if any input on her part, except her presence. There is no question of rights and obligations, except on the part of the man, who she expects to 'romance' her, and

to whom she would like to offer no commitment. Her position suggests a shift in the conceptualization of gender relations among young people, many of whom who have moved outside the economy of relations that maintained the household and community that their parents and predecessors experienced. As well, for girls like Janelle, going out with a young man will not necessarily result in pregnancy if they engage in sexual relations because there is access to different types of contraception. However, unlike Janelle, young girls do not always employ the necessary precautions, and teen pregnancies are rampant. Janelle's approach to men is not the dominant one yet, as young girls who become pregnant usually must end their education, and find themselves in the same position as their mothers and grandmothers (with children and few resources), with the difference that both the economy and the values associated with certain practices such as farming have changed. While for young women like Janelle, her independence is easier to ensure because of her education and her caution regarding pregnancy; others, like Magdalene, may become even more dependent upon male support than their predecessors, since they have neither the skills to obtain work, nor the desire (or the knowledge) to farm.

Janelle's decision not to become involved with a young man at this point in her life is reflective of some other young women, such as Ruth whose narrative appears below, who demonstrated a desire to develop their careers before becoming involved in relationships with men or at least prior to having children; this is by no means the most common trend yet, although it reflects the dominant discourse that has been endorsed by parents who wish their children to succeed, giving precedence to education of children before they have children of their own. This is supported and promoted by national images of femininity projected through beauty pageants, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The three young women whose narratives have been examined here show different ways in which the discursive frameworks elaborated in this thesis have been engaged. Betty and Magdalene speak of their relationships within a framework that includes a concern with economy: for Betty, it is through the

moral discourse of the 'Christian' church that the link between love and economy is disrupted and a contradiction is created, while for Magdalene a problem arises when the economic support by a man is used to control the woman's sexuality. Although Magdalene is aware of this and criticizes it, she still engages in this path. Neither of these women has completed high school, and both have children they must support. Janelle, on the other hand, is differently positioned, as she graduated and has no children, and hopes to pursue a career. This shows that while changes are occurring that allow some women to advance their career and to avoid the difficulties of survival that favour dependency on a male partner, not all are able to benefit. The rift that is being created positions some women in the middle class, those who conform to the modality of 'improve' through education, while others remain in the interstice.



Two local women and a child, La Plaine, 1999.

Projected Trajectories

What are the prospects for the future for women in La Plaine? Older women interviewed, because of their age, tended not to project into the future, but stayed within an attempt to resolve their lives through the narrative they told. Most were content to live out their lives as they were, having attained what they

believed was possible. Middle-aged and younger women, however, were still immersed in constructing their lives, some more conscientiously than others.

Beatrice, despite the rocky road she travelled, has achieved her goal; now, she only wants to pay off her house and finish raising her two youngest sons – all the rest have left the familial home. Nicole, on the other hand, has expressed frustration, as she still lives in a rented house and does not have an income although her common-law spouse practices a trade and makes enough for them to get by. She, like Betty, says she will not marry because she lives in a rented house, even though she and her partner have been together for over twenty years. In conversations, she expressed her desire to have her own house, and even showed me where she would like to build it. Although Nicole has vocational training, she only worked briefly after finishing her schooling, at a hotel in Roseau, and for a short time when she migrated to another island. She has carried out various tasks over the years, including farming, baking bread in a local cooperative, making and selling candy, selling fried chicken, etc. She has taken special courses in food preparation, and was a participant in the parenting course, as well as in other skills training courses. She has experimented with food preparation, especially drying of various foods with the idea of developing a product to market. However, in spite of all her training and her original ideas, she has not been very successful as an entrepreneur, lacking capital and possibly motivation. With a new hotel opening soon in the next village, she hopes to be hired there. While ultimately she would like to find herself in the same position as Beatrice, day-to-day survival takes precedence over a single, long-term goal. She lives without most of the amenities of modern life, that is, without running water and a washing machine, and often cooks with wood to save on propane, so her life is often caught up in the immediate tasks of carrying water, doing laundry by hand, and finding fuel for cooking.

Molly, a younger woman with two children, has been living with her mother, who since left to work in another island. Molly had been making and selling various products at the various activities in La Plaine as well as at the

school at lunch-time, and out of her house. When asked what she would like to do, she expressed a wish to expand her entrepreneurial way of life so that she could sell her products around the island. For that she would need a vehicle, but that would involve capital. In the meantime, she was making do with what she could sell. Since her mother left to work out of state, life has become more difficult for Molly, who was supporting her two children on her own.

Ruth, a young woman of twenty years, just finished her training and has begun working as a police officer. Like Janelle, she had a career plan that did not include a relationship or children, at least for the moment, as this excerpt of an interview with her shows:

Robbyn: The last time I spoke to you, you mentioned you wanted to be a lawyer. Is that still part of your life project?

Ruth: It could be. I am still interested, but at the same time I want to study like psychology or sociology to deal with the society, to understand the society so I could know how to approach them better, to encourage them and so.

Robbyn: Do they offer courses like that here in sociology or psychology?

Ruth: Well, they have the University of the West Indies so we could start up here in Dominica, and we would go to Trinidad or Jamaica to finish up. So it would be like a year or two here in Dominica, then we would go over to Trinidad, Jamaica, or wherever we really want to go, and then we finish up the rest of the years. Then they have, well there is a correspondence course, but then the government offers scholarship to go to Cuba, you could go to Cuba to study also.

Robbyn: In English?

Ruth: How you would do it, you would study for six years. One year would be for Spanish only. And then the five other years would be for the degree.

Robbyn: Five years, that's long. So, what kind of a job do you see yourself going towards, do you see yourself staying as a police officer?

Ruth: Yes, staying as a police officer, but then at the same time, I'll be doing, like I'll be having other subjects, like we are trying to develop the police officer, so apart from policing you could be a counsellor too, even

adults, you could counsel students in ways I guess, in problems that they have. It's not just being a police officer, you know, it's something else.

Robbyn: And how do you see that in relation to your family life?

Ruth: You mean having a family? I never really thought of it. I guess it would not be a problem.

Robbyn: So you don't have immediate plans to get married or have children?

Ruth: Not now. Not now. Later down.

Robbyn: That was never foremost for you?

Ruth: Yeah, I always said that I have to marry and I want two children.

Ruth's vision of her life is oriented towards a career goal that goes beyond simply fulfilling her own immediate needs. Unlike most of the other women, who appeared to be caught up in the daily tactics of getting by, Ruth has chosen an occupation that she enjoys, with the goal of 'improving' not just herself, but society in general. She speaks from within a view of the life course that is rather different from many of the other women: she envisions career before family, and when she speaks of family, mentions marriage before children. Ruth was brought up in one of the Christian churches by her mother, staying part of the time with an aunt while her mother worked abroad, and her vision of the life course may have been influenced by the Church. However, the role of the Church in her life decisions is uncertain, as Janelle, who was raised as a not-too-devout Catholic, is also career-oriented, hoping, she told me, to become a criminal psychologist:

Janelle: I want to be a criminal psychologist. I took sociology in college.

Robbyn: A criminal psychologist?

Janelle: That's what I want to be – that's what I aim to be I should say. Yes I took sociology as a main subject, and it was okay, but it was basically a basic sociology, basic theories, you know Marxism, functionalism, you know, the basic sociological theories and it wasn't in depth. Maybe if I had taken the extra year of college, maybe we would have gone more in depth.

But so far it was a little too easy, not easy but a little too basic. You know I want to do something in depth instead of just the basic thing. So I said I would just forget about college in Dominica, work, save up some money, and try it out somewhere else, even though it's not far like maybe to the University of the West Indies.

These young women see their roles in society as the purveyors of moral order: paradoxically, while they are 'products' of a modernized Dominica, they position themselves as wanting to rectify the damage modern life has supposedly wreaked upon the island, through the increase in crime, drugs, and violence. The vision of these two young women's projected lives is in keeping with a gendered view of women's role in society, a view that reflects her position as mother and purveyor of proper behaviour, but in relation to the wider society. This can be seen as an extension of the projects associated with women's roles in church organizations and NGOs, discussed briefly in Chapter 2. However, this image of womanhood not only places women as purveyors of morality, but also as the makers of the nation: the 'family' in her care is extended to encompass the population. The role of woman as the nation's caregiver is also portrayed in many of the performances in national beauty pageants to be discussed in the next chapter. This ideal of femininity is conveyed in connection with the images of feminine beauty that link them to the nation – to its physical characteristics, and to the health and social propriety of its people

CHAPTER 8
PERFORMING FEMININITY, EMBODYING THE
NATION

*Isle of beauty, isle of splendour,
Isle to all so sweet and fair,
All must surely gaze in wonder
At thy gifts so rich and rare.
Rivers, valleys, hills and mountains,
All these gifts we do extol.
Healthy land, so like all fountains,
Giving cheer that warms the soul.*

*Dominica, God hath blest thee
With a clime benign and bright,
Pastures green and flowers of beauty
Filling all with pure delight,
And a people strong and healthy
Full of godly, rev'rent fear.
May we ever seek to praise Thee
For these gifts so rich and rare.*

*Come ye forward, sons and daughters
Of this gem beyond compare.
Strive for honour, sons and daughters,
Do the right, be firm and fair.
Toil with hearts and hands and voices.
We must prosper! Sound the call,
In which ev'ry one rejoices,
"All for Each and Each for All."*

("Isle of Beauty," Dominica National Anthem, by Wilfred Oscar Morgan Pond, 1967)

The framework in which women's lives and narratives have been examined so far comprises the socio-cultural and political transformations that Dominica endured as the nascent state emerged from British colonial domination. Decolonisation involves not only political, social, and economic processes, but also cultural processes revealed in the shifting values as exemplified by changing attitudes in gender relations and family. These stand as effects of both changing

regimes of power and the introduction of new ideas, practices, and products. Cultural practices work as an important force of change, in the creation of new ideas and meanings and in their support and maintenance, especially in the production of the nation, as new cultural forms are adopted and 'tradition' is invoked in performances of a national 'subject'. In this chapter I will turn to the formulation of images of femininity and to women's self-realization through the production of national consciousness as I examine two Dominican beauty pageants, one with the emphasis on tradition, and the other taking the generic format of beauty pageants worldwide. Beauty pageants are wide-spread throughout the Caribbean, with most islands holding their own competitions, and regional competitions such as Miss OECS (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States), Miss West Indies, and the Queen of the Caribbean competitions. In Dominica, competitions are held at all levels and for all ages in both types of beauty pageants.

I have chosen to examine these two pageants because of the general popularity of not only observing the pageants, but of participating in them, and because they are a major public forum for the expression – and creation – of certain (dominant) forms of femininity in the context of cultural and national identity formation. Public displays such as pageants can be seen as rites of intensification in which group (national) identity and cohesion are reaffirmed, and where gender (femininity or masculinity, or both) is emphasized. They serve to produce images that refer to behaviours with a moral undertone, with which men and women can identify and upon which they can base their own life goals, or those they project for their children.

As productions of dominant official discourse, displays such as beauty pageants provide an iconic condensation of the 'right' way of being a man or a woman. This 'right' way offers the model for an ethics of self that combines notions of physical beauty with the adherence to preferred or dominant, nationally condoned sets of moral values and norms of femininity that include sexuality, education, beliefs and ethnicity/colour, as well as the ability to present oneself

well in public both visually and verbally (c.f. Banet-Weiser 1999). For the National Queen Show, these norms of femininity are constrained further by the international context, because the winner of this contest will go on to compete in regional, and perhaps, global contests and contexts (see Wilk 1995). The ‘dominant’ ideal of femininity, therefore, is not only derived from national constructions but is formulated in part by the homogenizing effects of international competitions and by the fact that the pageant winner becomes a national representative on both the international and local scenes, serving as a role model for other young women.

The pageant is also the locus for the production of a national identity as it draws on and showcases shared representations of nation that include cultural heritage and a common history, national unity, and national development, foregrounding and proposing the role of women in the construction of the nation. This connects to the image of femininity promoted by the pageant in several ways. The image of femininity, produced through the pageants situates the ‘woman’ in relation to the nation as its keeper of morality. The pageant produces and reinforces a dominant notion of femininity through its performance against which others can be measured and ranked (Van Esterik 1996). This chapter will examine, first of all, some of the ‘contents’ of Dominican national identity, and how it is produced, and then explore it in its connection to gender through two beauty pageants, one a cultural beauty pageant, and the other following the international model.

8.1 Shaping Dominica Identity

Dominica is a young nation and its government and other influential actors, along with the population, have made concerted, and successful, efforts at formulating and disseminating shared symbols of national cultural identity, where local understandings intersect with wider conceptualizations in the notion of ‘creole’, a blanket term that incorporates diverse practices and symbols into the

creation of identity.¹ The term ‘creole’ could be compared to the notion of ‘*kastom*’ in Melanesia as a label that fits many containers, and can acquire different meanings according to context and the interests of those using it. According to Lindstrom, “‘*Kastom*’ becomes a symbol which everyone understands but on the meaning of which no one agrees” (1982: 317). Like *kastom*, the notion of ‘creole’ can be invoked as “an ideology of decolonisation” (Keesing 1982: 297), and can be drawn into the political, especially nation building, arena.

The development of a national self-consciousness has taken place along two principal symbolic lines, both of which are drawn upon in the formulation of femininity as linked to nation through the pageants that will be discussed in this chapter. First, there is that of the promotion of Dominica as a beautiful pristine paradise, and second, that of the recontextualization of cultural practices, mostly those of the past, to the position of special event and concern, celebrated in organized festivals and competitions. In the first case, Dominica is affectionately referred to as the ‘Nature Isle of the Caribbean’ within local nationalist discourse and by promoters of eco-tourism, who entice prospective visitors with images of an unspoiled nature, implied in the anthem cited above. This lush and mountainous Caribbean island, overflowing with waterfalls and rivers, is undeniably more ‘untouched’ than its considerably more industrially and touristically developed neighbours, remaining primarily an agricultural island. While this portrayal of an eternal paradise has been created more in contrast to an image of the wealthy, industrialized, yet polluted North or the overcrowded, poverty stricken South, than as a description of people’s lived experience of their struggles in a spectacular but rather difficult and sometimes hostile environment,

¹ ‘Creole’ is a term that originally referred to the descendents of Europeans born in the colonies, especially Latin America and the Caribbean. Its meaning has shifted to refer to cultural practices and forms ‘born’ in the Caribbean, especially language, music, and dance. It is also a linguistic term that refers to recently formed languages in these and other former colonies, especially of the Pacific Rim. The term ‘creolization’ has been used in recent work to describe processes of cultural creation (Hannerz 1992) and the negotiation of different systems of meaning (Jourdan 1995). It is used in Dominica to refer to local and regional cultural practices seen as emerging from a common past that emphasizes Afro-Caribbean elements.

colonial history, and the circumstances of their everyday lives, it stands as a powerful image through which national identity and pride are expressed, as reflected in the anthem cited above. This image of Dominica is one that is implicit in the building of a notion of 'home' for those who have left as well as for those still living on the island, and as a comparison for Dominica of its status in relation to other areas of the world more affected by abject poverty: life in Dominica is 'sweet' according to local parlance, and, as stated by one of the interviewees in the last chapter, 'if your mouth split, you will eat' meaning that food is available for the picking in Dominica. Included also in this symbolic frame of the nature island and purity is the idea of a clean, healthy nation, one that is morally upright.

The other symbolic frame through which national identity has been formulated and promoted is that of local cultural, or Creole, practices. This involves several aspects of cultural practice as well as forums for their performance and celebration, and works both through the reformulation (or reification) as tradition of cultural practices from the past, and through the relocation of current forms of cultural practice (including language, but especially music) from everyday practice or local entertainment, to representative of the nation or regional cultural identity. Concern with the past in the creation of identity has been a theme of many works in the past twenty years, some of which have stressed the reinvention and spuriousness of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Keesing 1989; Jolly and Thomas 1992, for example). These works have underlined the constructivist aspect of history and tradition, bringing to the fore questions of authenticity and the validity of representations of cultural heritage and tradition. While I agree that the past is being continuously reconstructed in representations of identity, I look more to the uses and forms of that re-presentation in the creation of a national / cultural consciousness, rather than to question its authenticity. Heller (1999) proposes four ways in which history and the past are relevant to the construction of identities: past as tradition or cultural heritage including common cultural practices, language, religion, customs, clothing,

stories, and music that were practiced and are remembered or celebrated on certain special occasions; past as history as a record or memory of actual or what are thought to be actual events that occurred and that are relevant to a common identity; past as myth, as a “remote and unprovable history” and a “charter for the group’s existence and culture in the present,” based on common descent and history (ibid.: 40); and past as a resource, which can involve aspects of the first three in a conscious engagement of the past, often by elites, to promote nationalism, national identity, and the definition and membership of the group.

The creation of a Dominican national identity can be understood in part through these four aspects, especially that of reification of cultural practices as ‘tradition’, and their use in forging a common identity. The reification of cultural practices takes place during cultural festivals and pageants, through the promotion and celebration of cultural traditions such as dance, music and clothing of the past as a conscious reformulation of a common heritage, used as a ‘source’ for the formulation of national identity. In addition to reifying cultural practices no longer a part of everyday life, people have become conscious of current day-to-day cultural practices. This involves an awareness of their ‘culturalness’ as that which differentiates them from others and renders them similar to those who have the same practices, and as that which creates continuity with the past. These include the use of certain foods, musical forms, celebrations such as carnival, and language. The local Creole language, Patwa, is one of the most pervasive of these because it is extracted as a symbolic representation of culture, linked to the past, and is at the same time an on-going practice. This Creole language, while spoken less in everyday usage now, has been recuperated as a symbol of national culture and identity that forges links with a founding history, fostering pride therein.² Its

²² Patwa, once the main language spoken by most islanders except the British overlords, devalorized and suppressed by the British in schools, has, since the 1980s, become the object of revival by certain social activists within Dominican society – who now call it Kwéyòl, began radio programmes in this language, and attempted to introduce it to the schools. Patwa was looked down upon in Dominican society by those of the higher social strata, especially the British, as the language of the lower, largely illiterate, class of peasant producers. English was, and still is, the language of government, education, most media, including television and radio as well as newspapers. Patwa is still spoken in most of the rural areas, but there are few unilingual speakers,

value, for some, is to be found less in its communicative function than in its use as a cultural artefact in the production of national identity and cohesion. For others, those who still use it, it stands as an important aspect of their self-definition, and speaking it reaffirms their sense of national and regional cultural identity, of which Dominicans have come to be proud. This is all the more manifest as it and is spoken in counterpoint or contrast to English, through the elaborate and pervasive practice of code-switching, which, for Dominica, has not yet been thoroughly investigated (but see Paugh 2001).

The recognition of Creole language and the cultural practices associated with it as the most important symbols of Creole culture and national identity came about slowly, through the endeavours of artists who introduced Patwa in theatre and song to the local elite, such as Mable 'Cissy' Caudeiron, and through efforts to kindle self-esteem on the part of social interventionists such as Henckell Christian (Christian 1992: 33-34). Official promotion of Creole culture began in 1965, under the direction of then Premier O.E. LeBlanc, Dominica Labour Party leader, when local cultural competitions and fairs, initiated by Christian and others working through the Welfare Department, were introduced at a national level, under the National Arts Council (*ibid.*: 36-37). In 1970 the Cultural Division was founded to replace the National Arts Council, headed by a cultural officer responsible for developing programmes to promote the recognition and endorsement of local culture in Dominica (*ibid.*: 128).

The promotion of local culture today is widespread through various venues and it takes several forms, notably cultural shows and competitions consciously celebrating the national past, including dance, music, and dress. It comprises festivals and competitions that celebrate contemporary culture, such as calypso contests and the National Queen Show as well as those promoting a pan-Caribbean identity, connecting as well the diaspora to Africa. One event which links these three levels is the World Creole Music Festival, first held in 1997,

and among the young, few mother tongue speakers (Christie 1982; Stuart 1993; Paugh 2001). A dictionary of Patwa words was written (Fontaine and Roberts 1991), as well as a small grammar book, in an attempt to capture and preserve, if not revitalize what had always been language that

which hosts bands from across the Caribbean and some from Africa. Dominica's local Carnival, called 'Mas Dominik', is celebrated at the local village and national levels, and celebrates both Dominican and pan-Caribbean identities. It is neither the purpose nor the possibility of this chapter to make an exhaustive survey and analysis of the cultural performances in Dominica, as that would surely be a topic for a book in itself. My aim here is to show, using the example of beauty pageants, both the National Queen Show and the Wob Dwiyet competitions, how femininity and gender relations are produced by and through these performances, using the symbolic frameworks discussed, in the promotion of a femininity that is connected to national identity.

There are two main festival periods in Dominica: the time leading up to and including Independence Day and Carnival during which the most extensive organized national and local festivals occur.³ Independence festivities involve a celebration of Creole identity and heritage, at both the national and pan-Caribbean levels, while Carnival is not so much a self-conscious celebration of heritage (although there are such elements present) as an on-going practice, albeit one that has undergone transformations over the years. Independence Day is November 3, but the period of festivities stretches over about two weeks.⁴ In connection with the Independence festivities every year, there is a Creole Day, usually near the end of October, where each village carries out its own celebrations. In La Plaine, a district cultural show was held, with dance groups and *jing ping* music,⁵ as well as other performers from neighbouring villages. The school also had its own performance, with all the teachers and children dressed in 'Creole' costumes, carrying out the traditional dances.

was only spoken.

³ Other festive periods are Christmas and Emancipation Day, August 1st, which celebrates the end of slavery.

⁴ November 3 first known as Columbus Day, as that is the day on which Dominica was said to have been first sighted by Columbus' crew, in 1493. When Dominica achieved associated statehood in 1967, November 3 became known as National Day (Honychurch 1995: 233) and since full independence in 1978, it has come to be known as Independence Day. It is perhaps fitting that the beginning and the supposed end to the colonial period should fall on the same day.

⁵ 'Jing ping' is a musical group consisting of an accordion and various percussion instruments, that plays music for some of the 'traditional' dance forms, such as *kwadri* (from 'quadrille').

Carnival takes place on the days preceding Lent, and corresponds to the Catholic holidays, officially beginning on the Monday early morning, until Tuesday (Mardi Gras) preceding Ash Wednesday, when Lent begins. Independence Day is associated with national identity and cultural heritage, and consequently with the Wob Dwiyeet competitions, while Carnival as more of a forum for the expression of ongoing and contemporary culture, is associated with the Queen Shows. Although elements from both are present, the tone of the Independence celebrations is clearly a promotion of national cultural identity, based on the appreciation of local cultural forms, especially those cultural expressions associated with the past. Carnival in Dominica has been characterized as an appropriation, by the former slaves, of the masters '*fête*', turned into a "revolt against the ruling classes who were ridiculed in song and action" (Henry 1991).



Children celebrating Carnival at school, on 'Come as You Like Day',
La Plaine, 1999.

Carnival as a form of popular performance has been variously characterized as inversion of dominant norms (Bakhtin 1968; Da Matta 1977) and as social critique (Bakhtin 1968; Le Roy Ladurie 1981; see Miller 1994 for discussion). The historical development of the Dominican carnival has not been widely documented, but for Trinidad, writings record the “development of key characters such as Dragons, Midnight Robbers, Jabjabs, Pierrots, Sailors...these had their own costumes, choreography and elaborated speeches” (Miller 1994: 109). Dominican carnival also had its own masked figures, some of which are still associated with carnival today. However, in keeping with Miller’s observations in Trinidad, there were few of the old characters present in recent Dominican carnivals,⁶ and Carnival is becoming more a celebration of national culture, with the carnival characters invoked as reifications of past carnival traditions, and events such as the National Queen Show. While elements of cultural critique and inversion are still present, they may not be precisely the same ones as were historically prevalent or have the same sources or targets. In a context of decolonisation and independence, the celebration of cultural identity and nationhood itself, still young, is used as an expression of resistance to colonialism. Several events are associated with present-day Carnival in Dominica, the most important being the carnival road march or jump-up events, the calypso King competition and the National Queen Show.⁷

⁶ However, *Sensay*, figures dressed in costumes made of layers of strands of cloth or banana leaves, topped with a large mask often in the image of a bull have been very popular in recent carnivals. When questioned, local people did not know the meaning of this character. It may be derived from an African word, *senseh*, which refers to the ‘frizzle fowl’ (Winer, personal communication 2003). In addition to the main carnival activities held in the town of Roseau, each village has its own celebrations. La Plaine has its own carnival character, called the ‘*ban mové*’ from the French ‘*band mauvais*’ for which the literal translation would be ‘bad band’. They usually move as a group or a ‘band’ in the carnival procession. This character is dressed all in black, with a black mask lined with foam or some thick material in order to make the face appear flat so the features cannot be distinguished under it. Small holes are cut for the mouth and the eyes. Each ‘*ban mové*’ carries a whip, which is cracked on the ground to scare the local residents, especially the children, and money is extorted from passers-by or by going door to door. Weeks before Carnival, children look for rope to braid whips. Although they do not participate as ‘*ban mové*’ during Carnival, they play with their whips in the days and weeks leading up to Carnival.

⁷ Carnival officially begins with *jouvè* (from French ‘*jour ouvert*’), a road march that begins at dawn on Monday prior to the beginning of Lent. However, several events usually precede this, including preliminary Calypso competitions and in the few days leading up to Carnival, bands of

Wining, as a popular dance form that is prevalent at Carnival mostly among women, becomes one form of 'inversion' in the context of Caribbean femininity and sexuality in response to pressures to conform to a 'respectable', increasingly pervasive expression of femininity that is epitomized by the beauty pageant. In this perspective, wining can be seen as an empowering strategy of self-expression, one that defies the dominant perspectives on femininity, promoted by cultural and beauty pageants described below. While I agree with Miller's analysis of 'wining', discussed in Chapter 4, as a kind of autosexuality or a sexuality with no particular object but itself, I would go further and propose that it is a form of display that in some contexts takes on the aspect of a contest and at the same time, an exchange. Wining provides dancers with a forum to express their sexuality, in a way that also emphasizes their individuality: each dancer 'shows' how she (or he) can wine, so that at times, it becomes a kind exchange of ability and style – it is a performance, and when it involves more than one person, becomes a contest as well as a show. In this it resembles strongly African dance forms, where dancers, usually either female or male, will dance as a group, and then watch as individual dancers in turn dance solo, highlighting their ability and creativity. Where African dances have particular meanings, traditionally danced on specific occasions for a purpose, the element of community and individuality that is highlighted here is also present in the Caribbean. As well, wining elicits reactions from the onlookers: whether it is amusement, enticement or revulsion (or fear for one's masculinity) leaving neither the dancer nor the onlooker indifferent. Wining is almost an extension of verbal 'badinage', often with sexual overtones (Abrahams 1982). However, one does not preclude the other, as beauty

'po kabwit' drummers (from French *'peau cabrite'* or goat-skin) who march through the town and villages. A dance usually takes place before *jouvè*, beginning around midnight and lasting until dawn. Activities generally end at around noon, picking up again in the afternoon and lasting well into the evening, terminating at the time of curfew, which varies from year to year due to the amount of violence present the preceding year. This continues the next day as well. Carnival jump-up is led by several bands, consisting of a truck pulling an orchestra playing popular carnival tunes, a group of people following wearing the sponsors' logo on a T-shirt, and behind them, revellers dancing along. A sense of 'communitas' is evoked, as thousands of people mingle and dance closely together in the street.

contest participants can also be involved in wining, outside of the framework of the contest. As an 'inversion' of normal behaviour through bodily expression, wining can be seen as release from the shackles of bodily disciplines and constraints imposed through dominant norms of behaviour (although, in order to learn how to wine, one must impose other bodily disciplines).

In contrast to wining, which is not recuperated into a formal representation of femininity and national culture (although it is celebrated in song), probably because of its overtly sexual character, its association with present-day lower classes and, at times, its perceived threat to a dominant masculinity that is formulated in part through control of feminine sexuality, beauty pageants and cultural pageants provide an official forum for the creation and celebration of a femininity associated with dominant ideals and with national identity. Pageants take place at several levels: village, region, nation, and wider region. In the year I lived there, a Miss Noel pageant was held in the village for school girls, a regional Madame and Miss Wob Dwiyet competition were held, a Miss Zodiac, Queen of the Caribbean, Miss OECS, and the National Queen Show, as well as the National Miss and Madam Wob Dwiyet contests also took place. The women who participate are re-created within the form that their performance must take, and at the same time recreate the ideal through their particular contributions. Often, young women who become finalists in the Queen show have competed in other pageants, including Wob Dwiyet competitions.

8.2 Wob Dwiyet: Performing Gender and Culture

*Look at me I'm a black woman
I am a woman of the mountains
A woman of the world
A woman of the bush
Look at me I'm a black woman*

*I am a hard woman
I am a working woman
A woman of the mountain
A woman who works hard
Work I am working
Look at me a hard woman*

*I am a sweet woman
A woman of the world
Hard woman
Mountain woman
Hard working worker
Look at me a sweet woman*

*I am a woman of culture
A dancing woman
A bèlè woman
A Jing-ping woman
A woman who likes to roll
Look at me a cultural woman!*

(Bernadine Dumas, regional Madame Wob Dwiyet contestant)

This poem /monologue, written by a La Plaine woman, Bernadine Dumas, for presentation in the talent round for the district Madame Wob Dwiyet contest, links land, culture, and femininity, drawing on both paradigms suggested above. She presented her monologue in both Patwa and English. Each stanza makes a connection to a signifier linked with womanhood: black, hard, sweet, and cultural. In each verse except the last, reference is also made to the land as being of it, of the mountains and the bush, and in the last stanza, the different aspects of ‘traditional’ culture are brought in: music, as *jing ping*, and dance as *bèlè* (an African-derived dance named after the French ‘*belaire*’). The significance of these terms lies not only in the conceptual connection of each to womanhood and femininity, but in their association with one another and the importance of the tie of each to the land. Land is important to Dominican identity, vividly portrayed in the anthem cited at the beginning of this chapter. ‘Black’, as a signifier of race, connotes the historical and cultural background of the now dominant group, but uses a term derived from American racial categories, as ‘black’ in Dominica and

the Caribbean region generally, is usually used to refer to a skin colour that is dark, as contrasted to 'red' or 'yellow' which are terms for progressively lighter skin colours. Dumas' use of the term in her composition refers to a shared history, that of slavery and African origins, but reflects the American usage. The next term, 'hard woman' refers to physical, especially agricultural, labour, associated with the mountain and the bush where people have their gardens. She also is a 'sweet woman' – 'sweet' is usually used to describe a woman who is attractive and desirable, rather than 'nice' as in its popular usage in Canada. 'Sweet' used in Dominica is a translation of the Patwa '*dou*', from French '*doux*' which means soft to the touch, of calm disposition, agreeable, and sugary. All these connotations pass into the English translation of '*dou*' to 'sweet'. The last term, 'cultural woman' is directly associated with 'traditional' forms of cultural expression. '*Bèlè*' has a definitely African-based rhythm and attitude, danced to a single drum and voice, including a soloist, or '*chantwèl*' (from French '*chanterelle*' meaning highest string in a string instrument, but here, it refers to the lead or solo singer) and a chorus, without other instruments. According to Henry (1991: 7), the *Bèlè* "has its roots in mating and fertility dance rites." These cultural forms are now only practiced as cultural 'events' that are organized to celebrate tradition and a common history. A woman who "likes to roll" is one who likes to dance, to express herself through her body. Bernadine's poem thus connects these concepts, in a woman-race-work-land-body-culture matrix, to describe her understanding of femininity and womanhood, in the context of a celebration of cultural identity. Notably, this poem makes a strong connection of female subjectivity through the body to the land, in each of the stanzas except the last, through race/ethnic background, labour, and sexuality; in the last stanza, the connection is between the body and its experience of cultural expression through dance, music and liking to "roll." The use and juxtaposition of these terms serves to imbue with positive meaning and pride a rural, farming woman's experience of labour, culture and love, valorizing them as emblems of culture and nation through their attachment to the land. These emblems, and others, of Dominican

womanhood and national culture permeate the themes of Miss and Madam Wob Dwiyet competitions.

The competitions, which take place at both the island regional level and national levels, connect beauty, femininity, cultural heritage and identity for both the performer and the audience. In contrast to the National Queen Show winners, who represent the nation outside national boundaries as well as within, the winners of Wob Dwiyet contests become internal representatives of a national/cultural identity, thus reinforcing from within sentiments of unity and pride through the celebration of historical one-ness, attachment to the island, and valorization of cultural attributes of the past. While promoting a positive, shared representation of the past that evokes pride and unity, these competitions endorse a view of culture and the past that obscures the increasing diversity of the present day population and their experiences.

Wob Dwiyet, from the French '*robe douillette*',⁸ refers to the beautiful dress worn in the past on special occasions by women of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Authors of the time have noted the attention paid to dress by women, especially the free people of colour, who, according to Atwood (1971 [1791]), moved to Dominica prior to the time it came under no colonial jurisdiction (see Chapter 3), due to the French laws which prevented them from "wearing shoes, stockings, ornaments, or any dress after the fashion of white people... The free people of colour are remarkably fond of dress and dancing... their ladies being usually dressed in silks, silk stockings and shoes; buckles bracelets and rings of gold and silver" (ibid.: 219-220). Narratives examined in Chapter 4 also revealed the importance of clothing in self-presentation, that reflected resistance to the domination of slavery through the ability to purchase clothing, as well as coming to signify status.

The dress, in its present form, is a long dress, with a full skirt gathered at the waist and long sleeves. The skirt is usually trimmed on the bottom with a

⁸ There are two French meanings for the term '*douillette*'. One, in approximate translation, is 'soft and comfortable'. The other refers to a coat or a lined piece of clothing. It is the second sense of the word that is most appropriate here, and probably refers to the fact that the dress has long

piece of zig-zag ribbon and a wide satin collar is worn over the shoulders. A white petticoat, trimmed with a ruffle, eyelet or lace and ribbons is worn under the skirt. The dress is made of a colourful cotton fabric, most often, but not necessarily, the bright plaid madras cloth. Women wrap their heads artistically in matching cloth.⁹ The Wob Dwiyet contest performance, like other pageants, consists of different rounds on which the contestants are judged. The three rounds for this pageant are the talent segment, the contemporary Creole dress round, and the Wob Dwiyet



Two girls in 'national dress' on National Day, 1999, in Roseau. The girl on the right is wearing a *wob dwiyet*.

dress segment. In the talent round, the contestant must perform a monologue, a skit, or a song pertaining to cultural and national heritage. In the second segment, the contestant models an outfit of her choice, based on a 'Creole' theme. This could be a modern style dress made out of madras or African fabric, for example. In the third segment, the contestant must model the *wob dwiyet*. The year I carried

sleeves. *Robe* means dress.

⁹ In Martinique, the headdress is tied in specific ways, with the number of points signalling to observers the woman's marital status and availability, but in Dominica, I know of no particular meaning to the way in which the headdress is arranged.

out my research, the National Miss Wob Dwiyet contest was held as part of the Creole Couple contest, which took place for the first time that year. The contest rounds were the same as those outlined above, but each female contestant was accompanied by a male partner vying for the title of 'Mr. Creole'. This added another important dimension to the contest, that of gender relations, in some cases becoming even the focus of the performance. The man and woman both modelled in the two subsequent segments, but the female contestant took the foreground in most instances the *wob dwiyet* round.

The competition took place between seven participating couples, representing several different constituent regions. It was held in a heritage building, a transformed sugar refinery built of stone called the 'Old Mill Cultural Centre'. Competition rounds were interspersed with presentations of music, song, and dance by local performers, mostly traditional dances like the '*bèlè*' and a few calypso singers.

The contest began with the talent round. Each of the talent presentations used gender in some way in the presentation, and while the focus of the performances was 'culture', they created connections between culture and gender relations. Most often, the male-female interactions were slightly antagonistic, usually in jest. In some of the skits, the male / female dichotomy was configured within a juxtaposition of 'traditional' and 'modern'. The positions of the female and male participants were different in each skit, with relation to the configuration of tradition and modernity.

The first participants presented a skit about the competition in which they were taking part, the National Creole Competition. Their presentation begins when the young woman tells her boyfriend she would like to for them to enter the competition. The man refuses, and the woman argues that they should do it because "that is our culture." The young man wonders what his girlfriend is going present, a question to which she retorted, "What... I have talent you know." The man asks, "What talent you have?" and she replies, "What, Johnny, you mean you been loving me for all that years and you don't know I have talent?" He answers:

“I know you have talent, but do you have talent culturally?” eliciting chuckles from the audience at the sexual innuendo. The girl goes on to show him what ‘cultural’ talent she has, singing a calypso about women’s empowerment and their taking responsibility for bringing the country into action and unity, and ends by saying “women in charge now, we going up.” The interaction in this skit positioned the man and the woman in light disagreement, in ‘badinage’, a kind of jesting skirmish of words where each partner is on equal terms, a common framework for verbal interaction between men and women, and usually characterized by sexual undertones. The young woman positioned herself, interestingly, both on the side of ‘culture’ or tradition, and on the side of modernity, but used culture as a vehicle through which to endorse her self-empowerment, and by locating herself, at the same time, within a framework of modernity and nation building. She makes the connection between cultural identity and a positive vision of both femininity and the nation.

In the second presentation, a young woman awaits her boyfriend, sitting before a mirror applying lipstick, an obviously ‘modern’ gesture. She becomes impatient, and when her boyfriend finally arrives, she demands to know why he is so late. He tells her he stopped to watch a traditional *jing ping* band. He brought her some food – yam, a ‘traditional’ food. She complains, asking why he didn’t bring her ‘Kentucky’ (there is one fast food restaurant in Roseau, Kentucky Fried Chicken). She then asks about the money he was supposed to give her to purchase shoes and a dress. He declared that she has a perfectly good dress to wear, her *wob dwiyet*. She reluctantly slips it on, and finds that it is, after all, very beautiful. *Jing ping* music is heard playing, and the couple dance their way off the stage. Throughout the skit, the man was speaking Patwa, while the girl spoke English: she was the representative of change and ‘modernity’ (or Westernization), while he symbolized ‘tradition’ (or local culture). In the end, she was won over to the appreciation of her culture. In this skit, the man and the woman were positioned, vis-à-vis a contrast of ‘culture’ as tradition, and modern life. The interaction between the man and woman, as in the first skit, were slightly antagonistic at first,

only to be resolved through coming together on the same terms, in Creole 'culture'. In this skit, the gender relations and the negotiation of tradition and modernity were played out through an image of gender relations that positioned the man as the 'breadwinner', providing 'help' – it was the kind of 'bread' that was provided that was in question.

The third presentation minimized gender relations. It was set up as an interview where the young man interviewed the young woman, who acted as a cultural spokesperson. This skit was more of a monologue where the woman spoke, sang, and danced, presenting herself as promoter of 'culture' and nation.

The fourth performance, the winner of the contest, opens with the woman sitting on a stool washing clothes in a basin. Her partner arrives, with clothing stained from working in the garden and aggressively throws down his cutlass and demands his food. The woman slams the food on the table. The gender relations depicted here show much antagonism and even verbal abuse by the man, who calls the woman stupid. But they begin to talk about culture and finally perform a *bèlè* together, and their antipathy was resolved through this enactment of culture. In this skit, both the man and the woman are posed antagonistically in 'traditional' gender roles, but come together through the exercise of 'culture.'

The fifth performance involved a Carib couple in the costume of the Karifuna dancers.¹⁰ This portrayal differed from the rest, as there was no friction between the man and the woman; rather, they were in complementary roles. The scene begins with weeping in the background, and a drawing of Dominica with the head of a woman set up in the centre of the stage. The weeping was supposed to emanate from this drawing of Dominica, portrayed as a Mother. The young man spoke in Patwa, and the woman in English, each taking turns in a very balanced (symmetrical) performance. The woman said she had left Dominica because of poverty but came back because she heard her mother, Dominica, crying, and stated "Mother, don't cry, I will come by your side. I am willing to

¹⁰ The Karifuna dance troop is made up of young Carib people, and performs 'traditional' Carib dances, in native costumes. They perform at Carnival and cultural shows, and are held as a national symbol.

stay and fight, to stop the destruction. We need a positive attitude for development,” and claimed that Dominicans need to work together. The man, in the end declared that people must “hold hands strongly, Dominica is ours, hold hands to walk straight.” This skit stressed the theme of a need for unity and development, through the involvement of Dominica’s “children.” Gender ideas were subtly expressed here, in the use of language that portrayed the man speaking Patwa while the woman used English, (reiterated in other instances such as the skit performed by the parenting class, discussed previously), and the depiction of the island as the mother. However, because of the symmetrical presentation, both languages appeared on equal footing. Ethnicity of the Carib people was represented through the costumes of the couple. This skit provided another dimension for the portrayal of national identity as it was linked to gender, ethnicity, and the land.

The sixth couple’s presentation opened with the woman washing and packing bananas into a box for market. A man arrived, dressed in a three-piece suite with a bowler hat, an umbrella, and a briefcase. From his speech and dress, he manifestly had just arrived from England. The young woman spoke to him in Patwa and when he could not understand, she derided him for not knowing his native language. She made fun of his English as well, setting up a contrast between the two languages, emphasizing the legitimacy of Patwa over English as a national language. The man inquired as to why there were “21”s everywhere he looked. The woman replied that Dominica was twenty-one years old, the official age of adulthood, and proceeded to provide a short, recent political history, declaring that their former prime minister of fifteen years was “the only one with balls in the Caribbean – and she was a woman!” In the end, the man remarked that many who migrate say they will never return to such a place as Dominica. He ends the skit by stating that Dominicans should “not settle on mediocracy, but should settle to build Dominica to be truly the Gem of the Caribbean.” Here the theme of reverse migration is expressed through the play on the word ‘settle’. In this skit, several themes were played out in oppositional pairs: male/female;

English/Patwa; migration/home; and, less evidently, modernity/tradition. This performance used the male/female opposition as a base upon which to set the other contrasts, homologically, so that 'male' became the base for 'English', 'migration' and 'modernity', while female served as the base for 'Patwa', 'home' and 'tradition'. This skit underlined the position of Dominican national culture vis-à-vis the former colonizers, as well as making a statement regarding building the nation through discouraging out-migration.

While the themes of these performances varied considerably, they overlapped in many ways. Gender served as a frame for the theme of culture, nation, and attachment to the homeland either through the interactions between the couple, or, as with the Carib couple, and more subtly, the skit about return migration, the symbol of the motherland. The idea of cultural expression was used also as an important ingredient in women's identity and empowerment as well as in the harmony between men and women. The expression of cultural identity through the enactment of cultural forms (song and dance) from the past and present was the main theme in these skits, while the idea of a homeland, of belonging, and the need to unite to improve conditions were other themes.

The second round of the Creole Couple Competition consisted of both the man and the woman modeling contemporary Creole dress. These outfits, for the women, consisted in a long dress, a camisole and skirt, or a jacket and skirt, created with either African or madras fabric, or a mix of plain and madras material. The men usually chose an African-style shirt and pants, or an ordinary shirt in madras. Modelling was carried out together, and men and women usually enjoyed equal stage time. This round emphasized a modern Creole identity, one that connected it to a wider African identity through the presence of modern African themes in the apparel.

The traditional dress contest was the last round. The couple entered the stage together, and the man waited at the back of the stage while the woman modeled the dress. With calypso music playing in the background, the contestant swayed her hips slightly, as she sashayed around the stage, arms outstretched to

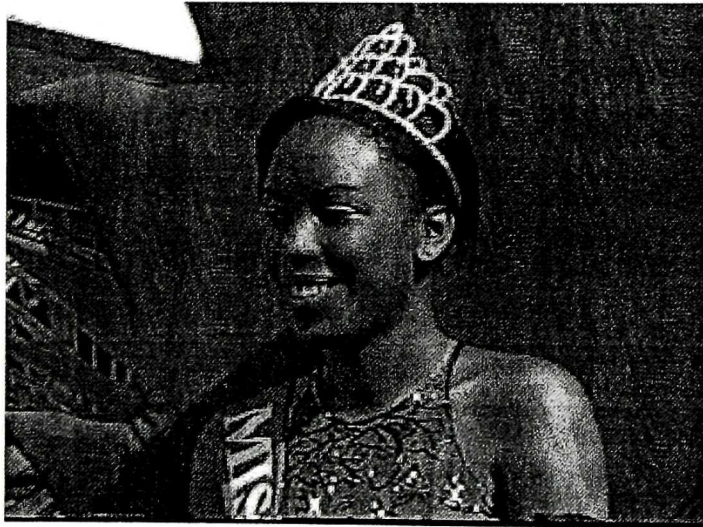
an angle of approximately forty-five degrees. As she sashayed, her head turned slightly from side to side, and her hips swayed gently to the music. She lifted the skirt, keeping the arms at the same angle, exposing the petticoat. Her arms, still outstretched, could be brought together, and then extended again. She may have dropped one side of the dress, and brought the other arm into the waist, still holding the corner of the dress up. With a flick of the wrist, she let go of the dress, and flipped the corner over her wrist, all the while continuing to sashay around the stage. These are the main 'moves' required to model the dress and the petticoat. The ability to mould the dress to the body through movement was the basis of the contest, so that through this display, 'culture' and femininity became one.

The man, clad in black trousers with a coloured sash binding the waist, a white shirt, a coloured straight-cut, collar-less jacket, topped with a pill-box, African-style cap, modeled his clothing. Where the women were at ease, smiling, confident in their presentation of the dress, with liquid, languorous movements, the men mostly strutted squarely across the stage, some giving the impression that they were uncomfortable in such a role. The time utilized by the women to model the dress was much longer than the time spent by the men on their portion of this round. The men appeared more as a stage prop, to offset the woman's presentation, rather than an equal partner in the presentation. This may be due to the fact that the *wob dwiyet* contest is much more developed than the Mr. Creole, which was in its first year of presentation.

This contest dynamically connected the formulation of a national consciousness through an attachment to a common tradition and history, to that of gender relations and gender identity, especially femininity as set off against masculinity, notably in the traditional Creole clothing portion of the contest, which stressed the *wob dwiyet*. This contest presented a particular aesthetics of dress, associated with the past (even though for many slaves and post-emancipation farmers, this type of clothing was beyond their reach financially), and with Africa, in the choice of materials and styles, especially for the modern

Creole dress contest. The criteria of physical appearance of the contestants, in comparison to those in the National Queen Show, did not seem to carry as much weight in this contest. The contestants, both male and female, were of all shapes and sizes, though all were young and healthy-looking. The emphasis on clothing as an expression of gender identity and nation, also reiterates its importance as an idiom of freedom and self-respect, and through which one can enact one's social presence, as discussed in Chapter 4. Throughout this competition, the idea of 'culture' was portrayed as something that can be rejected or lost, but that must be embraced, and that ultimately would bring about harmony in the home (between couples), and in the nation.

8.3 Queen of the Island



Vanessa Isles, 1999 Miss Dominica (photo Çakafete)

The National Queen Show takes place during Carnival, and the National Queen, for Carnival, is the female counterpart of the Calypso King who is chosen during a contest of Calypso performances. The calypso contest and its role in the production and celebration of masculinity cannot be discussed in depth here, but it certainly merits space to understand the gendered nature of the performances and their importance to local cultural expression and understandings of gender.

Calypso is a song genre that originated in Trinidad. It has long been mostly a male genre, although there are a few female Calypsonians, and the number is increasing. In 1998, two women competed in the Calypso King contest, but the event, as a traditional celebration of masculinity, precluded having a woman chosen as King. Their inclusion in the contest seemed more of a response to public (or official) calls for gender equality than of genuine interest in promoting the event for women participants. Female calypsonians do regularly perform outside the forum of this competition, however. Traditionally, the songster composes and performs his or her own songs especially for the competition. Calypso songs can have several themes, and love and sex are popular, usually sung in highly metaphoric language. The calypsos written and sung in Dominica for Carnival are usually a commentary on some current event or issue of political nature, and generally rendered in ironic and satiric, often hilarious, but sometimes serious, form. Local village songs are often composed as well, and any village scandal or event will fuel the songster's imagination.

This Calypso King contest celebrates verbal skills in the composition of songs and political critique, two practices associated with masculinity in Dominica (Abrahams 1982). While women's verbal skills are also celebrated in their performances of monologues and songs in the beauty competitions, their ability to cuttingly criticize the government and policy is not usually associated with femininity – the themes they are most prized are those having to do with social welfare, relationships, and families. According to Henry (1991: 10) calypso genre was imported from Trinidad in the 1950s, and combined with an already thriving song tradition of social commentary and critique. The two events, the Calypso King Contest and the National Queen Show run parallel, building up excitement over the weeks preceding Carnival through preliminary contests and media coverage, and usually take place on consecutive nights during the Carnival period.

It would be too easy to elicit a dichotomy here, with respect to the Calypso Contest and the Queen Show, that would position the men, on the one hand, to be

heard and women, on the other, to be seen, with all the connotations of objectification of women's bodies that this entails. It is true that the main attraction of the Calypso is the verbal message and its delivery, and in the pageants, it is the woman's presentation of self, especially through her body. However, women in these contests are enjoined to both perform a talent act that tests their verbal skills, where they either sing or speak and to answer questions, and the men, in their calypso performances, dress in elaborate costumes and are expected to present a visually dynamic spectacle in addition to their verbal skills. Taken together, these two cultural forms could be seen as corresponding to everyday interactions between men and women on the stage of the street, where some women present themselves in such a way as to be admired, through style and dress, while men try to impress through their verbal wit or eloquence even though the beauty pageant, as such, was initially borrowed from the American pageant model.

Critics contend beauty pageants and the beauty industry in general promote the objectification and commodification of women's bodies, propagating an 'ideal' that is inherently racist and class-centred, in spite of supposed good intentions, for example providing scholarships or other occasions for the young woman to realize herself (Perlmutter 2000). While I agree that the beauty pageant does showcase an ideal of the feminine body that comes to epitomize certain moral values and in this way, to justify the objectification of the female body, I wish to explore the Dominican National Queen Show pageant in a more nuanced perspective, revealing its positive and productive side while maintaining a critical eye (c.f. Zeglin Brand 2000). What follows will examine how the body is objectified, and what it comes to represent.

The Carnival Queen show was first held in 1948, introduced by a promoter of local culture, Mable Cissy Caudieron (*The Dominica Sun*, Monday June 28, 1999, p. 20). The Carnival Queen is now the National Queen as well, who functions as a national representative outside the country as well as role model within. The Queen show follows a standard format used in beauty

pageants, which includes a talent round, a bathing suit round, an evening wear round, and a question round. In addition, the show opens with a thematic costume round that locates it within the Carnival theme.

In 1999 seven finalists entered the Queen competition, all between eighteen and twenty-three years of age. Profiles of these girls showed that all of them had attended high school, some of them had attended college, and most were working in offices. Some had participated in pageants previously, performed in cultural groups or on television, or modeled. Because the girls are held to represent the nation, and the pageant foregrounds their bodies, placing them on display as the embodiment of nation, elements of their physical appearance take on importance, more so than in the Wob Dwiyeet contest, where the ability to represent 'culture' was the question. This reflects popular discourse where discussions of physical appearance and aesthetic/symbolic value associated with particular traits are common. Appearance, as already discussed in Chapter 2, was historically associated with socio-economic status. A more African appearance, with tight curly hair, called 'dry' or 'bad' hair locally, a broad nose, thick lips and dark skin were devalued, while more European-type features and fairer skin have been qualified as more desirable and more beautiful. While these criteria and the association of physical appearance with class have been transformed as more of the population attends high school and procures good jobs, none of the women present at this competition could be said to have any of the 'bad' features mentioned. While the young women varied in height, skin colour was fairly uniform: most of them were not very dark in complexion. It is not clear if this was a consideration in choosing them, as the 1998 Queen was darker of complexion than the 1999 contestants. None of the girls had 'bad' hair: in each case, their hair had been straightened and waxed, so that layers of flattened, leaf-like curls or a chignon could be formed. Features of the women's faces were usually small. These girls were not thin as some fashion models, but were not 'fat'. They appeared to reflect what I understood to be Caribbean standards for a well-built woman, one who is well-rounded, not fat nor thin. The 'ideal' look, surmising

from the girls present at this competition, celebrates their African heritage, but also promotes an aesthetic that is derived from years of colonial domination and class distinctions based on colour. Excluded, then, from this group of contestants were any contestants of obvious Carib descent, or whites, as well as girls with features mentioned above. The ideal girl was 'redskin' with fine features, good hair, and, in looking at the winner of the previous year and the year examined here, rather tall. This 'embodiment' of nation promotes and reinforces certain standards of feminine beauty that are peculiarly 'Caribbean' in their representation of hybridized origins, but that nonetheless exclude certain physical types present in the country, in large numbers. This contest, as the stepping stone to international participation, with contestants both participating in other contests and representing the nation overseas, also appears to have integrated certain generalized standards of beauty apparent in international competitions that include hair styles, dress, poise, etc.

The 1999 Queen competition opened with the contestants coming onto the stage, one at a time, to introduce themselves to the audience, dancing and waving to a background music of calypso or other carnival music such as soca. Each girl introduced herself, speaking her name, age, and mentioning her sponsor. Each girl was sponsored by a different commercial enterprise. The introductions were dramatic, well-enunciated, forceful declarations of self, using the "I" in a confident way, and ending with an enticement such as "I will be back!"

The first round was a display of thematic costumes. These were not costumes that adorned the body as clothing, but were constructed as a kind of float, a three-dimensional apparatus with a base on wheels, with wire set upon it, twisted into various forms and covered with colourful, shiny or translucent materials, framing the contestant as she stood in it and pulled it along, swaying and turning to the music. Each of these costumes was based on a theme clarified verbally by the commentator as each girl promenaded in her costume, so that, through the visual and verbal effects, the contestant became the embodiment of this theme. The themes were rooted in either moral or physical representations of

a national identity and/or femininity: three of the costumes pertained to the land or sea, images of the 'Isle of Beauty', while one paid tribute to the two major ethnic groups: African and Carib. One costume represented the movement towards a positive future, through the 'flames of the new millenium'. Of the two remaining, one represented a 'spiritual revival' while the other represented 'salubrity, innocence, purity, glamour, and grace' – all qualities associated with an ideal femininity. They thus invoked the physical image of the island/nation, the people that 'national identity' is associated with; piety and belief in God; femininity; and the projected future. These costumes represent very closely the ideas and connections that underlie and are projected by this pageant on the whole – a national identity that links femininity, beauty, and virtue to other images of national identity including the land (and all it represents) and ethnicity.

The talent competition followed. Each contestant performed a dramatic monologue or song, or combination of both, that reflected a theme promoting national interests, either cultural themes or icons, or issues that concerned the development of a unified, 'healthy' nation. Two contestants celebrated carnival icons: one dressed as a 'sensay', a carnival character (see note 6). Her monologue spoke of carnival as the time when 'everyone come out in a one piece band', celebrating the unifying character of carnival. The other represented 'Bwa Bwa' and 'Darkie', two local carnival characters that have regional relevance. Her focus was one of African heritage and pan-Caribbean cultural unity, as they were tied to a common heritage. Here is an excerpt of her monologue, in which she plays the character of the stilt man, Bwa Bwa:

I have been part of Dominican and Caribbean culture from the time it began and have remained a part of it until now. I represent the celebration of our class and our culture. To free us from the wretches we have in our minds, the pain we caution in our hearts. That is why I have survived throughout the history of our culture as a remembrance of a long journey and as a living example of the spectacle and the vibrancy of our carnival. (Velda Wade, 1999 National Queen Show contestant)

Two other emblems of Caribbean and Dominican cultural identity were portrayed. One contestant chose to celebrate the former calypso monarchs (winners of the

Calypso King contest), by singing a medley of their compositions, dressed in the costume of a calypso king, complete with crown and cape, justifying her portrayal of this national symbol by stating: "Calypso is a historic document that records our successes and failures, our social problems, and moral beliefs" (Ariel Williams, 1999 National Queen Show contestant). Another contestant chose to portray a cricketer, and came on stage in full cricket gear, including leg pads and bat. Her performance pleased the judges with its witty jabs at the West Indies team, and she won the prize for best talent. Cricket is widely played and enjoyed in Dominica. Radio transmissions of West Indies team games are avidly taken in, and while Dominica does not have its own international professional level team, cricket stands as a strong vehicle for Caribbean and Dominican identity: even though cricket is an international sport, played by many of the Commonwealth countries, adopted through British influence, local people strongly identify with the players and the sport, as representatives or extensions of their countries or regions. It is significant that these two women chose to personify what are generally held to be male roles and national heroes, as calypso king and a cricketer, and especially noteworthy that one of them was voted 'best talent': while women in pageants position themselves as role models for women, there are few female *roles* that stand as national symbol as do Calypsonian and cricketer, other than the National Queen that they are hoping to become. However, cross-gender representations are in keeping with the inversions of Carnival.

The three other contestants carried out dramatic monologues that advocated for social and economic improvements. In one monologue, the contestant recounted what she would contribute to Dominica's economic development if she became an 'ambassador at large'. The other two contestants engaged the theme of moral improvement, decrying the presence of violence and drug abuse: "My children, it is time to ignore impoverished entertainments, impurities, and sophisticated foreign values. It is time for a love symphony and man's harmony" (Natasha Bellot, 1999 National Queen Show contestant). The other contestant proposed increased faith in God to battle the social ills of

violence, drugs and suicide: “Our young nation is at the mercy of drug abuse. That is why we need to strengthen our love for each other and deepen our faith in the one and only God” (Vanessa Isles, 1999 National Queen Show contestant and winner). These performances situated these contestants as nation makers, either through economic development or through healing the nation, to make it correspond to the image of health and purity of a ‘nature island’. The second skit posed Dominican society in contrast to the ‘outside’ world, seeing a degradation of values that has come through modernization, much as did the women whose narratives were examined in Chapter 4.

In the third round, the contestants modeled swimsuits. All suits worn were one piece (in contrast to the Miss America Pageant in which the girls wear bikinis), some girls entering the stage with a wrap which they removed as they glided across the stage. This round obviously focussed on the physical beauty of the contestants, but the appeal was not only in their appearance but also in the way they displayed themselves, through their demeanour and poise. They modeled the suits much as runway models are seen showing designer clothing, in a standard mannequin walk. These girls’ ability to master this framework of display of their physicality was as much in contest as were the physical attributes themselves. The notion of the body schema, or image, discussed first in Chapter 5, is pertinent here. The manner in which the body is positioned becomes part of its physicality, so that corporeal beauty is tied to its movement through space, its connection to space, in this way creating and being created by the context.

The fourth round of the pageant combined the evening gown contest and a question and answer period. Each contestant modeled an elegant gown, with a deliberately languid step, to slow ‘dinner’ music. Again, in this portion of the show, the emphasis was on the movement, the ability of the girls to present themselves through their movement, their bodies disciplined and honed to conform to the mode of presentation. The entrance to the stage was transformed, so that each girl was obliged to descend a short staircase to make a dramatic ‘entrance’, as though they were entering a ballroom at some official function.

They modeled the gowns, one by one, in typical runway style, stopping and turning so that all angles of their dresses could be seen.

Each girl then stopped in front of the staircase, posing until the commentator approached with the microphone and a conk shell filled with numbers. The girl chose a number, and another person read the question. Each question derived from issues of social well being and development, including universal secondary education; computer literacy in schools; the fate of the banana industry; setting an example for young people; advising against use of illicit drugs; and benefits of participating in the National Queen Show. The answers were usually clearly stated in a well-enunciated, confident manner, using standard English without the grammatical particularities of Dominican English. Answers elicited cheers from the attending crowd. All but the last participant answered satisfactorily. This girl stopped several times while giving her answer, never really completing her sentences, and when she stopped, the crowd booed her, making it all the more difficult to continue. Continue she did, nonetheless, to finish her evening gown parade with a smile. This hesitation was her demise, however, in both the eyes of the judges and the audience: I overheard one man quip that if she had been his girlfriend, he would have revoked her after that performance. This comment demonstrates the extent to which verbal ability and the portrayal of self-confidence are important in women's self-presentation, for at least some Dominicans.

For the final round, all the contestants entered into a sound-proof booth and came out one by one to be asked the same question by the commentator: "If you could grant a wish to your country for the 21st century, what would that wish be and why?" Responses, again, were well-articulated. Six of the seven contestants wished for an end to the violence and drug use among youth in Dominica, generally seen as an impediment to proper development of the nation and the seventh young woman wished that politicians would 'become one', all for the same reason, to strengthen the nation.

The winner of the competition, Vanessa Isles, appears in photo above. Her response to the last question was thoughtful and well articulated, and the theme of the question corresponded to the theme of her talent monologue. That the majority of women answered this last question with similar responses demonstrates – if the booth was really soundproof and there was no prior communication regarding the question – that there is a common discourse circulating with respect to what is ‘wrong’ with the country, and an association between fixing that wrong and femininity. This connection of morality and femininity is an important aspect of the projection of an ideal image of femininity through the medium of the pageant.

The National Queen Show showcased the connection of femininity to nation through the framework of the female body, through a link to the beauty of the nation and to phenotypical criteria of Caribbean-ness, poise in the way one carries her body, ability to express oneself through both articulate verbal presentation and in developing a skit or monologue, and adherence to a particular morality, one that vies for the health of the nation. The beauty pageant allows for what Wilk (1995) called ‘structures of common difference’ as the occasion for public debate over the ideal woman. Newspaper and television coverage prior to the competition set the stage for much discussion over which girl should win and why. I overheard comments before and during the pageant concerning the women’s body shape, demeanor and dress, and verbal performance.

The female body displayed in pageants thus becomes the locus for the hegemonic production of a national feminine identity, from both within national boundaries and outside. As well, through the performance of monologues and other entertainment, the contestants align themselves with a particular moral stance that further combines with the other aspects in the production of femininity. By foregrounding the body, inscribed through dress and movement, in these pageants, it becomes the foremost signifier of femininity which is at the same time inextricably linked with national and cultural identity. Femininity is thus produced and signified through the ‘materiality’ of the body (Butler 1993). The moral aspects of femininity portrayed through verbal performance combine

with and are read through this materiality. In this way, the pageant can be considered a 'political technology' that works in the production of the female subject. The 'correct' version of femininity is made all the more appealing in its connection to beauty, and particular presentations of beauty are likewise made 'correct' through the pageant. The contestant, and especially the winner, embodies the discourses of femininity: her bodily movements, responses, etc. are all conditioned through disciplinary techniques used to produce femininity. Identification with the beauty queen is achieved through desire: a desire to resemble her, to imitate her, to be as close a replica as possible. The image of the 'correct' woman extends to men and gender relations: the beauty queen presents the model of a desirable woman: at the same time as the 'correct' image of femininity is presented to be emulated, the 'gaze' is also regulated, so that which feminine attributes should be looked upon as desirable are also designated through the performance. This ultimately has as effect the continuity of the production of femininity in everyday interactions, through repeated 'performances' of femininity under the disciplined gaze of onlookers.

Both pageants discursively construct the links between gender, especially ideals of femininity, and national identity: one with a view towards the future, and the other with a focus on the reinvigoration of traditional values, symbols, and gender for the creation of a national identity and cohesion.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: SELF, GENDER, NATION

The fundamental objective of this study was to learn the ways in which women's subjectivities have changed through the process of decolonisation, modernization, and nation building, from the inter-war period until the present in Dominica. The relationship between the conditions of colonial and post-colonial life in its material, political, social, and cultural aspects, and the permutation of discourses that relate to proper behaviour (moral discourses) through the shift in modes of governance were explored. The various ways in which the women in this study locate themselves in narrative and performances, evoking these discourses, have thus been revealed. These differences emerge in part due to their socio-economic backgrounds, in part to the age of the women because of their position on the life course, but especially because they were raised in different contexts due to changes in material life and governance.

Throughout the study, I have evinced moral discourses within which the women interviewed have formulated their self-representations. This study has drawn upon a hermeneutic that moved between the social and historical context and the narratives and performances, taking into account as well a body of work pertaining to family, gender relations and women's experiences in the Caribbean as a comparative basis against which to develop my analysis. In order to frame both the aspect of change and the analysis, I employed Foucault's theory of governmentality as a general framework through which to understand the transformations that have occurred in Dominican society as colonial policy shifted, and the project of nation building took shape. In using this framework, I have drawn out moral discourses that existed at both the colonial level and at the level of daily interaction of local people, and queried how those discourses were engaged by women in their self-accounts, and in the creation of frameworks of femininity. My aim was to apprehend both the discursive frameworks and their negotiation, through the presentation of historical information, oral historical

accounts, personal narratives, and ethnographic observations of performances through which moral frameworks of social relations (including relations of authority and gender relations) and images of femininity were transmitted. One goal was to demonstrate the shaping of the nation as it intertwines with the production of femininity, made most evident in the last chapter, but present in all as the changing modes of governance were connected to women's changing experiences and shifting subjectivities.

To accomplish these ends, I set out, in the second and third chapters, to explore the foundations of social relations and gender as they pertain to both the Caribbean region, and to Dominica in particular. In the second chapter, I demonstrated the development of social relations, especially those of kinship, class, and family, as well as women's status and ideologies surrounding women and gender relations by engaging with other work on women in the Caribbean.

The third chapter discloses the complexities and particularities of Dominica's history, showing the development of the rural, mainly peasant population. The rural population was shown to have developed after slavery as a quasi-autonomous peasantry that moved back and forth between subsistence agriculture, some market agriculture mainly through the *métayage* system, and wage labour on plantations and migration to other Caribbean regions and abroad. This partial marginalization, both from the urban sites, where political exchange occurred, and from access to lucrative markets through various colonial strategies, along with an almost *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the colonial office except when its interests were threatened, saw the development of communities that generated their own structures of authority and social organization. To do so, they drew on ideologies and practices that developed during slavery and that were reinforced somewhat through interactions with priests and planters, but nevertheless reinterpreted them within the context of their everyday lives. This was the case until after WWII, when colonial policy changed towards the Caribbean colonies, and, building on the premise that these societies were fundamentally unorganized, Britain began a series of social reforms and

interventions that targeted the family and gender roles and relations in order to create a healthy society of producers that could reproduce itself.

Both the overview of literature on family in the Caribbean and policies of the colonial government show an emphasis on the relative lack of males in the lower class Caribbean families. At the same time historical work showed that the development of kin relations and families in the Caribbean, emerging from the period of slavery, depended on both the presence of patriarchy as a system of organization and upon which the laws of inheritance were based, coupled with an ideology of domesticity for women, and for the slaves, the fact of inheritance of slave status through the mother, the lack of any right to marriage, the insecurity of relationships, where partners or children could be sold, and the sexual exploitation of female slaves. It also showed the development of ideological underpinnings that placed higher symbolic value on the practices and values of the elites, so that property and marriage became markers of status, as did the physical features associated with European-ness, such as light skin and smooth hair, and the ability to present oneself well, through dress. This system of symbolic values was reinterpreted by local villagers, emphasizing equality over wealth.

An important discursive framework then emanates from women's accounts of the past where the transformations that have occurred since the 1960s are critiqued from a moral point of view. This critique focuses especially on the departure from an egalitarian ethos where the economy and social relations of affection were based on the exchange of services and goods, and the idea that while it was important to be 'respectable' through the way in which one presented oneself, it was important to be 'equal' to others, neither poorer nor richer. The importance of clothing emerges here, as both a symbol of this respectability, of egalitarianism, and as a sign of autonomy. Clothing, purchased with cash, becomes an emblem of freedom from slavery and later, from poverty, rather than a symbol of the attainment of a superior status. But in the narrative of Helena (Chapter 4), clothing also symbolized a shift in the underlying moral discourse of egalitarianism, expressed as having *vari*, too much style and too many outfits. It is

fully plausible then, that the *wob dwiyet* has come to stand as such a strong symbol of femininity, the values of the past (culture), and independence (of individuals and of nation).

The critical stance that older women engaged, termed *critical nostalgia*, comments upon a shift in the values pertaining to local notions of respectability as denoted by the acquisition of too many clothes (*vari*), and that signals a dissolution of the egalitarian ethos exemplified by the sharing of goods and services in a system of generalized reciprocity, that extends to the relations between male and female partners, as an 'economy of love'. The increased need for and reliance upon cash has slowed if not halted the cycle of reciprocity through which social relations were expressed. The attainment of respectability has been transfigured, so that rather being characterized as an ability to share and to 'be on a level' with others, entwined with an egalitarian ethos, it has come to encompass more and more the idea of 'improving' as acquiring material wealth, and bettering one's situation, shedding the concern for the welfare of others.

The critique of older women encompassed another important framework of relations that they perceptively underlined as having transformed, those that comprise an *economy of respect*. The notion of respect was largely structured upon a hierarchy of age, but forged mainly of the concomitant acquisition of responsibility. In the study, the notion is elaborated based upon the relations between children and adults, where strict discipline prevailed. Responsibility was acquired slowly, with age, and older children often had jurisdiction over younger ones. Respect was thus an obligation, owed to them by the younger ones in their charge. The more responsibility a person accrued, the more respect was due. Becoming responsible meant fulfilling the ascribed gendered tasks, which, for women, included being able to control a child's behaviour. Any failure to fulfill responsibilities was chastised, or ridiculed if the person was an adult. With the attainment of responsibility, came autonomy, as freedom from the jurisdiction of others. This autonomy was negotiated in the women's narratives, in several ways,

especially through contradictions and conflicts that were part of the *ambivalence of patriarchy*.

The *ambivalence of patriarchy* emerges from the juxtaposition of the valorization of the male provider/female housewife that was promoted both through the example of colonial houses during slavery that fed an image of the black woman as unchaste, and through post-slavery colonial policies of reform, to the reality of Dominican rural society, where consanguinal kin relations took primacy and where a woman was 'lucky' if she married. The 'father' role existed in discourse, but the space was often filled with other kin: the absence of the father also signalled autonomy, experienced negatively by some, and sought after by others. Because of the valorization of marriage in this way, it was integrated to a system of values that was partially embedded in the relations of the economy of respect, in that marriage was most desirable for many of the older and some of the younger women, after a certain maturity was achieved, which included both emotional and financial stability. However, at the same time, it also shifted as the importance of the age-related status dissipates: on the one hand the Christian churches encourage marriage on the basis of morality, ignoring the value system of which marriage was a part, while on the other, as age and maturity become less important for marriage for many, it becomes more associated with the ethic of 'improving', and the accumulation of wealth and prestige.

The economy of love that underlies relations between men and women, as an exchange of goods and services, with concomitant rights and responsibilities, obligations and expectations that are worked out within what Kandiyotti has termed the 'patriarchal bargain' is also undergoing a shift for some women, as relations of class are altered. Young women are entering the salaried workforce more than ever before, and to do so, need their high school education. There is more pressure on them to succeed in school and to land a good job before they begin to bear children; some young women project a career to which children and relationships with men are secondary, if not contradictory. On the other hand, fewer young women become involved in agriculture, yet less than half achieve

high school graduation. The fertility rate for teens is high, and young women with little education do not, or cannot turn to subsistence agriculture as did their mothers: the 'patriarchal bargain' has shifted somewhat for them, as some of them become more desperate than their predecessors, and dependent on men for support. The shifting relations of class do not 'marginalize' only the young lower class males who, in fact, are more often gainfully employed than their sisters and girlfriends, and are also more involved in agriculture, one industry that does not require a high level of literacy to enter. So while some young women are attaining the gender ideal disseminated and upheld by the National Queen, most do not, either in career or in physical beauty. Nevertheless, she stands as a symbol of possible selves, and of self-empowerment, renewed each year as another Queen is chosen.

In another perspective, one trope that has traversed this study from the beginning (befitting because it is a chronicle of change) is the contrastive juxtaposition of past and present in women's narratives and performances. Older women set past against present to both frame and imbue value to their lives as they lived them prior to the coming of the road to La Plaine (a symbol in itself of the journey from past to present), and to critique the profound shifts in values they perceived. The mothers in the parenting skills course expressed their perceptions of positive change within a framework that strongly opposed 'tradition' and 'modernity' paradigmatically with male/female, Patwa/English, authoritarian/communicative, ignorant/enlightened. In contrast to the older women, this paradigm regarded the values of the past negatively, including the local language which, in the nation-building project, has been valorized, as have other symbols of common heritage such as dance, music, dress, and Carnival characters. In the Creole Couple contest, the juxtaposition of past and present emerges once again, in divergent configurations, but notably in the first skit reconciliation occurs, where past, as 'culture', stands as the female contestant's empowerment, or in the fourth performance where the 'modern' woman is portrayed in a negative light. And ultimately, the Wob Dwiyet, as the celebration

and melding of national heritage and femininity, is juxtaposed, complementarily, to the National Queen contestants as the embodiment of womanhood and modernity.

Finally, this study has attempted, not to juxtapose past and present, but to illuminate the in-between, the transitional processes and consequences of change, especially on women's subjectivities in connection to the development of the nation, framed both methodologically and metaphorically within the life course. The coming of age of the nation (2000 was Dominica's twenty-first birthday after all) and the coming of age of young women like Frances, after all, are wrought with ambivalence as both nation and woman seek a representational framework within which to position themselves.

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McGill

University

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Dawson Hall

APPENDIX D

FORM 11

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

A review committee of:

Position	Field of Research
FUMIKO IKAWA-SMITH	
Professor	Anthropology
Andy Simpson	Anthropology (Grad Student)
Col. H. Scott Assoc. Prof.	Anthropology
Al. F. Ryan	Anthropology

has examined the application for funds in support of a projet titles:

As proposed by Robbyn Seller to Research Grants Office
(Applicant) (Granting agency, if any)

and consider the experimental procedures, as outline by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dec. 10/98
Date

[Signature]
Head of Department

Dean of Faculty

Ethical review committees are to be convened by the Head of the Department, or Administrative Unit, in which the proposed research is to be done and are to consist of a representative appointed by the Dean, two individuals knowledgeable in the field of the proposed research but not associated with the propsed project and preferable not from the department in which the project is to be carried out, and one or more individuals who would represent a general point of view. The applicant should not serve on the Committee or should he sign on behalf of the department or the faculty.

Form RGO 73-9-200

Postal address: 853 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, PQ, Canada H3A 2T6

