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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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DRAMA, ACTION AND CHANGE:
SISTREN, A WOMEN'S THEATRE COLLECTIVE IN JAMAICA

by Susan M. Ferner

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in International Affairs

The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
April, 1986

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ISBN 0-315-33403-7

The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis, submitted by Susan Ferner, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Brian Tomlin, Director
The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

J. Keil
Supervisor

ABSTRACT

In 1977, thirteen Jamaican working class women came together to do a play about "How we suffer as women and how men treat us bad." The play signalled the beginning of Sistren Theatre Collective, which aims to raise consciousness and facilitate the organization of women to address their problems and devise strategies for change.

Sistren examines the oppression and exploitation of Jamaican working class women in terms of the wider socio-economic and political system, showing the links between class and gender, production and reproduction, and material and ideological conditions. The form of their cultural and political activities follows from this understanding. This approach parallels the key elements of the Western-based framework of socialist feminism. While many Third World women argue that Western "feminist" ideologies are inappropriate for the study of, and political action by, women in developing societies, it is argued in this study that Sistren's political and cultural activities, and the analysis on which these activities are based, parallel the major tenets of socialist feminism.

In order to draw the parallels between socialist feminism and Sistren's work, socialist feminism is defined. Background information on Jamaica, women in Jamaica, and women in the family is provided to situate Sistren's work in its historical socio-political and economic context. Finally, Sistren's work is described, analysed, and evaluated.

In conclusion, the parallels between socialist feminism and Sistren's activities are drawn. Socialist feminism proves flexible enough to facilitate the study of women in different cultures and times, and can be enriched and expanded by drawing on the experiences of Third World women's organizations such as Sistren.

Acknowledgements

Plenty, plenty thanks are extended to all the women in Sistren, for their time, openness, and generosity. Thanks are also expressed to other Jamaican organizations and individuals, especially CUSO, the Women's Resource and Outreach Center, and the Women's Center. In Canada, thanks are extended to my supervisor Dr. Jared Fell and advisors Fiona Mackenzie and Dr. Robert Moore. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who have lent much support and encouragement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The position of women in Jamaica is expressed in the historical and contemporary socio-economic and political power structures and their associated belief systems. The problems facing poor, working class women and their male counterparts are inseparable from the wider historical and material problems of economic dependency and class conflict. Facing high unemployment, unskilled working class women are often forced to accept menial labour for low wages in the service industry and sweatshop factories. Those who cannot find work in the lower echelons of the formal sector manage to "make do" as petty vendors, market women, and prostitutes in the informal sector. With 33% of the households in Jamaica headed by women, and these primarily in the working class, the burden of childcare, unemployment, inadequate social services, inflation, and poor housing falls largely on the shoulders of women. Research and studies devised to improve the status of women must take these problems into account.

Current studies by Caribbean researchers on women in Jamaica avoid adopting an explicitly Western "feminist" approach, and this may be due in part to the caution learnt in transplanting Western-based feminist philosophies to the Caribbean. (Anderson, 1984: xiv). It is argued that the Western models are based on the experience of white, middle-class women and are inappropriate for Third World women. The majority of studies which originate in the Caribbean examine the inter-relationship between the national and international economic, political, and social structures and how

this influences the position of poor, working class women (see Bolles, 1981; Massiah, 1984; McKenzie, 1982; Reddock, 1980). This approach is compatible with socialist feminism, a Western-based framework which draws upon feminism and Marxism to examine the status of women in any given society. In short, socialist feminism analyses the historical and material position of women in relation to ideology and the over-riding socio-political and economic structure. This shapes the sexual division of labour in both the work force and the household. Power relations are examined in terms of their gender and class origins. The Marxist-feminist synthesis has proven a useful tool for researchers in the Third World, who combine analyses of changing household structures, familial relations, and ideologies with the effects of the expanding capitalist mode of production on women (Bandarage, 1984:506) (see Benaria, 1982; Benaria and Sen, 1981; Deere, 1982).

In the literature on women and development, two Western social science approaches may be broadly discerned, these being Modernization/liberal feminism and socialist feminism. These two modes of analysis lead to very different action to alter the situation facing poor women in developing societies. Whereas Modernization/liberal feminism calls for attitudinal and legislative change to integrate women into the development process, socialist feminism advocates the restructuring of the socio-political, economic, and ideological structures which maintain women's oppression and exploitation. Action seeking to achieve the goal of socialist feminism will differ significantly from strategies devised by Modernization/liberal feminists.

Given the aversion towards culturally biased Western models expressed by Caribbean researchers, the question of whether socialist feminism offers a useful framework of analysis for the study of Jamaican women is raised. By examining the cultural and political activities of Sistren, a women's grassroots theatre collective in Jamaica, this question can be answered. As this study indicates, Sistren's understanding of the oppression and exploitation of working class women and their strategy for change is compatible with socialist feminist analysis.

The Collective is composed of working class women who examine and dramatize the historical and material position of Jamaican women as defined by the socio-political and economic environment. Sistren looks at the position of women from the eyes of the working class actresses who explore the forces which define their own lives: the socio-economic and political environment, class structure, male ideology, and the sexual division of labour in the work force and the household. The working class actresses work in conjunction with middle class professional women.

This study examines the parallels between the active approach used by Sistren and the Western academic discourse of socialist feminist analysis. While the group does not explicitly utilize the framework nor identify themselves as "socialist feminist", it is clear that Sistren's examination of working class women in Jamaica and strategy for change implicitly corresponds to the general approach of socialist feminism. The socialist feminist framework

offers enough flexibility to be used in different settings to examine the local condition of women.

In order to discern whether parallels between Sistren's work and socialist feminist theory exist, socialist feminism must be defined. In Chapter II, Modernization/liberal feminism and socialist feminism, the two main methods of analysis employed in the study of Third World women, are outlined and examined. Socialist feminism, which synthesizes the major elements of Marxism and feminism, is determined as the most comprehensive framework of analysis for examining women in developing societies. It therefore provides the framework of analysis on which this study is based.

In order to understand the contemporary conditions facing Jamaican women's organizations such as Sistren, the historical and material position of working class women in Jamaica must be examined. Chapter III provides an overview of Jamaica's socio-political and economic history to situate women in their historical context in Jamaican society. The specific study of women in Jamaica is divided into three main periods: Slavery Plantation Period: 1655-1838; Capitalist Plantation Period: 1838-1945; and Industrialization Period: 1945-1986. The position of women in the productive and reproductive sectors are examined over time. Because the female role in the family is extremely important in Jamaican society, a separate section on contemporary women and the family is presented. This section examines the female role in the household and its links with women's position in the wage labour sector.

As Chapter III indicates, the historical, material, and ideological conditions facing working class Jamaican women are

complex and critical. If viable change is to occur, women's groups such as Sistren must be aware of the material and ideological forces at play which shape the position of Jamaican women. Sistren provides a case study of a Third World women's organization which takes into account socio-economic, political, and ideological conditions when examining the position of working class women and devising strategies for change. Chapter IV outlines Sistren's work in theatre productions, workshops, textiles, and educational research. Sistren aims to raise consciousness, and the various themes presented by Sistren in their drama, workshops, textiles, and educational research are explored, which include the sexual division of labour in the household and the workplace, patriarchal ideology, and class conflict. Sistren aims to facilitate active change through its workshops, which reach a wide variety of individuals, including female sugar workers, school girls, domestic workers, female prisoners, unemployed urban women, middle class professional women, and youth groups. The workshops aim to raise consciousness and organize women to devise strategies to alter their own situation. For example, Sistren has successfully facilitated the organization of rural women in the Hayes community, who have acted upon the pressing problems of the lack of water and housing titles held in the male partner's name.

In the final chapter, Sistren's work is evaluated in light of whether Sistren itself has undergone a process of consciousness raising and empowerment, and whether the Collective has facilitated the consciousness raising and empowerment of other women. The Collective itself has been very successful in raising their own

awareness through discussion, drama, travel, and research. The members themselves have been empowered by acquiring greater knowledge and self-confidence and by attaining some level of economic self-sufficiency. Despite economic, political, and social constraints, Sistren's consciousness raising work through theatre, workshops, textiles, and educational information has been found to be successful. Facilitating action for change proves more difficult, as the socio-economic and political obstacles are greater. However, Sistren has successfully facilitated the organization and mobilization of women's organizations in Jamaica.

Conclusions are made by drawing parallels between Sistren's work and the Western socialist feminist framework. It is argued that, while Sistren is not explicitly "socialist feminist", their work implicitly corresponds to the key elements of socialist feminism. The socialist feminist framework itself can be enriched by drawing on the experiences of Third World women's organizations such as Sistren.

The information concerning women in Jamaica and Sistren is largely based on research and interviews conducted in Jamaica between June and September, 1985. Information on Jamaica and women in Jamaica was gathered in Canadian libraries, the University of the West Indies, and from women's organizations in Kingston.

Sistren was extremely helpful and open to interviews and observation. As a participant-observer, I was able to participate in workshops, attend the play "Muffet Ina All A Wi", and interview Sistren members. I attended and participated in several urban and

rural workshops and was able to observe the members of the groups, who were clearly enthusiastic. I spoke to a few participants, who spoke very favorably of the workshops. I was unable to speak to individuals after the theatre performance, which was held in an urban ghetto. However, it was clear throughout the performance that the audience responded very favorably to the play.

I spoke to Sistren members on an informal and formal basis, speaking with both the working class actresses and middle class resource personnel. I was able to speak to all of the members at one time or another, and socialized with some of the actresses on an informal basis, meeting family and friends. In addition, I was given access to Sistren's files and publications, including notes from their general meetings, workshop reports, and scripts.

All material from interviews are anonymous and interviews are indicated in the text by the date. The Jamaican patois, which is the local dialect, will not be translated in the text.

II. SOCIALIST FEMINISM: A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The literature concerning the position of women in developing countries is enormous and diversified. One can conveniently divide the material into two basic, contending methods of analysis: Modernization/liberal feminism and socialist feminism, with the latter incorporating elements of feminism and Marxism. It is important to determine which method offers the most valuable and comprehensive approach to the study of women's position in developing countries. Women must understand how and why exploitation and oppression is maintained in order to develop a viable strategy for change.

In order to determine the advantages of socialist feminism over Modernization/liberal feminism, a short summary and critique of latter will be provided. This will be followed by a definition of socialist feminism which synthesizes the key aspects of feminism and Marxism.

LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism, which arose in the West, focuses upon patriarchal ideology as the cause of sexual inequality and the subordination of women. Patriarchy refers to an hierarchical system of power in which males possess greater economic, political, and social privileges and hence a superior position. Sex roles themselves are perceived as units of power and oppression (Eisenstein, 1979:8). The original basis of patriarchy is believed

to lie in the biological differences between men and women in pre-industrial societies. The male "biological advantage" in size, strength, and reproduction allowed men to control the key resources of land, food, tools, and weapons (Saunders, 1983:20). This male privilege was maintained through the development and emergence of a cultural definition of appropriate sex roles, or "patriarchal ideology", which defined men as superior.

Liberal feminism argues that patriarchy is presently maintained and transmitted through the family and socio-economic and political institutions, such as education, legislation, and mass media. Because liberal feminists believe in "the inherent viability and goodness of the dominant politico-economic and ideological structures of the capitalist system", they believe that social inequalities will gradually disappear through legal procedures and attitudinal change (Bandarage, 1984:495). Women's oppression is thus viewed as a deviation from the norms of equality and justice, which can be rectified through the expansion of civil liberties and rights. Inequalities are legitimate inasmuch as all individuals have the right to raise her/his position as far as her/his talents will allow (Jaggar, 1984:84). As long as women have equal access to work and education, their status will improve within a liberal-democratic system based on meritocracy. Liberal feminism calls for the removal of cultural attitudes concerning gender which impede equal opportunity in the work place.

Liberal feminism has its counterparts in the study of women and development, particularly among middle class academics and policy planners who subscribe to liberal feminism and Modernization theory.

The pioneering study of Ester Boserup, "Women's Role in Economic Development" (1970) is the first in this school of thought to identify the centrality of women's work in the Third World economies, which remains "hidden" in statistics and undervalued by policy planners. In this study, gender is recognized as the basic factor in the division of labour: the sexual division of labour in agriculture is identified and linked to the pattern of women's participation in non-agricultural activities and migration. The study acknowledges the negative impact of colonialism and the penetration of capital into the subsistence economy on the status of women. Subsequent empirical studies by Liberal feminism/Modernization researchers support Boserup's findings, acknowledging that, while women's work is key to Third World economies, their contribution is undervalued.

Liberal feminists investigating developing countries subscribe to Modernization theory, which attributes the cause of underdevelopment to traditional values and social structures. Modernization theory argues that all societies can develop along the same path as the West through the diffusion of capital, technology, political institutions, and values. It is only because women are initially marginalized in the backward sectors of the economy that they fall on the lower side of the economic "production gap" and suffer inequality (Wellesley, 1977:3). It is therefore assumed that the position of women will improve as they become integrated into the Western development model and gain access to the economic and political benefits of development. Women's status will rise as employment, education, legal rights, and attitudinal change emerge

during the modernization process. The strategy advocated by Modernization/liberal feminists to raise the status of Third World women entails the integration of women into the development process.

While the Modernization/liberal feminism has successfully documented the importance of women's work in developing countries and has exposed the inequities engendered by the process of modernization, it has failed to see the modernization process in general as anything but positive. Women are believed to be subordinate only because they have been marginalized throughout the development process. As a result, the policies implemented according to the Modernization/liberal feminist planners are potentially detrimental to the position of poor women. (see Beneria, 1982; Beneria and Sen, 1981; Tinker, 1976). For example, schemes encouraging women to "enter development" and find wage labour do not account for the fact that women enter along the sexual division of labour and may find themselves exploited in low wage, low skilled positions. The greatest limitation of applying liberal feminism in the Third World is its adherence to Modernization theory, which ignores the historical and material evolution of developing nations and the political and economic links to the colonial and neo-colonial powers. An enormous number of analytical studies argue that poverty under capitalism is not a mere aberration, but a structural feature of an economic system which places profits before basic needs (see, Baran, 1957; Foster-Carter, 1976). Modernization theory overlooks the political, economic, and social interactions and interests between the elite of various nations. The fact that hundreds of billions of dollars of foreign aid has not "trickled

down" to the poor nor sent the developing nations speeding along a continuum of modernization is evidence of the failure of Modernization theory to address the key issues of underdevelopment and dependency: class conflict, class interests, capital accumulation, and the control of production. Nor does the model examine the fact that inequities between rich and poor, men and women, and First and Third World nations are ever growing, due partially to the hierarchical, exploitative mechanisms of capital penetration and accumulation.

The lack of class analysis is a major weakness in Modernization/liberal feminist research. Contemporary Marxists indicate that women's oppression is inextricably woven into class oppression at the national and international levels (Bandarage, 1984:500). Studies indicate that in many pre-class societies, women were highly autonomous and sex roles were reciprocal and equally valued (see Sanday, 1981; Schlegel, 1977). The studies also show that the incorporation of these societies into the Western capitalist system undermined the traditional position of women. Thus the liberal feminist argument that women must be "integrated" into the development process is problematic. As the Modernization/liberal feminist studies indicate themselves, women presently play a central role in the economy. In other words, women are already well integrated into the existing economic structures (Bandarage, 1984:499). It is the hierarchical socio-economic and political structures of the existing system which relegate women to the lowest echelons of the ladder. Hence, greater "integration" into the prevailing system will not guarantee equality for poor women.

The liberal feminist argument that attitudinal change will lead to the equality of women is equally problematic. The focus on patriarchal ideology as the cause of women's subordination and oppression is incomplete. While ideology is certainly an important factor, patriarchy cannot be separated from the socio-political and economic environment as a whole. Patriarchy is not the ahistorical, universal system of power envisioned by liberal feminists. Rather, patriarchal ideology changes over time and place, under the influence of political institutions, economic structures, and social conditions. Therefore, by eliminating the male bias in policy planning, liberal feminism does not ensure the eradication of a sexual division of labour, which relegates women to the domestic domain and low wage, least skilled work. This is due to the fact that liberal feminists fail to analyse women's reproductive role as a determinant of women's work, the sexual division of labour, and the subordination of women. (Reproduction in this case refers to biological reproduction, the daily and generational maintenance of the labour force, and the perpetuation of the social system [Beneria and Sen, 1981:290]). The crucial role of women in the household is not linked to the overall subordination and exploitation of women in the labour force. As a result, development projects aimed to integrate women into the cash economy can intensify, rather than alleviate, the subordination of women. Women will enter the labour force along the sexual division of labour, finding themselves in low-wage, unskilled jobs.

In essence, the blend of Modernization theory and liberal feminism isolates sexual inequality from the socio-economic

inequality with which it is intertwined. Thus, the strategies advocated by Modernization/liberal feminists, namely the "integration of women into development"; attitudinal change; and legally guaranteed access to education, employment, resources, and technology, will not ensure a rise in the status of women. The changing role of women in economic production is determined by numerous historical factors which are ignored by Modernization/liberal feminism, such as the sexual division of labour and the local class structure (Bandarage, 1984:502). Researchers in Modernization/liberal feminism fail to identify the cause of women's oppression and exploitation. Policies adhering to the liberal feminist/ Modernization approach are narrow and may be detrimental to the very women they seek to "help" (see Beneria, 1982).

SOCIALIST FEMINISM: A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Socialist feminism draws from Marxism and liberal and radical feminism, examining the links between gender and class; reproduction (in terms of the social relations which regulate the formation of families and the bearing of children) and production (in terms of the social relations which govern the production of goods and services); ideology and socio-economic and political structures (Deere, 1982:87). The object of socialist feminism is to identify gender relations and their connection with the processes of production and reproduction within an historical and material framework (Barrett, 1980:9). Analysis focuses primarily upon the

relationship of patriarchy to historical modes of production and the relationship between production and reproduction. In short, socialist feminism analyses power relationships in terms of their class origin and patriarchal roots, linking class and gender, domestic and wage labour, and ideological and material conditions (Eisenstein, 1979:23).

Radical feminism shares the same concept of patriarchy as liberal feminism, arguing that the oppression of women is caused by patriarchy, an ~~hierarchical~~ sexual system of power in which men possess superior political and economic privilege (Eisenstein, 1979:17). Rooted in female/male biological differences and in women's reproductive role, patriarchy is maintained through ideology, marriage, the family, and the sexual division of labour. Women's position in society is defined in terms of the patriarchal organization of society, which limits and defines the activities, desires, and aspirations of women. In order to eliminate patriarchy, radical feminists call for the removal of patriarchal ideology which maintains the hierarchical sexual division of society and the sex roles themselves. In contrast to liberal feminism, radical feminism demands a radical sexual revolution, calling for the restructuring of marriage and the family institution and the removal of society's patriarchal and hierarchical form. In its extreme, this calls for the abolition of monogamous marriage and the nuclear family in order to eradicate patriarchy at its roots, that is, in women's reproductive selves.

Socialist feminism borrows the radical feminist notion of patriarchy as a system of sexual power which cuts across the public

and private spheres. However, the feminist ahistorical primacy of patriarchal ideology is rejected. The fact that the nature and extent of oppression under patriarchy can alter and vary under different socio-political and economic institutions and structures is recognized by socialist feminists. Therefore, socialist feminism locates patriarchy historically and materially as "a system of social relations between men and women, governing the production and reproduction of people and their gender identities." (Leacock, 1981:482).

Socialist feminism also rejects the notion that women, as a sex, is a class (Eisenstein, 1979:18). The feminist definition of patriarchy as a social system characterized by male domination over women is viewed by socialist feminists as extremely general and simplified. Clearly, not all men benefit equally under the socio-economic system, nor do all women suffer equally. The problem is not simply men as a group versus women as another group. Class, racial, and cultural contradictions in status within each group must be examined. The material conditions facing women must be considered.

Socialist feminism rejects the radical feminist solutions to the oppression of women, which are offered without the basis of a theoretical framework of analysis. For example, such solutions as the abolition of the nuclear family, the evolution of lesbian societies, and the extrauterine reproduction of children do not offer realistic answers to the problems of oppression under the existing power structures. The desperate material conditions facing poor women in the Third World call for an examination of not only

ideology, but of economic and political factors within a clear theoretical framework.

Marxist analysis provides an extremely useful tool for examining women's oppression, as it provides an historical, material, and dialectical method to analyse the power relations between men and women. It also furnishes a class analysis necessary for the study of power (Eisenstein, 1979:6).

In classical Marxism, women's exploitation is treated as part of the general critique of class relations. Marx argues that the social relations of production under capitalism led to a situation in which women, just as men, were exploited as workers in the labour force (exploitation referring to the extraction of the worker's surplus value by the bourgeoisie). In addition, women were oppressed as forms of property in the bourgeois family institution. Oppression in the family, based on the woman's lack of control and power, was determined by structural factors external to the family and identical to those which underlie the exploitation of working class individuals in general.

Engels examines the historical emergence of women as a subordinate group, attributing the origin of women's inferior position to the emergence of private property. Engels argues that the sexually egalitarian nature of hunting and gathering societies altered as men entered the "production-for-exchange" sector, leaving women segregated and subordinated in the "production-for-use" sphere (Saunders, 1983:29). Men's activities became increasingly involved in work outside the home in the "public" sector, while women remained in the familial or "private" sector. The break between the

public and private spheres excluded women from participation in "valued" production and hence created their subordination in the family. The role of reproduction became peripheral to the relations of production, and the monogamous family evolved as a means of transmitting private property to legitimate heirs. Engels maintains that the hierarchical sexual division of labour and segregation of the sexes coincided with the emergence of private property.

The oppression of women through their role in the relations of reproduction is key to Marx's conception of "patriarchy" or oppression, which is defined as a property relationship between husband and wife in the bourgeois family in which the male head controls the means of production and organizes the labour of the family members (Saunders, 1983:29). The material base of patriarchy is the control of property and the privatization of the family and domestic labour. The conflict between men and women within the family is cast in a class analysis, with men representing the bourgeoisie and women the proletariat (Eisenstein, 1979:13). Women are only oppressed in the bourgeois family, where private property exists. Therefore, Engels does not explicitly consider women as oppressed in the working class.

Neo-Marxists maintain the primacy of class and class based revolutionary strategy, while correcting what are perceived as historical oversights. Neo-Marxists contribute to the Marxist analysis by examining the changes in family functions over time to serve the interests of the capitalist system. The family is viewed as secondary to the productive sector, playing an essential role for

capitalism as an institution for the appropriation and transmission of private property, a site for the reproduction and socialization of the labour force, and a storage place for a "reserve army" of female labour (Barrett, 1980:21). Capitalism benefits directly or indirectly from domestic labour.

The strategy for emancipation in Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis entails the entrance of women into the wage labour sector, the replacement of economic family units with collectivized units, and the collectivization of domestic chores. The overall strategy calls for the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

Marxist analysis is extremely useful, as it historically links the variability in female status to changes in the mode of production, provides a material base for the examination of sex subordination, and analyses women as members of certain classes rather than as a single, homogeneous "sisterhood". However, Marxism has been criticized by socialist feminism on a number of essential points. Engel's argument that women's oppression emerged with the introduction of private property has been proven false by anthropological studies (see Sanday, 1981; Schlegel, 1977). The historical fact that women were subordinated in various pre-capitalist societies is not acknowledged by Marxists. Factors other than private property, such as ideology and culture must be examined.

Marx and Engels view the sexual division of labour as a "natural" division due to men and women's biological functions in reproduction. In essence, a biological argument is used to explain the origin of women's oppression, which is reductionist inasmuch as

complex social and historical phenomena are limited to a single category of biological differences. It is also regressive, as it accepts separate spheres for men and women in the home and workplace (Barrett, 1980:12). By separating the productive and reproductive sectors, neither the issue of the sexual division of labour outside the family structure nor the question of how domestic subordination is linked to public exploitation are addressed. Marxist analysis fails to link the organization of production to the sexual division of labour and the nature of the family household. The female role in reproduction, which limits women's activities in production, is not seen as problematic. The sexual division of labour is not explored as a site of exploitation in itself.

Marx and Engels view the family as a microcosm of the class struggle, whereby women are the proletariat and men form the bourgeoisie (Eisenstein, 1979:14). However, these categories do not extend outside the family, where class positions are assigned according to their relations to the means of production and not gender. Patriarchal relations outside the property relations in the family are ignored. Sex is subsumed to class and the relations of reproduction are subsumed under the relations of production. The sexual system of power in which men possess a superior position is not examined as a determining factor in women's oppression. Hence, women's subordinate position in the labour force is not linked to her inferior status in the home.

In addition, Marxist analysis does not account for the oppression of women in the working class family. Marx argues that oppression in the household is due to property relations between

members in the bourgeois family. Because the working class does not own property, the proletariat woman is not explicitly viewed as being oppressed. Socialist feminism calls for an analysis of ideology and the sexual division of labour in the household to examine the oppression of working class women in the private, as well as public, sphere.

Socialist feminism calls for a reworking of Marx's definition of patriarchy, which fails to offer a theoretical base for articulating the linkages between the organization of patriarchy and the social relations external to the family (Saunders, 1983:47). Marx considers women's oppression as peripheral to the mode of production. Socialist feminism maintains that patriarchy and the economic system are inextricably intertwined.

The strategies advocated for the emancipation of women by Marxists are inadequate. Case studies of women in socialist countries indicate that the socialization of the means of production and the entrance of women into the wage labour sector do not guarantee the emancipation of women (see Croll, 1981). Women continue to enter the labour force along the lines of the sexual division of labour, and are relegated to the low-wage, least-skilled occupations in the labour hierarchy. The socialization of domestic work is extremely costly and few nations are willing to shoulder the expense. Therefore, services fall short of demand (Croll, 1981:361-381). Monogamous marriage and the economic family unit have not disappeared even in socialist societies. The demise of the economic family unit to "ensure" women's emancipation has not occurred. Patriarchal ideology based on women's supposed "natural" rôle and

the sexual division of labour can survive even a radical restructuring of society. If a new ideology of job sharing in the reproductive sphere is not promoted, women will perform the bulk of domestic work. Women will thus find themselves shouldered with the burden of a "double day", working in both the productive and reproductive sectors.

The analytical roots of socialist feminism lie in feminist and Marxist analyses. Socialist feminism rejects the problematic areas of radical feminism, which are the failure to link the sexual division of labour to sex inequalities, the ahistorical notion of patriarchy, the separation of public and private spheres, and the emancipation strategies of the abolition of the family and the elimination of patriarchy. The limitations of Marxism, namely the separation of the public and private spheres, the primacy of class, the Marxist conception of patriarchy, and the criteria for the emancipation of women are reworked. Socialist feminism adopts the Marxist focus on the material base of inequality to examine patriarchy, linking production and reproduction, class and gender, and the economic and political system to ideology within an historical and material framework. Socialist feminism argues that capitalism and patriarchy are interdependent, mutually reinforcing systems, and that the oppression of women cannot be understood without examining the relations of production and reproduction.

Socialist feminism borrows the feminist notion of patriarchy, locating it historically and materially. Both the material and ideological relations of patriarchy are articulated, the former in terms of the sexual division of labour, the latter in terms of

cultural norms and values which support the inequality of sex roles. Sexual division of labour is conceptualized as the allocation to, or exclusion from, certain positions in the process of production and reproduction on the basis of gender.

This analysis is broad enough to consider the situation of women in both the workplace and the household. The primary concern is how the sexual division of labour, in conjunction with other relations, intensifies or restricts the power difference between men and women (Saunders, 1983). This involves an examination of the socio-economic conditions to determine how these intensify or restrict women's roles in the sexual division of labour.

In terms of domestic labour, socialist feminists explore women's subordination in the household and the patriarchal structures which maintain this oppression. Women's primary involvement in the reproductive sector, which is recognized as a sphere of production by socialist feminists, is key to understanding the subordination of women in the public sector. This entails the analysis of the domestic economy, the sexual division of labour in the household, social relations between household members, the family's class position, and patriarchal ideology. In this way, socialist feminism links the two essential elements of Marxism and feminism: the productive and reproductive spheres.

The maintenance of the sexual division of labour is of greater concern to socialist feminists than the origin of sexual subordination. The role of the state in linking and maintaining the needs of the economic system and patriarchal ideology is considered. The state, which intervenes in both the productive and reproductive

sectors, plays a key role in facilitating or inhibiting the entrance of women to the labour force.

Socialist feminism draws further from Marxism by examining women as members of certain classes. Not all women are oppressed and exploited equally under the socio-economic system. Some women exploit and oppress other women by virtue of their class position.

The socialist feminist framework has been used by scholars in the Third World to examine the linkages between female labour and the organization of production in traditional and industrial modes and between male and female labour in general (see Beneria, 1982). The basic argument maintains that the interaction between subsistence and capitalist spheres of production is facilitated by the sexual division of labour which serves capitalist accumulation. For example, because the subsistence production of foodstuffs and the sexual division of labour supplements wages, capital can pay below subsistence wages and accumulate greater profits (Deere, 1976:9). By absorbing women into the marginal, subsistence sectors of the economy and maintaining the household as a source of subsistence labour, the cost to the modern sector is reduced considerably. Socialist feminism also documents the negative impact of capital accumulation and modernization on the traditional roles and status of women.

The strategy advocated for the emancipation of women by socialist feminists directs attention to the context of women's entrance into the labour force, the degree of control of women in production, and the responsibility for domestic work and childcare. The ultimate goal is the abolition of both capitalism and

patriarchy: "the elimination of class and sex hierarchies through a radical transformation of society (is) a struggle that requires not only an analysis of class and accumulation, but a recognition of the importance of reproduction at all levels." (Beneria, 1981:298).

While socialist feminism offers the most comprehensive and effective method of analysis, it is not without its problems. Third world women criticize the middle class, Western bias of socialist feminism. The theoretical assumptions are drawn largely from the experience of white, middle class women in advanced capitalist countries. As a result, analytical categories such as the patriarchal nuclear family, the domesticated housewife, and the male income earner are less relevant for Third World women living under the system of dependent capitalism, where the realities of female headed household, "feminization of poverty", and changing sex roles call for a reformation of old categories (Bandarage, 1984:506). Socialist feminists in the industrialized nations tend to overlook development issues in the Third World, failing to make connections between their own situation and political, economic, and social structures in other parts of the world.

Socialist feminism is also criticized for inadequately dealing with race (Joseph, 1981:91-109). Black women suffer triple oppression by gender, class, and race divisions. Black feminists maintain that the historical and material conditions of black women differ significantly from those of white women. Black women thus find themselves in a unique position, oppressed and exploited by white women, white men, and black men. At the same time, black women express solidarity with black men in the struggle against the

oppression of racism. In essence, black women accuse socialist feminists of subsuming race to class. Racial and ethnic differences call for greater analysis.

Finally, socialist feminism is challenged in terms of its strategy. How is the demise of capitalism and patriarchy to occur? What is to be done in the interim? How can women change the socio-political and economic system? These questions are especially critical for women's organizations in the Third World, dealing with the immediate problems of hunger, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and disease. There is a need for both analysis and action.

In sum, socialist feminism offers the most comprehensive analysis for examining the position of women in developing societies. While drawing on the other schools of thought, socialist feminism offers a valuable critique of Modernization/liberal feminism, radical feminism, and Marxism. At the same time, socialist feminism breaks through the dichotomies of class and gender, production and reproduction, and ideology and material conditions. The shortcomings of socialist feminism, such as its Western bias and gap in terms of strategy, can be overcome by drawing on the experiences of women in different cultural settings. On the whole, the socialist feminist framework is flexible enough to facilitate the examination of women in developing societies.

III. WOMEN IN JAMAICA: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The status of women in any society must be examined in light of the overall historical process of social change. The linkages between the changing conditions in the household, the local and national economy, and the world economy must be taken into account (Deere, 1982:89). A brief overview of Jamaica's socio-economic and political history is provided to situate women within their historical context in Jamaican society. The specific study of women in Jamaica is divided into three main economic periods: Slavery Plantation Period: 1655-1838, Capitalist Plantation Period: 1838-1945, and Industrialization Period: 1945-1986. A section on women and the family follows, which examines the contemporary female role in the household and its links with women's position in the wage labour sector.

JAMAICA: AN OVERVIEW

Jamaica's history has been characterized by the development of an underdeveloped economy, dependent on the world market and foreign capital. Schisms between and within class groups are historically deep and bitter, both socially and politically (Standing, 1981:31).

From the time the British defeated the Spanish in 1655 until 1838, the slave mode of production formed the base of the plantation society. A local labour force did not exist, as the indigenous Arawak people had been decimated by the Spanish. Therefore, African slaves were imported to work on the sugar plantations which

were owned by white European slave masters and dominated by English capital. The brutal exploitation of African slave labour guaranteed the production of sugar and other plantation products for the British Empire's markets. An antagonistic and contradictory social relation emerged between the European slave-master and the African slave. Over time, as a result of the absence of white women, miscegenation became widespread and there developed a middle class of colored slaves and "free slaves" (individuals who bought their own freedom), which served as a buffer between the two principal classes (Beckford, 1980:17).

The slave plantation economy was transformed into a capitalist plantation economy after the last vestiges of slavery were removed in 1838. While emancipation ended slavery, it did not guarantee the survival of black women and men as free and independent producers. Conflict emerged between the plantation mode and the petty commodity production mode, which comprised the ex-slave peasantry (Beckford, 1980:40). Land ownership remained in the hands of the white planters and the British Crown, buttressed by legislation which prevented newly freed slaves access to land (eg: the Vagrancy Laws, which victimized the landless). The Jamaican worker found her/himself "free" only to sell his/her labour power cheaply to the capitalist planter. After years of brutal exploitation, the struggles for land and justice climaxed in 1865 in the ex-slave rebellion led by Paul Bogle. This resistance was suppressed, and the plantation owners continued to acquire crucial control over land. The planters tied as many ex-slaves to the estate as possible, while encouraging the importation of

indentured labour, primarily from the Indian sub-continent (Beckford, 1980:42).

During the early 20th century, the political and economic dominance of the capitalist plantation mode of production slowly declined, as commercial and industrial capital proved increasingly profitable. Although the plantation mode of production remained the island's primary economic force, the balance of political and economic power gradually shifted to the urban centers, as Jamaican working class blacks increasingly left the sugar estates and migrated to the urban centers. The steady exodus of rural workers was due primarily to the inaccessibility of fertile land, the low wages on the detested sugar estates, growing poverty and population in the rural areas, and the promise of employment and higher wages in the urban areas. Squeezed out of unskilled agricultural labour by increased mechanization, women withdrew from the agricultural sector and entered the cities in larger numbers than men, finding employment in manufacturing and service sectors.

Unemployment and serious social unrest became problematic in the 1930's, climaxing in the 1938 rebellion of the working class and unemployed. In response, the government sought a strategy which would raise the living standard by increasing employment in the industrial sector. "Industrialization by invitation" was adopted to encourage industrialization, increase manufactured exports, and expand the domestic market. The structure of production changed substantially after the 1940's, as Jamaica became increasingly industrialized. The economic, political, and ideological dominance

of the plantation mode of production was completely replaced by industrialization in the post war period.

The "Puerto Rican model" of development was pursued by the People's National Party (PNP) from 1955-1962 and the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) from 1962-1972. This strategy encouraged foreign investment in both import-substitution and export-oriented manufacturing enterprises, as well as in tourism. (Ambursely, 1983:76) The rapid economic growth that ensued significantly altered the island's economic structure. The traditional exports of sugar, bananas, coffee, and citrus were displaced by bauxite-alumina, tourism, and manufacturing, stimulated by an influx of American investments.

While the basic social structure of the capitalist plantation period remained essentially unchanged, there was considerable labour differentiation within each class, as new job opportunities were created. The social relations of race/class were reinforced and institutionalized in the 1950's, with the white expatriate or "socially white" managers on top; the expanding colored, Chinese, and Indian professionals, middle managers, and clerks in the middle; and black workers at the bottom (Beckford, 1980:67). While race and class remained practically synonymous until Independence in 1962, the correlation loosened considerably in the 1960's, as more blacks moved into the civil service and middle class occupations. Despite the movement of blacks into the upper echelons of society, the social structure retained its strict hierarchy. The attitudes of the new black elite reflected that of the white upper class.

The working class experienced a tremendous expansion, recruited from the displaced peasantry and lower strata of the colored petit-bourgeoisie. This latter class was increasingly differentiated, with highly skilled workers on top (eg: in bauxite and alumina) followed by low-skilled and semi-skilled labour in the "sweatshop" factories, hotels, clerical and service industries, and domestic work. The majority of women found themselves at the bottom of the urban occupational ladder. Agricultural labour remained at the bottom of the entire labour hierarchy.

Throughout the 1960's, the Jamaican economy experienced economic growth of approximately 6% per annum due to the rapid growth in world trade (Payne, 1984:19). However, despite this economic achievement, Jamaica retained its dependent and underdeveloped economic structure. External capital regulated and controlled the key sectors of the economy, with bauxite mining 100% foreign owned, manufacturing 75%, financial institutions 66%, transport 66%, communications 50%, tourism 50%, and the sugar industry 40% (Ambursely, 1983:80). While the middle and upper classes mushroomed and prospered due to the emergence of new high income occupations, the situation for the rural and urban unemployed deteriorated. Emphasis on the manufacturing sector and export cash crops led to domestic agricultural stagnation. The deterioration of the rural economy and the enticement of higher wages in the mineral and manufacturing sectors encouraged migration to urban centers, despite the fact that the capital intensive nature of the imported technology created few jobs. Hence, rural and urban poverty for the working class increased, as unemployment rose from 13.5% in 1960 to

23.6% in 1972 (Bernal, 1983:222). Income distribution worsened, with the share of personal earned income of the poorest 40% of the population dropping from 7.2% in 1958 to 5.4% in 1968 (Payne, 1984:19). Illiteracy, poor housing, inadequate health services, and hunger were the norm for the majority of the population. The overall result was not one of "trickle-down" growth, but perverse, unequal growth. For women, these difficulties were especially harsh, as over one third of the households were maintained by women alone.

As a vote of protest against the socio-economic and political system by the working class and intellectuals, the People's National Party under Michael Manley came to power in 1972. The PNP attempted to alter Jamaica's socio-political and economic structure. The PNP embarked on a strategy based on democratic socialism, which consisted of three commitments: the creation of an economy independent of foreign capital and more responsive to the needs of the people; the development of a more egalitarian society in terms of opportunity, respect, and basic rights; and the revitalisation of the local and state governments to encourage mass participation in the decision making process (Payne, 1984:27). The PNP's policies brought a number of social reforms aimed to alleviate the worst aspects of poverty. These included the implementation of "crash programs" of job creation; the introduction of new welfare commitments; the announcement of free secondary education; and the nationalisation (with compensation) of foreign owned electricity, omnibus, and telephone companies (Payne, 1984:27).

This era of democratic socialism opened new opportunities for women, as they began organizing within political parties, women's organizations, and small pressure groups. The Women's Bureau was established in 1975 to promote policies and programs aimed at integrating women into Jamaica's overall national development. For example, training programs were launched, such as the teacher aid program. Another important and successful project was the opening of the Women's Centre to provide support and education for pregnant teens, with the goal of returning the girls to school and delaying the birth of a second child. While these programs were an important step towards change, the PNP failed to challenge the vision of women's role in the household and the sexual division of labour.

Numerous laws were passed to improve the status of women. In response to protests by domestic workers, the National Minimum Wage Act was passed, limiting the hours worked per week and setting wages at a basic minimum level (Ford-Smith, 1982:9). The Employment Act, 1975 (Equal Pay for Equal Work of Men and Women), was passed to eliminate discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment for men and women. The Family Court Act, 1975, provided the establishment of a Family Court to deal with cases of maintenance, affiliation, and other family laws. The Status of Children Act, 1976, removed all legal disabilities of illegitimate children, requiring fathers of children born out of wedlock to contribute financially to their maintenance. In addition, the government made a conscious effort to appoint more women to the Statutory Boards at decision-making levels in public offices (Wint, 1980:34-38). While the laws were certainly a progressive step in the right direction,

enforcing them proved highly problematic. In addition, the laws did not address the material bases and control of production and the sexual division of labour. Therefore, the impact of legislation such as the Employment Act was minimal, as "equal pay for equal work" was irrelevant if women and men were employed in largely different jobs.

Despite the progressive program of the PNP, the Jamaican government was unable to avert economic and political crises, which led to the PNP's ultimate downfall in 1980. The oil shocks of 1974 severely hurt the energy-dependent nation, tripling the island's import bill from J\$65 to J\$177 million (Sharpley, 1981:7). With the world recession, exports, imports, and foreign capital inflows declined. The government was unable to raise the revenue necessary to pay for its social welfare programs and thus the debt rose considerably.

In addition, the PNP alienated the support of the local bourgeoisie and fostered open American hostility through its political actions. Manley's affiliation with Fidel Castro, his participation in the Non-Aligned Summit Meeting in 1973, and his commitment to democratic-socialism sparked off a negative reaction among foreign and domestic capital. New overseas private investment dwindled to nil by 1975 and the local capitalist class contracted their investments in Jamaica, exported foreign currency abroad, and migrated in large numbers to North America (Mandle, 1982:100).

The PNP was forced to approach the IMF in April, 1977. After rounds of harsh negotiations and failed attempts to alleviate Jamaica's economic problems, Manley opted for a non-IMF path in

December, 1979. The economic decline continued and the PNP suffered a massive defeat after the bloody election year of 1980 to Edward Seaga's Jamaican Labour Party. (JLP)

The JLP returned to a strategy of export-oriented growth funded by foreign capital flows to the private sector. The "institutional debris" of democratic socialism was "cleared up" with the sale of public enterprises, the lifting of import licenses, the elimination of agriculture co-operatives, and the dismantling of the welfare state (Ambursely, 1983:96). The development strategy of the JLP, which is backed extensively by the IMF, has failed miserably. The market dependent export sectors of bauxite and sugar remain depressed, inflation is ever rising, the debt is growing, and unemployment has reached 25% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1984). The position of the middle-class has deteriorated, with violence, unemployment, and poverty becoming increasingly the norm for a large percentage of the Jamaican population.

The JLP maintains that the market will eventually take care of the unemployed, women included. For example, the government argues that jobs are being created for women in the Free Zone in the garment, textile, and electronics industries. A twenty five page document produced by the JLP outlining the government's economic, employment, and resource strategies makes not a single reference to women. Unfortunately, the assumption that market forces will "develop" the island's economy and raise the standard of living of Jamaican men and women has proven false. The downward spiral of the economy has not been reversed, with the price of sugar and bauxite declining and the cost of imports rising. The government has been

forced to cutback public expenditure, which directly affects women. The position of women has worsened under the JLP government, with the termination of employment programs, the closure of schools, the decline in health and welfare facilities, the inaccessibility of daycare services, and the rising cost of living. The activities of the Women's Bureau have been severely restricted due to cutbacks. Funding to programs specifically aimed to raise the position of women have been cut. For example, the closure of the PNP's employment programs left 196,000 women unemployed overnight (CWP Newsletter, May 27, 1983). The proportion of women in the unemployed labour force was more than twice that for men in 1984, 33% as opposed to 67% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1985:16.1). Job opportunities are minimal. Women must deal with unemployment, rising prices, increases in rent, and violence. As one young mother expressed her frustration: "Bwoy, me no know how we a go mange... is three children me hav going a school and is scufflings me hav fi do. An look, rice gone to seven and six pence, flour gone to four and sixpence... how we a go eat, much less pay rent?" (CWP Newsletter, April 10, 1981).

SLAVERY PLANTATION PERIOD: 1655-1838

Under the institution of slavery and the sugar plantation mode of production, a three-tiered political and economic system emerged in Jamaica, characterized by white plantation owners at the apex, colored individuals (the mixture of white and black) in the center, and black slaves at the bottom. This system was geared to maintain the exploitation of black labour for the economic benefit of the white land owning class. Like white men, white women enjoyed their position at the apex of the social structure based on slave labour. The lifestyle of white women was patterned after the British cultural traditions of the elite. White women were virtually forbidden to work and found themselves economically dependent on their men, without any opportunities for economic self-sufficiency. Their social roles were defined primarily in terms of child-bearing and child-rearing (Massiah, 1984:96). While the British nuclear family represented the model familial form, the entire nuclear family rarely resided in Jamaica. Members of the family often returned to England. In fact, one of the striking features of Jamaican slave society was the "almost total absence" of white women, due to the arduous and tedious life on the island (Patterson, 1967:41).

An antagonistic class/color relationship emerged between white and black women. White women often treated their female slaves brutally, spurred on by racism, sexual jealousy, fear, and hatred (Mathurin, 1974:271). Clearly, white women had a vested interest in maintaining the subjugation of colored and black women, as their

position was threatened by the common occurrence of miscegenation. The "moral welfare" of slaves did not become an issue until after 1816, when church-going women first demanded rights on behalf of slaves. "Kindness and indulgence" towards blacks was advocated, although a "correct distance" was always maintained between white women and the objects of their charity (Mathurin, 1974:271).

The colored class, which emerged due to the union between black and white individuals, found itself situated between the two opposing classes. Rather than supporting the black slaves, colored individuals aligned themselves with the white class, accepting the rewards allocated to brown-skinned individuals by the ruling class. For example, lighter skinned people were considered more trustworthy; and therefore enjoyed a position of relative privilege on the plantation and in the urban areas. Colored women were considered "too light" to engage in the labour delegated to black women. Therefore, colored women received training and (sometimes) schooling, and worked as domestics, washerwomen, seamstresses, nurses, and shopkeepers. A high correlation between color and occupation emerged, with lighter skinned individuals performing skilled tasks and having easier access to purchasing their freedom. Colored individuals considered themselves superior to black slaves and were relatively well placed in Jamaican plantation society. It was therefore highly desirable for a black woman to have children by a white man, as her children would rise in the social ladder more easily.

The social structure of the 17th century proved more tolerable for black slaves than that of the 18th and 19th centuries, with a

looser colonial system and an official willingness to admit the humanity of slaves in the former (Mathurin, 1974:96). This was partly due to the existence of poor, white European and East Indian indentured labourers, who found themselves near the bottom of the social structure. The social/racial situation was not yet irreversibly polarised into a black/white system, as indentured workers were also victims of miserable living conditions, excessive punishment, and exploitation.

During this period, women's work, while primarily in agricultural labour, was less demanding and less degraded than female slaves experienced in the following centuries. The planters hired an equal number of men and women, recognizing the slaves' domestic needs and acknowledging black men and women as functioning in family units. Hence, couples were often allocated half an acre of land, livestock, and a garden.

This situation was short lived and changed rapidly under the Slave Act of 1696, which codified black workers as permanent chattel. The term "slave" no longer identified indentured labourers, but blacks only. White and colored labourers were able to move into more skilled positions, leaving the darkest slaves at the bottom of the social ladder.

The changing economic situation and increased demand from England for sugar also altered the situation. The economy was pushed into the direction of a massive agro-industrial operation, with huge sugar belts emerging along the coast. Greater demands for higher production were translated into an intensification of the exploitation of slaves, who were regarded economic units of labour.

The market preference turned to men, as male slaves were believed to be more economical than women due to their greater physical potential. On the average, traders brought over two African men for every woman, which was the ratio of men to women in the mid-18th century (Mathurin, 1975:4). The black population rose steadily from 45,000 in 1700 to 328,000 in 1800 and peaked to 354,000 in 1808 (Higman, 1976:61). This growth was due to the importation of slaves, as mortality rates were high and fertility rates were low.

Color, age, health and sex were the key factors in the division of labour. Darker slaves were believed to be stronger, and best suited for arduous manual field labour. Colored slaves were regarded as more capable of performing skilled tasks and were better placed than black slaves. Black males and females were very close in value throughout their "peak" years, that is, age 15-40. While men were believed to be stronger, young, healthy female slaves were also allocated back-breaking work alongside men. For example, women were hired out to sugar, coffee, and pimento plantations in "jobbing gangs" with men, and expected to work equally long hard hours.

The extreme exploitation of black women was made possible by the organization of the production process - slave labour on the sugar plantation - and the maintenance and propagation of the ideology that women are inferior to men. Women were believed to be less intelligent and therefore incapable of learning skills. Black slave women were thus allocated to the least skilled areas, performing arduous manual field labour. As a result, despite the fact that men outnumbered women, more women were found in the fields. For example, in twelve estates of 2204 slaves in 1780, 36% of 802 men

were in the fields (291), while 57% of 778 women (444) were in the fields (Mathurin, 1974:300). While men were trained as stonemasons, fishermen, tailors, bricklayers, blacksmiths, millwrights, sail-makers, carpenters, and caulkers, women were restricted as unskilled field, garden, or domestic workers. The value of the black slave woman was determined by her capacity to work. Female slaves thus bore the brunt of heavy manual labour, performing such tasks as cane cutting, digging, thrashing, stone breaking, and road building. Women were even used as substitutes for animals and machinery (Mathurin, 1974:308-313).

This sexual division of labour, determined by patriarchal ideology and the plantation system based on the slave mode of production, had severe ramifications for female slaves. The exclusion of female slaves from the higher ranks of labour severely limited their opportunities, as they were relegated to unskilled agricultural and domestic work.

Because the plantation economy functioned on the exploitation of slave labour, the owner tried to minimize the cost of labour while maximizing output. Female slaves proved more expensive to support, due to absenteeism for pregnancy and lactation. As a result, women were heavily utilized to compensate for their higher maintenance costs. It was only after the abolition of the importation of slaves in 1807 that women became increasingly valued, not only as workers but as breeders of slave infants. Hence, women's health became a greater concern, and special concessions were granted, such as extra food and clothing (Mathurin, 1975:5). However, black women did not enjoy a more respected status as a result. Slave women were not

looked upon as mothers, but as "breeder" whose value was increased due to their ability to reproduce slaves (Davis, 1981:7).

Laws and customs facilitated violence against both black men and women. Colonial laws gave masters the power of corporal punishment over all black slaves. Women were therefore subject to physical abuse, such as extremely brutal floggings, beatings, and mutilations. An unfavorable view of the African system of polygyny existed in the European mind and women were debased as low, evil, and promiscuous. The sexual exploitation of black women was common: rape or seduction of young girls, the rape of common-law wives of male slaves under the threat of punishment, and outright sadism and torture (Patterson, 1967:42).

As a result of the exploitative working conditions, physical abuse, and poor nutrition, poor health was frequently recorded among women, with ailments including sore eyes, legs, feet, and backs; festering cuts; disease; and fevers. Women were physically exhausted by the age of 40 and relegated to tasks elsewhere, most often in the plantation household kitchen. Slaves were considered a burden as they grew older and the death of an aged slave was met with indifference. While some masters provided provisions, the majority of aged slaves were left to wander and care for themselves as best they could. The African tradition of respect for old age survived throughout the slavery period, and therefore relatives or friends cared for the elderly slaves (Patterson, 1967:158).

Outside of sugar production, women played a central role in the reproductive and productive sectors of the black community on the plantation. Although certain tasks were performed generally by

women (such as cooking and sewing) and others generally by men (such as gardening), the division of labour was not rigid, with men sometimes joining women and vice versa. The sexual division of labour was not hierarchical, as male and female tasks were of equal value and necessity. Because both men and women were property of the slave owner, women were subjected solely to the slave master's authority. Women were not subjugated to the demands of male slaves, as black men were unable to assert supremacy in the slave community. Nor were males able to assert themselves as the "family provider" (Davis, 1981:8). Hence, the domestic life in the slave community was one of sexual equality (Davis, 1981:18).

All slaves were allotted a plot of land by law, on which their own provisions could be grown. These small subsistence plots were provided by plantation owners to minimize the cost of feeding the slaves. Surplus produce was sold in the weekly Sunday market by female slaves. The market was an important economic and social institution as a meeting place for slaves where goods were sold and information exchanged. Female slaves became very prominent in the local market as the market vendors or "higglers". With the little extra income generated, women were able to support the family and buy extra food, clothing, and, in some cases, freedom (Mathurin, 1975:10).

In literature concerning the slave family, the image of the dominant black woman and the absent, demoralized black man has emerged (see Smith, 1956). The ceaseless arguments about the "matriarchal power" of the female slave have been refuted. While the plantation system did undermine the capacity of men to act in,

"paterfamilias", it also usurped the role of women in "materfamilias". Women were degraded, children were weaned early, and families were split. In actuality, what past studies are attempting to prove is the "matrifocal" character of slave families, which differs greatly from "matriarchy", a system based on female power. Under slavery, women were in no position to exercise matriarchal power in either the productive or reproductive sectors.

Barry Higman's important study, "Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834", claims that the assumption of the female dominated household is not based on a thorough examination of actual slave families. The study, based on a sample of three sugar plantations, indicates that while female headed households did exist, they were less common than two-headed households among black plantation slaves. Female-headed households were less dominant than believed, with 50% of the units being women, men and children, and 75% of the slaves living in units containing maternal and paternal consanguines (Higman, 1976:159). These figures may indicate an attempt to maintain a familial household based on kinship, despite the dehumanizing and divisive impact of slavery. Female headed households were most apparent among colored town slaves.

The arguments about female "sexual promiscuity" have also been refuted (see Higman, 1976). The view of black women as being debased and promiscuous was a cultural construct of European society.

If black women suffered along with men under the oppressive institution of slavery and participated on an equal footing in the slave community, they also participated equally in the resistance to slavery. Women expressed, in one form or another, their resentment

towards slavery. Subtle forms of protest were used, such as feigned illness and prolonged nursing to miss work. Verbal protestation occurred more frequently among female slaves, as opposed to males. Female slaves were also involved in plotting and conspiring against the slave owner, such as setting fires and poisoning food. Runaway slaves often included women and children. Women also participated in the slave uprisings against their white oppressors. One of Jamaica's greatest folk heroines is Nanny, the great Maroon leader who successfully led the Maroons (a group of organized escaped slaves) against the British and played a key role in asserting the freedom of Maroon men and women in Jamaica (Mathurin, 1975:37).

CAPITALIST PLANTATION PERIOD: 1838-1945

Historically, the participation of Jamaican women in the wage labour sector differs from that of their counterparts in most Third World nations, as women have always participated in the wage labour force. Women's work was circumscribed by the socio-economic structure and male attitudes which dominated the post-emancipation plantation society. White women remained dependent on their men, with roles very much defined by the household and motherhood. Colored women dominated the teaching profession, hotel industry, and shops (Massiah, 1984:43). Black women found low wage, low skilled work in the service, industrial, and informal sectors.

While Emancipation was proclaimed in 1834, the last vestiges of slavery were not removed until 1838, and black men and women entered the cash economy as wage work was gradually established on the plantations. Both men and women were free to "job out", that is, to provide cheap labour for the sugar estates. However, estate work was initially shunned due to its association with slavery and the very low wages offered. A mass exodus of ex-slaves from the detested plantation areas occurred following Emancipation, as individuals set out in search of small peasant land holdings or work in the urban service sector. An intensification of independent pursuits occurred for both men and women.

The pursuit of independent subsistence farmholdings proved difficult, as the white planter class impeded the access to fertile land in order to

maintain a stable supply of cheap labour. The best land was secured by the large sugar estates, restricting the majority of the population to a small proportion of land, much of which was relatively infertile (Standing, 1981:40). Over time, these small landholdings became increasingly fragmented due to the growing population and increasingly limited access to land. In addition, because the planter class controlled the political, economic, and social institutions in Jamaica, financial, educational and health facilities were not extended to the ex-slaves, thus preventing the rural farmer from improving his/her own techniques or diversifying into other occupations.

Due to the inaccessibility of fertile land, credit, and education, the ex-slave was forced to sell his/her labour for minimum subsistence wages. The estates tried to secure a stable labour force not only by impeding the development of a small-scale farming sector, but by hindering those who actually laboured on the plantations. Entire families were often hired for very low wages and provided some food, accommodation, and small plots of rented land. While labourers worked on the estates with the intention of saving enough money to purchase land, workers were unable to avoid indebtedness due to high rents for estate housing and garden plots (Standing, 1981:42). This rendered the workers entirely dependent on the sugar estates.

As previously discussed, black women under slavery had been relegated to the bottom of the social ladder, performing unskilled agricultural labour or domestic work. As a result, black women were not prepared to enter the skilled wage labour force when Emancipation came in 1834. Because wage work was more available to men, women were forced to drop out of heavy manual labour and became increasingly involved in production for domestic consumption, a task which women could combine with other household duties (Ford-Smith, 1982:6). Black women, by virtue of the selling skills acquired during the slave days in the Sunday market, moved into the public market place and internal marketing system as market women or "higglers". Marketing the household surplus was considered a woman's "duty", as it was linked to the household tasks of gardening and providing food. Marketing was considered unskilled labour and therefore suited for women.

In a society increasingly stratified along lines of color and class, black women had very few choices. Women were forced to withdraw from the agricultural sector due to their lack of skills and the increased mechanization of plantation work. Women who did not become market women sought employment in the urban centers. As a result, female mobility to the urban areas rose dramatically. Between 1891 and 1911, 20,600 women were displaced from documented wage labour in agriculture (Roberts, 1975:87). The domestic service industry rose by 11,000 during the same period (Roberts, 1975:88). Women moved in greater numbers than men, with 8600 women moving to Kingston and St. Andrew between 1911 and 1921 as opposed to 4950 men (Edwards, 1980:10). Emigration of male labour to Cuba, Costa Rica,

Panama, and the United States was high, with 148,000 men leaving the island between 1880-1920, from a total population of 850,000 (Roberts, 1975:159).

The majority of women were engaged under exploitative conditions as domestic workers. Others entered the industrial sector, which employed 17% of the female labour force in 1921 (Bolles, 1981:128). A large number simply could not find work, and joined the ranks of the unemployed in the urban ghettos. In general, women became confined to working in weak and marginal sectors outside the wage earning economy.

The sexual division of labour and its unequal relations between the sexes became increasingly prominent during the 19th century. Men and women were no longer considered equals in the household. Men, predominantly in the wage labour force, were "expected" to support a family. Women, in the reproductive sphere and subsistence economy, were "expected" simply to contribute to the family earnings as secondary wage earners (Edwards, 1980:13). However, these expectations could not be met. Men were not only unable to secure reliable wage labour, they were also unable to develop skills or derive adequate income outside the estates. This inability of males to secure steady wage work weakened family cohesion. Insecurity and poverty made it impossible for men to provide for a wife and children. The instability of migration and emigration weakened the family structure further. As a result, the number of female headed households rose, with women supporting their children alone or with the help of female kin and friends.

The position of women was of greater insecurity than that of men. Lacking formal education and technical skills, women found employment in low wage, low skilled occupations in order to support their family. This pattern of employment which emerged in the post-emancipation period influenced the pattern of female labour participation in Jamaica's industrial commercial sectors in the 20th century.

INDUSTRIALIZATION PERIOD: 1945-1986

The contemporary pattern of dual participation in both the reproductive and productive sectors finds its origin in the slavery and post-emancipation era. Gender has never presented a barrier to economic activity, and therefore women have consistently participated in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Female participation in the Jamaican labour force is among the highest in the developing world. For example, in 1984, female workers comprised 46.6% of the total Jamaican labour force (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1984). While gender has not prevented the participation of women in the workforce, it has determined what kind of work women perform, as they enter the work force along the lines of the sexual division of labour.

The post-war era witnessed a shift in economic growth, as the Jamaican government pursued an economic development plan based on industrialization by invitation. "King Sugar" was finally dethroned, with mining, manufacturing, and tourism replacing the traditional plantation exports. Rural migration to the urban centers rose steadily between 1945-1962 and has continued to increase as individuals leave the depressed rural areas in search of work in the urban manufacturing sector or service industry (Standing, 1981:47). As at the turn of the century, the majority of rural-urban migrants were young women. This was largely due to the fact that women's earning opportunities in the rural economy were more limited than those of men. In addition, emigration for women was low, with the first women leaving the island in search of

employment in the 1960's. As a result, the urban female to male ratio was very high for Jamaica in comparison to other nations.

In the early 1940's, women were ready to join the industrial proletariat, having fewer opportunities than men in the agricultural sector and a greater need to work to support the family (Standing, 1981:149). Migrant women were willing to accept very low wages and work long hours, and were therefore preferred over men and urban educated women. In addition, women had lower absentee and turnover rates. Aware of the high levels of unemployment and the need to secure a regular income, women were inclined to stay with a job, despite low wages and poor conditions. Companies recognized women as "responsible, stable" workers, and thus capitalized on their insecure position. According to the manager of a cigar factory, "Women as workers are easier and better and more efficient. They don't go off and drink rum as the men often do. They make better cigars, and are more conscientious." (Standing, 1981:145).

Although the level of female participation in the non-agricultural labour force is high by international standards, one cannot assume that women hold a strong economic and political position in Jamaican society. The situation of Jamaican working class women is exploitative and precarious. As Table 1 indicates, while the proportion of women in the labour force increased from 33.2% in 1970 to 46.6% in 1984, women comprised approximately 67% of the unemployed labour force in 1984. Women comprised 39.6% of the employed labour force and males comprised 60.4% in 1984. Seventy percent of the female labour force find themselves in the less-skilled, least paid, marginal jobs. For example, in 1978, 78% of

Table One

Labour Force by Sexes and Employment Status
1970, 1978, 1983, 1984

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>
	Numbers %	Numbers %	Numbers %	Numbers %
Labour Force	566,445 100	949,200 100.0	985,400 100.0	971,400 100.
Males	378,288 66.8	505,200 53.1	522,000 53.0	519,200 53.4
Females	188,157 33.2	445,000 46.9	463,400 47.0	452,200 46.6
Employed Labour Force	N.P.	702,100 100.0	722,700 100.0	724,700 100.
Males	N.P.	425,900 60.5	437,300 60.5	437,500 60.4
Females	N.P.	277,200 39.5	285,400 39.5	287,200 39.6
Unemployed Labour Force	N.P.	247,100 100.0	262,700 100.0	246,700 100.
Males	N.P.	79,200 32.1	84,700 32.2	81,700 33.1
Females	N.P.	167,900 67.9	178,000 67.8	165,000 66.9

Source: 1) Statistical Yearbook, 1978.

2) Statistical Institute of Jamaica, The Labour Force, 1984.

N.P. = Not Published.

those employed earned under \$30 per week, with minimum wage at that time at \$24 per week (Durant-Gonzalez, 1982:2).

Women enter the labour force along a clearly defined sexual division of labour. For men, the most important sectors in the declining order of numbers employed in the 1970's and 1980's were agriculture, forestry, and fishing; manufacturing; and public administration. For women, the most important sectors during the same time period in order of numbers employed were services, which included domestic work and unspecified services in the industrial sector; public administration, including clerical work; commerce; and agriculture. The index of femaleness of occupation in 1984 was as follows: Service-74%, Clerical-62%, Transportation and Communication-57%, Sales-56%, Professional and Technical-54%, Production-19%, Administrative and Managerial-12%, and Agriculture-8% (Massiah, 1984:105). As can be seen, women are consistently dominating the traditionally "female" service and clerical occupations and are present in far fewer numbers than men in jobs requiring managerial or administrative ability.

Domestic Work

Female migrants, while absorbed into the urban labour force, fill the positions in the low-wage strata of a segmented labour force. Traditionally, the main form of employment for migrant women has been as domestic servants. Young, unskilled girls from the rural areas often have little alternative but to enter the domestic service sector. With urbanization and the status conferred to middle and upper class families by the number of domestic servants

hired, the demand for domestic workers increased in the post war years, peaking in the 1960's. However, due to the economic crises of the past fifteen years, the increased mechanization of household tasks, and the declining size of middle and upper class families, the domestic workforce has since contracted. Forty percent of the Jamaican female labour force was occupied in the domestic service industry in 1978, down from close to seventy percent in 1945 (McCaffrey, 1978:2). Women are now often hired on a daily basis, thus excluded from the benefits of the minimum wage act.

Domestics have been traditionally the lowest paid of all wage workers. Despite the long, hard hours, domestic work is viewed as unskilled; an offshoot of unpaid domestic labour in the family home. Wages are low, often justified by the fact that women board in their employer's home. In essence, the lives of these young women are controlled by the middle and upper class women of the household, who are renowned for their mistreatment and exploitation of black domestic workers. While the minimum wage law passed in the 1970's under the Manley government ensures certain rights, such as a set salary and two weeks paid vacation, these rights are often difficult to secure. Domestic servants are in a precarious position, as they can be dismissed at any time and easily replaced. Therefore, young women are afraid to demand their own rights, fearful that another job will not easily be secured.

Manufacturing Sector

The post-war "industrialization by invitation" scheme encouraged the development of the manufacturing sector. By 1965, Jamaica was

providing textiles, cosmetics, clothing, tobacco, and beverages for the domestic and export markets in "foot-loose" type firms, where the production process is secondary in nature (eg: packaging, assembling, processing). In the minds of the owners, women are "ideally" suited for repetitive, monotonous work, due to their "docile" nature (Durant-Gonzalez, 1983:2). In addition, women provide cheap labour because they are considered as the second family wage earner, despite the fact that over one third of all households are headed by women.

Manufacturing, while having played an important role in the economy, has not provided stable employment for women. Between 1943-1960, the employment of women rose from 35,300-43,865. However, between 1960 and 1978, the number of women employed in the manufacturing sector dropped by more than half, from 43,865 to 19,400, while male employment rose from 45,658 to 58,000 (Bolles, 1981). (It must be noted that male participation was also unstable, but nevertheless greater than female employment.) This was largely due to the nature of the "foot-loose" manufacturing firms, which are characterized by minimal integration and contribution to the national economy and the ability to depart at will. Many firms left Jamaica in the 1970's when the politics of the PNP proved threatening and labour proved more costly in Jamaica than elsewhere. Under the JLP, the number of individuals employed in the manufacturing sector has increased to 31,000 women and 26,500 men in 1981 (Durant-Gonzalez, 1985:1). Female labour fills the ranks of the low skill, low wage occupations which have opened in the Free Trade Zone.

In general , the incorporation of women in the manufacturing sector has manifested two specific problems for women in Jamaica. Women have not participated on par with men in numbers or in wages and labour intensive export processing plants do not offer economic stability for women in the labour force.

Informal Sector

Women have always sought wage labour under conditions of high unemployment. In 1946, the unemployment rate was 15.5% for the adult population over the age of 14 (Standing, 1981:49). Labour Force surveys conducted in 1953, 1957, and 1960 indicated that half of the unemployed resided in Kingston. After 1960, unemployment rose to over 20%. This figure has since risen constantly, reaching 25.4% in 1984 (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1985:16.1). In 1984, while women comprised 46.6% of the labour force, 39.6% of the employed labour force and 66.9% of the unemployed labour force was female (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1984).

In the face of this high unemployment, many women cannot find wage labour at all. An increasingly large number of women must rely upon their own ingenuity to sustain themselves and family by working in the informal sector, that is, in petty commodity production and trade. The informal sector of the economy has been defined as a formation of small-scale activities conducted outside the state and state regulated private sectors (Bolles, 1981). Informal jobs are constantly changing to meet the requirements and new circumstances of the "modern" formal economy. Informal sector activities are neither traditional nor transitional, but are important in the

system of capital accumulation. While dependent on and subordinate to the capitalist sector, the informal sector is integrated into and necessary for the accumulation of capital in the developing nation (Reddock, 1980:3). The informal sector is profitable for capital in numerous ways: The petty relations of production are reproduced without any labour cost incurred by capital (Reddock, 1980:18). The informal sector develops a self-sufficient reserve army of labour which provides employment for its members which capital cannot provide, which prevents social and political unrest. It supplies cheap goods to wage labourers, and thus subsidizes low wage rates. Capital produced goods are distributed to areas that capital itself cannot reach or does not find profitable.

In a nation divided along lines of class, color, and sex; and with widespread unemployment and inadequate education facilities, the informal sector provides a means of subsistence for the poor lower class family. Because of the nature of dependency and uneven development rooted in Jamaica's peripheral position in the world economy, informal activities are necessary and therefore thrive (Bolles, 1981:89).

Due to the lack of steady employment, the low wages paid to the unskilled sector of the working class, and the widespread situation of women as the sole head of the household, women find work in the informal sector. The informal sector is also divided along a sexual division of labour, with women taking certain jobs linked to their role as mother and housekeeper. Thus, women operate largely as prostitutes, market vendors, seamstresses, and craftswomen. Street

vendors of small commodities such as peanuts, pillows, clothing, and food are both male and female occupations.

Work in the informal sector is attractive to women due to the ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, small scale of operation, use of skills acquired outside the formal school system, and unregulated competitive markets. It offers a steady income (albeit small), work in times of high unemployment, flexibility in operations, and accomodates childcare and household work (Reddock, 1980). The informal sector is ideal for women who are unable to secure a job in the wage labour sector due to high unemployment, lack of education, class position, and "constraints of childcare. While this work is "ideal" in terms of providing a relatively stable income and compatibility with childcare, work in the informal sector is difficult and poorly recompensed. Profit margins are very small and hours are long and extremely tedious. For example, higgler must grow or purchase food, transport it, sell it in the market, and transport remaining food home. Of course, there is no security whatsoever, and sickness or fatigue means no income.

Ignored by statistics and denigrated by the middle and upper classes, those involved in the informal sector play a key role in maintaining the economy. For example, the higgler, while considered inferior and "low" by middle and upper classes, is of great importance to the economy. The Minister of Marketing and Finance testified to the importance of the higgler's role in 1975, stating that market women supply 80% of the fruit and vegetables to the Jamaican population (Gill, 1984:8). The higgler is the link between

the isolated small farmer who grows the produce and the market. She transports agricultural produce and sells them to the working class and unemployed at a lower price than goods in the supermarket. She is self-employed, and therefore serves a key function at no cost whatsoever to capital. In addition, she constitutes a de facto labour reserve for the direct and indirect needs of the economy, forming a firm buttress in the lowest echelons of the local capitalist economic structure. She produces and trains the next generation of higglers, self-perpetuating the trade through daughters and friends. In addition, the higgler generates employment for others, such as farmers, van drivers, taxi drivers, butchers, craftsmen, moneylenders, and shop owners. Finally, she plays a vital role in maintaining her own household (Edwards, 1980).

With present government policies which fail to adequately address the problem of rising unemployment, one can expect an increasing number of individuals to enter the informal sector. Women will continue to dominate this sector.

WOMEN AND THE FAMILY: CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

The conditions of life for Jamaican women are affected by the types of family unions which they experience. One of the striking social features of Jamaica is the loose or informal family structure. Traditionally, most women have lived in some form of "consensual union", varying from "visiting" relationships to a more stable "common law" partnership. Marriage is the norm only among the middle and upper classes, although it is common among older working class couples (Standing, 1981:69). The classical Western definition of the household and family in its nuclear form is not applicable to the majority of the population in Jamaica. Rather, historical, cultural, and economic factors have shaped Jamaican society and its familial forms. While a household is generally comprised of a father, mother, and other related persons sharing the residence, not all members of the family reside in the same household, nor are all members related (Massiah, 1982:68). Household implies common residence, for economic and other arrangements. Family implies kinship, but not necessarily in the same residence.

The nature of the relationships between men and women in Jamaica has been attributed to several factors. Researchers (Clarke, 1953; R.T. Smith, 1956; Blake, 1961; Patterson, 1967) suggest that the roots of the female headed household can be traced to the African traditions of polygyny and the institution of slavery. It is argued that family and kinship cohesion was undermined on the plantation, where marriage was incompatible with the slave code and

either partner could be removed or sold at any time. The condition of slavery made it virtually impossible for the average black male to maintain a role as the head of the household or as father. Black males could not assert themselves economically, politically, or socially, nor could they protect black women from the advances of white men (Brody, 1981:191). The children of the slaves derived status from their mother's legal status, thus becoming the property of their mother's owner (Massiah, 1982:62). Therefore, special dispensations were rewarded to pregnant women by the plantation managers to encourage reproduction. This practice had two effects: it gave legitimacy to the centrality of the mother's role and it eliminated the stigma attached to illegitimate children (Massiah, 1982:62; Standing, 1981:71).

As previously discussed, studies indicate that, while the incidence of female headed households was firmly established during slavery, it was not as extensive as believed (Higman, 1976:159). Higman's study of the slave population in Jamaica demonstrates that the great majority of slaves lived in simple family households, most of them family units. Approximately 30% of the slaves had no family and lived with friends or alone. Most of these were elderly male Africans and creoles (Higman, 1976:168). This study challenges the interpretation that the matrifocal family was dominant during the slave era and that "the nuclear family could hardly exist within the context of slavery" (Patterson, 1967:29) or that "normally, the children resided with their mothers, and the parents lived apart, singly or with different males." (Smith, 1953:72).

The second set of factors linked to the existence of female headed households is migration. Although rural-urban migration is important, where women outnumbered men in the cities, external migration is especially important. A steady exodus from the Caribbean has been a major feature of West Indian society. Marked imbalances between the sexes within the productive and reproductive ages has been the norm, with a larger number of males leaving the region (Massiah, 1982:64). However, this does not account for the fact that those individuals who do remain on the island choose a loose, informal form of union.

Finally, reference is made to the high incidence of female headed households in lower income black families, linking this phenomenon to poverty. The "unstable family", characteristic of the lower stratum of the working class and unemployed in the Caribbean, is also found in other Third World nations and among the working class poor in Western nations. In fact, recent evidence from survey data dealing with the status of women in different nations indicates that the incidence of female headed households is growing, particularly in Third World nations (Massiah, 1982:58). The increase appears to be closely correlated with economic development strategies geared towards "modernization" which have, in many cases, undermined the traditional status and role of women.

A study of women who head households in the United States and Venezuela by Rae Lesser Blumberg supports this hypothesis. The relationship between women and society's mode of production and the political economy is examined to explain the emergence and persistence of male-absent households. The family structure

reflects a situation where the presence of unemployment and poverty destabilizes the family unit. Because women are aware that their men may never be able to provide steady support for a family, they are reluctant to choose a single partner. Men and women regard marriage as a ceremony which can only take place when the couple is financially able to house and feed a family adequately. Because men are unable to fulfill the role as the chief provider, their role is marginal. Women end up alone supporting children fathered by different men. The end result is matrifocality and a high proportion of female headed households.

Blumberg argues that certain conditions in the wider political economy must be present for the emergence, prevalence, and persistence of mother-headed families. "The unit of labour must be the individual, and not the family. Females must have independent access to subsistence opportunities, be it through their own work, the work of their children, an inheritance, or state provided welfare. These subsistence opportunities must be reconciled with child-care responsibilities, allowing women to pursue these opportunities while carrying out child-care responsibilities. Finally, women's subsistence opportunities from all sources in the absence of a male head cannot be drastically less than men of the same class. (Blumberg, 1978:109-110). These conditions do exist in Jamaica.

The low incidence of marriage among the working class and unemployed and the high frequency of marriage within the middle and upper classes in Jamaica further supports this theory. Better educated, economically secure men and women tend to express small

family values and almost invariably enter marriage as their family union and seek legal divorce as their means of separation (Brody, 1981:117). By contrast, lower income women begin their family in the context of visiting relationships, drawing on their own resources for survival. While marriage to a dominant male income earner is an aspired ideal for poor women, it is not realized due to economic insecurity. The unemployed or low-income male can hardly play the role of the dominant male provider effectively. In addition, the low income woman often has children from several different fathers, a burden which most men are unwilling to shoulder. Hence, in the end result, unions among the unemployed and poor working class are doomed to impermanence, with the female/child relationship becoming permanent and the father/husband peripheral (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:14-15).

Types of Family Unions

Marriage

Approximately one-third of all Jamaican women aged 14-64 years experience marriage as their type of family union (Massiah, 1982:6). Marriage is associated with the middle and upper class ideals and almost invariably individuals in the middle and higher income groups enter marriage. Marriage is an indication of social status and social mobility, and the requirements for marriage include a stable income to provide a stable home for the family. Marriage is a feature of the lives of those who can afford to live a middle or upper class lifestyle.

The desired pattern and ideal picture of conjugal union, that of marriage, is based on the relationship between a dominant male income earner and a female partner responsible for child care and domestic duties. While increasing numbers of women in the middle and higher income groups are entering the work force, the ideal picture has not been noticeably modified (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:15). A large degree of deference is paid to men, who are the head of the household. Women's work in the home is not economically valued and therefore is downgraded.

Marriage offers the woman and her children the greatest measure of economic security, strongest legal rights for women and children over family property, the most fully established status for women within the family group, and the highest prestige in the local community (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:16). While being the most desirable type of union, only a minority of Jamaican women experience this type of familial pattern.

Common Law Unions

Somewhat less than one quarter of all women aged 14-64 are living in "common-law" unions, or consensual relationships (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:7). These are based upon mutual consent for cohabitation and have limited legal rights. The average age of women living in common-law is 25-35. After age 35, most women are married (if poverty is not too great) or alone. The rationale behind the non-legal unions is the lack of economic security and stability which prevents partners from marrying. Women express little desire for marriage, as it is perceived as an institution

where women lose their freedom. Women entertain no thought of "letting a man boss me." (Bolles, 1981).

Common-law unions are often short-lived, especially in the rural areas where migration is high. The status of women in these unions is deemed to be lower than those in married unions. In most cases, her status is downgraded to that of a domestic worker with sexual relations included. (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:17). Because the male contribution of income for the household is often sporadic, women must work to support their children. From a legal point of view, women in common-law unions are economically unprotected. While women have no claims to legal property they do have grounds for child maintenance, according to the Status of Children Act, 1976. This removes all legal disabilities of children born out of wedlock, requiring minimum payments from fathers for child support. This, of course, is very difficult to enforce and women find child support from fathers a constant battle.

Visiting Relationships

The "visiting" union consists of an ongoing relationship with a non-resident partner, which is a well institutionalized pattern in Jamaican society. Different circumstances occur, including the courtship of a young woman residing in her parents' home; a clandestine relationship where the male is already a member of a conjugal relationship; a relationship between independent individuals unwilling to commit themselves to a residential union, possibly due to multiple relationships, age, and economic insecurity.

The majority of women involved in visiting unions are between the age of 14-25 and represent 15% of all women aged 14-64 (Massiah, 1982:6). Visiting unions predominate among the low income and unemployed classes and leave women in the most unprotected position of all. The single woman cannot depend on the father of her child to provide economic support, despite the child maintenance law. Legal procedures are difficult and almost impossible to enforce, as proof of paternity is problematic and enforcing payment difficult. In some cases, the woman can fall back on the kinship network, remaining in her parent's home, seeking refuge with a female relative, or passing on the child to her mother or aunt (McKenzie and Powell, 1974:18). The remaining 24% of women age 14-64 are widowed or single.

Adolescent pregnancy within the context of visiting unions is an acute problem in Jamaica. The island has one of the highest fertility rates in the Caribbean and Latin America, with 25% of all births in 1983 to adolescent mothers (McNeill, 1984:1). Interestingly enough, premarital sexual relationships and childbearing are both culturally reinforced and penalized. A high value is placed on motherhood and a girl is not considered a "woman" until she has had a child. Barren women are called "mules" and believed to be lonely and unhappy. These attitudes are especially prevalent in the lower classes. Therefore, while girls may be initially frightened, ashamed, and remorseful at first knowledge of pregnancy, they generally look forward to the birth of the child, with the majority planning to keep the infant. A survey conducted by the Women's Center in Jamaica indicated that nearly 80% of 150 girls planned to

raise their infant, with the others planning to "pass on" the child to a female relative, usually the grandmother (McNeil, 1984:3). While a son's sexual activities are tolerated or accepted with amusement, if not encouraged, a daughter's sexual activities are greeted with strict and repressive behavioral restrictions. "Floggings" are commonly used to keep girls from becoming a "big woman", that is, pregnant (Brody, 1981:153).

Due to the lack of education concerning reproduction and birth control, girls find themselves pregnant at an early age, with the median age of first pregnancy being 16 (Brody, 1981:153). Knowledge of contraceptive methods and the reproductive cycle is scant and filled with folk beliefs and remedies. For example, it is feared that an IUD can "suck you down" or that a condom can get lost inside and "fly up to the shoulder". Many women have no information, and believe that they will bear a foreordained "lot" of children, as determined by the knots on the umbilical cord. Therefore, as one woman said, "If you are going to have a certain amount of children, you might as well start at 16-17, then out and done." (Brody, 1981:161). In short, adequate information is lacking. Girls find themselves in a contradictory position. While living in a society that reinforces the value of children and motherhood, they are reared in such a way that their own sexuality is feared and distrusted. Suffering the pressures and hardships of poverty, including poor housing, unemployment, hunger, overcrowding, inadequate education, and malnourishment, girls are vulnerable to increased opportunities for sexual contact and the risk of pregnancy. The ramifications of adolescent pregnancy are critical.

Pregnant girls are not allowed to remain in school, and young women with little education and few resources find themselves responsible for supporting their children alone. Essentially, once a girl becomes pregnant, her future is set. She remains locked in a cycle of poverty with few economic options. A young woman without education and skills often seeks a male partner to support her, risking repeated pregnancies. The chain of events includes limited schooling, poverty, substandard health, inadequate housing, repeated pregnancies, and an unstable family life (McNeil, 1983:144).

The male attitude towards sexual activity is conducive to multiple pregnancies, as male fertility and manhood is measured by the number of children a man fathers, but not necessarily cares for. This attitude is particularly prevalent in the lower classes. Men and women in the middle and upper classes are more inclined to use contraceptive methods to limit the number of children. However, the male attitude towards women as sexual objects among educated professional men does not vary drastically from the male labourer, as exemplified by this comment made by a professional concerning the domestic worker: "We've got a new maid...and I'd like to give it to her." (Brody, 1981).

While the matrifocal character of the Jamaican family system is well established, and the role of the male partner is diminished or non-existent, the often mentioned matriarchal character is a myth. Even in a family where the male's economic role is marginal, his authoritarian and dominant image is maintained by traditional and prevailing value systems. While it is true that in the majority of lower-strata Jamaican families the mother is the dominant figure,

her dominance does not rest on superior economic or social authority. Rather, her "dominant" position is assumed by default, as a result of her age vis a vis her children and as a pseudo father in absence of a male father (Blake, 1961:73). In reality, women who head households are very insecure and without economic resources to exercise any real authority. The existing role relationship places the women in a subservient position, struggling to maintain the household, putting in a double day in both the productive and reproductive spheres.

After examining the historical and material position of Jamaican women that follows from the socialist feminist framework defined in Chapter II, it becomes clear that the exploitation and oppression of black women in the slavery and capitalist plantation periods has led up to the contemporary position of working class women. The three-tiered socio-economic structure which emerged during the slavery period has not altered substantially over time. While labour differentiation has occurred within each class as new job opportunities have opened, the social structure is still characterized largely by the white elite at the apex, colored professionals and middle managers in the center (who align themselves ideologically with the elite), and black workers at the bottom.

During slavery, black women were relegated to unskilled field, garden, and domestic work. When Emancipation was proclaimed in 1834, female ex-slaves were not prepared to enter the skilled wage labour force. The gradual de-feminization of agriculture pushed

women to the urban centers in search of wage labour. Very few choices were open, and working class women found themselves in the low paid, low skilled service, industrial, and informal sectors.

While female participation in the labour force has remained high throughout the industrialization period, women do not hold a strong position. Working class women enter the labour force along the lines of the sexual division of labour, finding themselves the lower echelons of the service and manufacturing sectors. Faced with higher unemployment than men, women are forced to "make do" in the informal sector as higglers, petty vendors, and prostitutes.

The sexual equality of men and women in the slave communities on the plantation quickly eroded during the capitalist plantation period. The dominant ideology which characterizes men as the primary income earner and women as housewives and secondary income earners devalued the role of women in the household. This ideology also rationalized the sexual division of labour, as women are considered naturally "suited" for certain occupations which are related to household duties (such as sewing, cleaning). Low wages are rationalized by the belief that women are unskilled, secondary income earners. In addition, this image of the ideal family is inapplicable to the working class poor, where the incidence of female headed households is high. A large percentage of working class women are solely responsible for their family (or rely on female kin to assist) and must find work in the low wage sectors of the formal and informal economies. As one woman expressed, "Woman is a donkey...first she works at work, and then she works at home." (Massiah, 1982:32).

IV. SISTREN: A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION IN JAMAICA

The historical and material position of working class women in Jamaica has been examined in order to understand the present situation facing women's organizations working for change. The problems facing working class women are complex and critical, and Sistren is aware that the material and ideological forces at play must be examined if viable change is to occur.

Sistren actresses would not label themselves "socialist feminist". While the resource personnel have had access to socialist feminist literature in the past, the working class women have not. As one actress indicates, the actresses are wary of Western ideas, concerned that feminists "try to put us in a model or a frame" (Interview, August, 1985). By virtue of the class position and gender of the actresses, their theatre and workshops examine oppression in terms of their own experiences in the productive and reproductive sectors, the working class, and the over-arching political and socio-economic structure and ideology. By examining Sistren's method of analyzing the oppression of women in Jamaica and their strategy for change, it will be determined whether the Collective's approach corresponds in some ways to the key elements of the socialist feminist perspective. This will be done by describing and examining Sistren's major theatrical productions, workshops, textiles, and educational research.

The Sistren Theatre Collective is a group of working-class women who came together in 1977 to do drama about "how we suffer as women and how men treat us bad." (Ford-Smith, 1981:52). Working with professional women and other resource personnel, Sistren has produced several plays on the situation of women in Jamaica, revealing the oppressive and exploitive conditions of women in both the public and private spheres. These plays are based on the personal experiences of the actresses and other women and are analysed with reference to the socio-political and economic framework within which they occur.

Sistren characterizes itself as "an independent popular theatre company (that) works at advancing the awareness of the Jamaican public on questions affecting Caribbean women." (Sistren, 1978). Sistren, meaning "sisters", is unique in terms of the composition of the Collective, as the actresses have received little formal education and have spent their lives in the urban ghettos in Kingston. The Collective was created by thirteen working class women who were employed in the Special Employment program, designed by the PNP to create jobs for the unemployed. The "Impact Workers" program was specifically aimed at single women who were solely responsible for their children. The actresses were being trained as teachers' aides at the time and were asked to devise a short skit as part of national celebrations surrounding Workers' Week. With the help of actress-director Honor Ford-Smith, the women wrote and performed "Downpression Get A Blow", a skit dealing with the attempts of working class women employed in a garment factory to form a union. In the process of writing and performing the play, it

became clear that the women were conscious of themselves as representatives of the working class. The social context of the 1970's had been conducive to increased awareness of women's position in Jamaican society as women had greater opportunities to organize around their own concerns. As actress Beverly Hanson expressed it, the group had something in common, "In the first place, we are all impact workers, and in the second place, all of us live in the ghetto." (Ford-Smith, 1981:52).

In "Downpression Get a Blow" the women focused on the theme of empowerment, which eventually led to the idea of forming a theatre collective. Honor Ford-Smith, who was very interested in exploring popular theatre as a tool of raising consciousness, agreed to direct the Collective. The women have since written and performed a variety of theatre productions examining their own lives as a living testimony to the meaning of oppression. The Collective works with middle-class professional women who have shared acting and organizational skills.

In addition to producing major plays, Sistren uses smaller theatrical pieces, skits, and workshops for popular education with smaller groups at a community level. Sistren has worked with a wide variety of groups, including women prisoners, youth groups, rural sugar workers, ghetto women, pregnant teens, and university professors. While the Collective concentrates largely on women, Sistren is open to working with all sections of the community (eg: men, youth) to raise consciousness about women in Jamaica.

Sistren aims not only to raise consciousness, but to motivate women to act upon their own concerns. As director Honor Ford-Smith

explains, "Sistren provides a dramatic forum for the problems of women from the labouring poor and in so doing helps to bring pressure for changes for women. By confronting what has been considered indecent, irrelevant, or accepted, we have begun to make a record of ways in which our lives have been thwarted and restricted. We have begun to refute the forces behind those ways." (Ford-Smith, 1981:55). Sistren recognizes "the need to promote the collective resistance of all women to the reality of oppression", using drama as a vehicle of mobilisation, education, and problem solving at the community level in workshops (Wasserstrom, 1985:160).

In Sistren's stated philosophy, the aims of the Collective are expressed: Sistren members use their personal lives as the crucial starting point to examine the oppression of women. The Collective works to raise consciousness concerning the general exploitation and oppression of women in society, while realizing that men also struggle against similar structural constraints. Drawing strength from Jamaica's history of struggle and resistance, Sistren collaborates with both sexes to reach its aims. Sistren brings the struggle against oppression down to a day-to-day level so that the average individual can relate to it. The Collective takes their ideas to the working class, demonstrating that by breaking the walls of isolation and working together, individual problems can be solved through collective action. In this way, Sistren makes the "private" and domestic areas of women's lives a political concern, showing that "we cannot fully understand the meaning of female oppression unless we examine that area." (Sistren, untitled pamphlet, 1978).

Sistren operates as a non-hierarchical, democratic collective, in which each member has a right to voice her own opinions and concerns. Weekly general meetings facilitate the exchange of ideas and input between members. The Collective deals openly with problems as they arise, hashing them out across the table. Labour has been divided into four teams which focus on the different areas of theatre, workshops, textiles, and educational information.

A textile workshop has been established to raise revenue to support Sistren's activities. However, the Collective as a whole is not yet economically self-sufficient and relies on funding from international non-governmental organization. The actresses themselves receive a monthly salary from the Collective's funds which ensures a decent standard of living and individual economic self-sufficiency.

THEATRE

Sistren's theatre productions provide a dramatic forum for the problems of women, from the working class poor. The audience is confronted with hidden and taboo subjects about women. "As such, drama is not a reflection of life, but a de-mystification of it, by the full exploration of these realities." (Ford-Smith, 1981:55).

Sistren is a popular theatre group which uses drama to express the popular culture of Jamaica, that is, "the culture that preserves, rescues, and incorporates elements whose content...strengthens ethnic, class, and gender consciousness." (Ford-Smith, 1982:2). "Popular" theatre differs from standard

theatre as the dramatic process is controlled by the people for expressing their ideas, concerns, and analysis. It is a means of resisting the culture propagated by the dominant class, media, and institutions, and is thereby a method of recovering and advancing the people's own culture and history. For conscientization, popular theatre can be a very powerful tool, as it mirrors reality and provokes critical analysis. In addition, it has the important potential as a vehicle of organization. Popular theatre provides the basic tools for analysing both personal experiences and social realities. Participants can then identify and act on solutions to problems arising out of their own analysis (Kidd, 1983:29-40). Sistren's work aims to present the audience with the current situation facing Jamaican working class women and the forces which determine it. It is hoped that this will lead to new knowledge, greater understanding, and collective action.

The method of work used by the Collective follows certain steps. In the first stage, themes are evoked from the women's own testimonies. A common problem such as the lack of education is described. In the next step, the problem is analysed in terms of its relationship to the wider social, political, and economic environment. For example, an early testimony of actress Beverly Elliot revealed that she "didn't get enough schooling. The reason for this: living in the country and my mother didn't have any help. She had eight of us and I was the biggest girl. She had to leave us and go out to get food. She had to work out during the day, so that she can find enough food for us. So you find that I have to stay home most of the time and do washing, the cooking, and

keep the smaller ones occupied at home. That is the reason I didn't get enough schooling." (Ford-Smith, 1981:57). Certain questions are raised which link the problems facing Bev to the wider socio-economic and political sphere: Why is Beverly's mother solely responsible for the family? Why is she unemployed? Why is wage work normally offered to men? To answer these questions, the members move on to the third step: research. After researching the problem, the scenario is rewritten to include the analysis. The material is then recorded (step five) and performed (step six) (Ford-Smith, 1981:52-59). The performances aim to reach a wide variety of people. The middle and upper classes are exposed to the experiences of working class women in the professional theatre circuit. The working class and unemployed are reached through Sistren's free community performances and rural tours. Sistren also performs in the international theatre circuit.

SISTREN'S PERFORMANCES: THEMES

Sistren focuses on working class, women's problems, making reference to Jamaica's past to understand the present situation. In "Nana Yah", the historical struggle against injustice is interpreted in a more contemporary fashion. Nanny, the famous Maroon leader, led the escaped slaves successfully against the British. Sistren celebrates the strength of Nanny, who had "probably raised ordinary children, swept her ordinary yard, and planted her ordinary yams before she became a fighter." (Ford-Smith, 1979). The narrator of the play takes us back in history:

"back, back, back,

pas dis lan
 pas dis time
 pas dis generation
 back, back
 befo unoo did know bout
 foreign exchange
 devaluation.
 We go back to Africa
 we madda country"

In Africa, a subsistence agricultural community is shown in a circular design. The circle is broken by the arrival of the Europeans and slave sefters, who capture the people and load them on the boats.

The play then goes on to describe the situation of female slaves. In powerful monologues slave women describe their situation: "Loss of Name" tells how "me spirit feel dead"; "Abortion" Before me born a child fe be slave, me will kill it. Dem nah get fe me pickney!"; "Rape"; "Loss of Limb: Dey call me Haffa Han Fanny. An unoo how me got dis name. Hungry - when me reach de banana tree...me hear one dog bark...Lawd, me frighten so, me run an me run, an run, run, run...when dem ketch me ...Me see backna man a grin him teet an him tell de man wid him fe get de machete fe teach me one lesson. Dem jus a hole me down pon de nearest tree, dem rip off me clothes, an him seh sin me use me han fe tief, him gwine get rid ov i...an wid one blow dem cut i off...Me tell you if me wasn a strong black oman me woulda dead."; "Poison"; and the "Whip". The play thus

reveals the oppression and sexual violence which female slaves faced.

Nanny escapes slavery and runs away to organize the Maroons against the British. As the storyteller concludes, "Dem was wha yuh call guerilla fighters yuh know. Same as modern times wen dem ave revolushin." Nanny is an inspiration for all Jamaican women: strong in spirit, she was able to overcome the oppression of slavery. Sistren concludes by urging women to also fight for their rights: for the end of violence, poverty, and hunger; for peace and love between brother and sister; and for greater solidarity between people.

Sistren uses history to understand the present situation of women in Jamaica. In "Nana Yah": the slave era is depicted, with women exploited in menial plantation work, responsible for childcare in the domestic sphere, subjected to physical and sexual violence, and actively involved in the resistance movement.

History continues in other productions. In "Domestick", Adelphi's father agitated for land reform and rights for sugar workers in 1938. He participated in the general strike which eventually led to the land settlement scheme in 1940. However, the farm failed over time due to shortages of services, poor technology, inadequate soil, and no water. Unskilled and unemployed, Adelphi migrated to Kingston along with thousands of other women at the time, in search of wage employment.

Sistren also examines the history of women's involvement in social movements in the Caribbean region. Sistren organized the Caribbean Popular Theatre, which brought individuals from nine

Caribbean theatre companies from Cuba, St. Lucia, Belize, Dominica, Guayana, Dominican Republic, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica to share ideas and information. The aim of the theatre workshop was to examine and dramatize the labour movement in the Caribbean and women's position within it. The project drew on research concerning migration into Jamaica in the 1920's, the depression of the 1930's, the development of the labour movement in the Caribbean, and the participation of women in the uprising. The play "Ida Revolt Inna Jonconnu Stylee", based on the testimony of a woman who had participated in the rebellion, describes the forces which led to the strike and the role of women in the uprising. The central theme ~~is~~ applicable today: working class women make history when they struggle for autonomy against those who oppress them.

The situation facing women who head households is dramatized and the sexual division of labour in the reproductive sphere is clearly enacted. Women and their daughters are solely responsible for washing clothes, cleaning house, buying and preparing food, and caring for children. In the working class, the majority of households are headed by women alone who must make ends meet. The end of Lina Finikin's poem, "Madda, Madda, O Madda", clearly depicts the difficulties facing single mothers:

"Now me grow up, now me realize

what it was to grow me up,

all by yourself.

Try fe school me, feed me, clothe me.

It was a hard job being a madda and

a fahda.

Now we understand.

Nadda Nadda O Nadda"

Women must be clever and innovative in order to survive, as exemplified by Gloria in "Tribute to Gloria Who Overcame Death". Gloria is a single mother who must provide for her children alone. One evening, Death comes knocking for the hungry, sick children. Gloria stalls for time, asking Death to return in a month when the children are healthier. Gloria quickly packs up and moves to her sister's home, where the two devise a plan. Gloria searches for work, and finally ends up in the market, selling enough vegetables to feed her children. When Death returns, the children are so fat and healthy that he does not recognize them! In this way, Gloria outsmarts Death.

The division of labour for working class women in the productive sphere is dramatized in various plays. Women enter the labour force along the lines of the sexual division of labour. In "Tribute", Gloria initially seeks employment at a construction site, but is refused, "Sorry, baby, men only!" Lacking formal education and technical training, the only work Gloria can find is that of a market woman. In "Downpression Get A Blow", women are employed for low wages in a sweatshop factory. These low wages are rationalized by the fact that women are unskilled workers and proclaimed as "secondary" wage earners, despite the fact that a high percentage of working class women head the household. The insecure position of women is clearly illustrated. The main character is forced to quit her job due to pregnancy without a leave of absence. While the women are involved in forming a union to secure certain rights, the

factory leaves the island literally overnight. In "Muffet Ina All A Wi", women employed in a garment factory in the "Free Zone" are forced to work long hours for little pay in order to pay rent and feed their "pickney" (children). When Muffet begins to organize her fellow workers to "leggo Negative and chant Positive", the Boss threatens to fire the workers. Finding themselves in a very vulnerable position, the women are forced to accept the ultimatum. Only Muffet refuses. Sistren thus dramatizes the impact of runaway industries on women in the Third World, whose vulnerable position and need for a steady income render them a reliable cheap labour force.

A large percentage of working class women are employed in the service industry, and Sistren reveals the oppressive situation facing domestic workers. Domestic work is considered an offshoot of unskilled work in the home, and therefore is poorly paid. Most of the actresses themselves were domestic workers at one time, and the plays reflect their own experiences. In QPH, Hopie leaves the rural area in the late 1930's to work with her Auntie. While Hopie's cousin Sissie is at school, Hopie is left to work alone day and night. At one point, Auntie accuses Hopie of slacking off in the morning: "Imagine all you had to do was wash de two likkle plate dem and scour the two likkle pot, sweep out de house and clean out the dog kennel, wash and iron your cousin dem clothes...". When Auntie dies in the 1950's, Sissie emigrates to England with the promise of sending for Hopie later. Hopie is left alone, without a home or money. Lacking education, she is forced to seek domestic labour in home after home. By the late 1970's, aged Hopie is left destitute

in the alm's house, begging for pennies in the streets. Hopie's story is a common experience for young, rural women seeking work in the urban sector. The precarious position of domestic workers is revealed.

To survive, women must "make do". Many enter the informal sector, working as petty vendors and higglers. Two higglers in a short skit argue over where to set up their stalls. Rather than working together, they demolish their stands in a swirl of dust. Sistren's message is clear: women have to stand by each other.

Women often have no choice but to turn to prostitution as a means of surviving. In "Muffet Ina All A Wi", Anancy traps Muffet in his web when she is forced to become a prostitute. The chorus in the background sympathizes, "Prostitution, just can't be the solution. Prostitution, motivated by a lot of sufferation." The price of survival can be high, as Sistren's song "Cash On Delivery" depicts:

"Me say cash on delivery
 Me say a business we a deal with
 How you a go on so?
 You better pay for your pleasure
 Is we life it a measure
 Just the service which I render
 So don't check say I tender."

In QPH, Pearlle becomes a prostitute when her mother learns of her pregnancy and kicks her out of her house. The "Queen of Pearl Harbour" is left poverty stricken and demoralized once she is too old to offer sexual service.

Class differences between women are clearly dramatized in Sistren's plays. In QPH, Pearl is forced to leave her upper class house when Mummy learns that her daughter is pregnant by James, the black, working class gardener: "James and the Sambo in yuh belly, leave me house...Get out! Me only daughter...O God all the money, the plans, the cake...the disgrace...the shame...you hear me...get out. Get out of my sight."

In "Bellywoman Bangarang," there is a clear class difference between the accents and attitudes of the nurses and the poor pregnant teens they are caring for. Little sympathy or understanding is expressed: "You girls are just too careless. Don't you have any self respect?...You're a total disgrace."

The class difference between domestic workers and their employers is apparent, as the "Missis" orders Lucy to work:

"Lucy, I want you to fix up this place properly...

I want you to get out the crystal ...

Yes Missis

and the silver...

Yes, maam

Get me some red roses

Yes maam

And Lucy ...

Yes missis

Fix the napkin behind the chair back

Yes maam (Lucy is running back and forth)

And Lucy...

Yes missis

One last thing... I want you to fix yourself properly.

Don't forget to wear your cap

Yes maam

That's all for now Lucy

Yes maam! (Lucy runs confused)" (Muffet Ina All A Wi)

While Sistren is aware of class antagonism between women, the Collective also recognizes the oppression of all women by men. In "Muffet Ina All A Wi", the oppressive situation of middle class women in the home is depicted. Muffet tins of her role as her husband's high class housekeeper, who is expected to stay at home, raise the children, and entertain his business contacts.

Sistren links the situation of Jamaican working class women to the economic and social environment. In the humorous "IMF Skit", Sistren introduces the "IMF Racket" where, "from past to present we have to watch we ppocket." "Lay-off, high prices, maintenance, child abuse" are all problems experienced by women related to harsh IMF conditionality. The Collective calls for a solution to "IMF polution... no mek we bawl, no mek we fret. Struggle to resist the confusion that exist." The problems of high unemployment, inflation, and inadequate education and social services are expressed in Sistren's theatre productions. In "Bellywomen Bangarang", the incidence of teen pregnancy is linked to poverty. Didi has a sexual relationship with Dennis only because she is hungry and he promises her lunch. In "Miss Mavis Yard", Althea's

husband is laid off work, and takes out his frustration by beating Althea.

Government policies are not aimed to improve the plight of poor working class women. In QPH, Queenie is given thirty days notice to move, which she receives on the twentieth day. Queenie has no where to go, and decides to approach the government. "For a long time poor people a suffer and a time dem (government) fe' help we properly." But the government offers no support: "...dem a bulldoze you out fe' nek up office building."

The international economic and political links and their impact on women are also depicted. Sistren comments on work on an American-owned plantation:

"Gal who a thresh your rice,

Is de same old Yankee man!

Gal mind you catch the lice

From de same old Yankee man!"

Sistren reveals male attitudes and ideology which perpetuate women's subordination. The current ideology, as promoted by the major socio-political institutions, such as media, portray women as sexy, passive, and dependent. In "Muffet Ina All A Wi", the ideal woman is auctioned off and bids are taken for "a prize of a woman to be chef in your kitchen, a lady in the living room, and a whore in the bedroom." Another "gem" is offered... "her picture will make you a penthouse, vulnerable and vivacious and willing to do cooking, cleaning and sewing."

The current media portrays an image of the "beautiful" woman which reflects the Western ideal: blonde, fair and slim. Muffet,

trapped in one of Anancy's webs, emerges as a beauty queen, parading to wedding march music. In "Bellywoman Bangarang", women bemoan their physical appearance, "Me gosh. Me-nuh like me color at all. Is how me black so!... Me-nuh like me belly at all. Me belly too big and hang over. When me go a store and see all dem sexy belly skin blouse fi tie up here so me can't buy it fi wear at all. Me belly too big."

Women are considered weak and dependent, and girls and women are constantly exposed to physical and sexual violence. Girls are taught to stay at home and do housework, while boys are allowed to explore and control the streets. In the play, "Bellywoman Bangarang", Marie cannot leave the yard to play, because her mother "coop her up." A girl who walks out on the street at night is in male territory and is "asking for it" (French, 1983:10). Men essentially view women as sexual objects and believe that they have a natural right to women's bodies. As a result, wife beating and rape is commonly used to keep women "in their place" (French, 1983:4). Women are often blamed for bringing rape upon themselves. In "Bellywoman Bangarang", Teddy rapes Yvonne. Yvonne's grandmother is not sympathetic, but rather blames Yvonne, telling her to "pack up yu tings." Yvonne is held responsible for the rape and consequent pregnancy: "Dutty gal, O'le Whore, You did like it, Old Pasant, Leggo girl."

Women live with constant violence. In "Muffet Ina All A-U", Muffet faces violence night after night: "Dem (rude boys) broke down de fence and mash up de yard... Me can't sleep a night, sake a gun-men dem... De T.U. gone, and de fridge it gone. De stove is gone

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

and me can't cook at all... A me alone wid de pickney dem... Dem puppa gone, me no have no help... Wha we a go really do? Wha we a go really do?"

Even old women are not always respected, as exemplified in QPH when two Rastafarians harass the old women, calling Pearlle "Red Neggah gal" and Hopie "Old fat girl". They threaten to rob and rape the old beggar women.

Sexuality is viewed as shameful and dirty, and the reaction to teen pregnancy, on the whole, is negative. Mother's often beat their daughters when pregnancy is discovered and order them out of the house, at least temporarily. In QPH, Pearlle is forced to leave her home and never returns. The responsibility for pregnancy is largely shouldered by the girls. In "Bellywoman Bangarang", however, Didi's mother reacts differently. She accepts the news calmly, and suggests that they go speak to Dennis, "Might as well we go ovah dey go talk to him. Dats all we can do. Three of us... jus talk out what pass and what is to come." In this way, Sistren dramatizes a means of dealing with teen pregnancy which does not leave the girls "guilty" and vulnerable.

It is clear that women are expected by men to perform certain tasks in the domestic sphere. Cooking, cleaning, and raising children is given little value and considered "women's work". Unskilled women are then exploited in the work force, performing "women's work" in low-skilled, low-wage jobs. In "Muffet Ina All A Wi", the Boss hires women because they provide cheap, reliable labour. Aware of the vulnerable economic position of women, the

factory owner hires unemployed women from their yards. A paternalistic attitude is expressed by the Boss towards "his girls".

Sistren dramatizes the personal strength of women as they deal with violence, unemployment, inflation, male attitudes, exploitation in the labour force, and oppression in the domestic sector. The problems facing women in the working class are linked to the socio-economic structures in which they live. Sistren expresses anger and resistance to the injustice "we see and feel around us." Sistren offers a strategy for change, encouraging women to organize and change their situation. Nanny offers a model for all Jamaican women to stand up to their oppressors and continue the struggle. Muffet out-tricks Anancy, and calls on all women to join her:

"Sisters come row

come mek we stay afloat

You know we are sailing in the same boat."

If women realize their common position, understand the forces of oppression, and rally to alter them, they can work together to change their situation:

"If society don't recognize us

or realize our dignity,

then the hotter the battle,

the sweeter the victory.

The dust will remain in the corner

till the broom sweeps it away

We're gonna sweep on, sweep on,

Sweep out poverty, sweep out slavery!

Time to break down the cages.

We want better cages!"

Sistren's plays are an important tool of raising consciousness among both men and women. The plays are aimed to reach middle and upper class individuals in the commercial theatre circuit. While initially extremely successful, the social climate is no longer conducive to popular theatre in Jamaica. As the finance administrator explains, "the middle class prefers their fashion shows and tea parties...they are not interested in hearing about working class women." (Interview, July, 1985). As a result, attendance has declined over the past few years. However, Sistren will keep "hitting away" at the middle class. As one actress expressed, "Sistren is a working class group, speaking for all working class women. The message is strong and simple...it gives the middle class a taste of something else." (Interview, August, 1985).

The plays are also aimed at the working class and unemployed men and women. Sistren presents its plays in community centers and rural towns. It is extremely important to reach the "roots" people and initiate discussion among the urban workers and rural peasants.

Sistren also performs in the international theatre circuit. The group has performed in Canada, the United States, Europe, the Caribbean, and Kenya. For example, the IMF skit was performed at the Nairobi UN Decade for Women conference and was an enormous success. Sistren's message is not only reaching Jamaicans, but individuals from other nations as well.

WORKSHOPS

While theatre is an effective means of raising consciousness, it does not actively organize women to address their problems and change their situation. Sistren realized that consciousness raising was not enough and women must be organized. As a result, Sistren began its workshop program in 1978, reaching a wide variety of women from different socio-economic strata. Workshops are conducted with female sugar workers, school girls, domestic workers, female prisoners, urban unemployed mothers, youth, middle class women, and professionals. The themes vary according to the concerns of the group: unemployment, teenage pregnancy, health, child rearing, sexual violence, education, population control, and non-traditional careers for women. Aiming to reach rural and urban unemployed and working class women, Sistren works regularly with a number of organizations as an expression of "solidarity with the struggles of the community as a whole." (Ford-Smith, 1980:561).

Through workshops, Sistren aims to put groups in touch with the current situation of women in the home and the labour force and to understand the economic, social and political forces at play. The workshops provide the participants with basic tools for analysing both their personal experiences and their social reality. Drama, with its imagery, physical participation, and immediate mental engagement, offers a language where analysis and action occur together. This helps the participants to identify and act on solutions to problems arising out of their own analysis. The

ultimate goal of the workshop is the empowerment of women through awareness, analysis, and collective action.

The method of work begins with a physical warm-up to relax the participants and allow improvisation to flow more easily. For example, a "trust game" is played, where one person closes her eyes and falls, allowing the others in the circle to catch her. The games can be expanded to represent certain themes. For example, in "bull in the pen", two individuals must break through a "pen" created by encircled linked arms. The circle can represent certain aspects of society that the players feel oppresses them. The two "bulls" must strategize a means of breaking through the chain (Ford-Smith, 1980:562). The physical warm-up is followed by testimonies, which draw on personal experiences from which themes are evoked. These themes are plugged into the wider socio-economic environment and analysed. The scenario is then dramatized. Those questions raised which cannot be answered are further researched, recorded, re-dramatized, and re-evaluated.

Workshops are particularly effective with small groups, where problems are more thoroughly analysed and a sense of community is created. Shared assumptions and experience provide more intense reactions among participants. For example, a workshop in Riverton focused on "How a sistah in your community survives." (Participant-observations made in June, 1985). One woman acted out her weekly routine as a pillow vendor. This involved buying foam, material, and thread; taking the bus home with all the material; sewing the pillows; selling the pillows in Kingston and Montego Bay; and dealing with the complaints of prospective buyers. Fellow

members could empathize with her situation, and a discussion of why women must turn to petty commodity vending to survive followed. This empathetic response is important, as it is based on a shared class and gender consciousness (Ford-Smith, 1980:561).

URBAN WORKSHOPS

Urban workshops have been conducted with female prisoners, pregnant teens, school girls, middle class women, university students, and unemployed ghetto dwellers. The themes include women's work inside and outside the home, childcare, political organization, and unemployment. For example, the Collective is well aware of the pressing problem of teen pregnancy. Girls as young as eleven years old find themselves pregnant. Forced to leave school and sometimes their homes, the girls are locked into a situation of unemployment and poverty. A workshop conducted with pregnant teens addressed the themes of contraception (myths, taboos), lack of child care facilities, the impact of pregnancy on health, and the links between teenage pregnancy and poverty. Workshops such as these aim to increase understanding among teens of their situation and may prevent subsequent unplanned pregnancies. It also facilitates discussion of shared experiences between the girls, who often find themselves feeling very much alone in their situation.

Sistren works on a regular, bi-weekly basis with a group of working class women in Riverton, a Kingston ghetto which is located literally on a garbage dump. The women hustle to earn a living raising pigs, selling commodities in the petty trade sector, or

working as cheap labour in the Free Zone. Sistren was first employed by the University of the West Indies to conduct a pre-school development workshop on child care, health, nutrition, and education. The workshop proved extremely popular and successful, and the Riverton women asked the Collective to return. Other pressing problems were discussed in subsequent workshops, including unemployment, rape, high food prices, and teen pregnancy. The women eventually chose to organize a craft class, in order to learn new skills which could generate additional income. While Sistren would prefer to see a greater shift in ideology away from women's stereotyped roles and division of labour, requests of this nature are not refused. The organization of women to earn money is seen as an important step in facilitating change. The question then facing Sistren is how to bring craft work and education together. Craft work can be used as a vehicle to teach skills and express the struggles and concerns of the participants, rather than a tool for domestication. When a group of women come together, important problems can be raised, analysed, and acted upon, even within the context of a craft class.

Mobilization is difficult to organize and maintain. While short, two or three day workshops may raise consciousness, they do not facilitate action for change. Workshops held on a regular basis, which have the potential for organization and action, also prove problematic. For example, the Riverton group has not yet established its own leadership and has not organized to act upon the concerns of ghetto women. Attendance is also a problem; as many women stop attending the workshop as soon as they realize that

Sistren is unable to find them employment. Those women who do join face constraints of work and child-care, and cannot participate regularly. In addition, male partners are often suspicious of Sistren, and keep "their" women from attending. As a result, the urban workshops remain largely a tool for consciousness raising.

RURAL WORKSHOPS

While the urban workshops are still at a level of consciousness raising, the rural workshop at Hayes community is action oriented. Sistren became very interested in women's work in the sugar industry, Jamaica's historically most important agro-business. In the early 1980's, Sistren met with women in Hayes, a housing settlement built by the People's National Party in the 1970's for sugar workers in an estate area. The problems that the women faced daily were raised: grueling work in the fields, the household burden, the unjust legal situation concerning house titles, unemployment, inadequate education facilities, lack of water, and rising prices. Themes connected to the deterioration of the sugar industry and its impact on the community and ex-sugar workers were confronted. These included such issues as wage rates; the role of trade unions; the impact of the IMF on the sugar industry; the oppressive condition of women's work; decreased government input into health care, education, and social services; and alternatives to sugar work.

The testimony of one woman in particular illustrated various key themes, and was produced as a play. "The Case of Iris Armstrong" tells the story of Iris, who arrives in the sugar belt in the 1960's, in response to the promise of a job. She soon learns that the job entails living with and looking after a sugar worker, and not work as an employed sugar estate labourer herself. Unemployed and homeless, she settles in with the man. He is an abusive alcoholic, and she eventually leaves him to find menial labour on the sugar estate. After years of living and working as a fertilizer dropper in the fields, she becomes ill and is forced stop work. The government buys the estate while she is ill, and she returns to work on the co-operative as a supervisor. Being the only female supervisor on the estate, she realizes that she is paid less than men. Iris approaches the union with her demand for equal pay, which is dismissed with the argument that the co-operative is making too little profit to increase the worker's wages. After the change in government in 1980, the sugar co-operative is disbanded. Iris loses her position and is left to raise chickens in her yard.

"The Case of Iris Armstrong" focuses on key issues for women in Jamaica. The relationship between labour in the home and cheap labour outside the home is identified and discussed. The sexual division of labour limits women's opportunities in the wage labour market. Unskilled and unemployed, Iris is initially forced to "make do" as an unpaid housekeeper in the sugar worker's home. When Iris finally secures work on the estate, she is relegated to menial work in the fields. Women are clearly at the bottom of the rural labour hierarchy, due to their lack of skills and the belief that women are

not "fit" for skilled labour. In addition, the systematic de-feminisation of agricultural labour has left many female sugar workers unemployed, without alternative employment on the estates. Those who do not migrate to urban centers work as menial labourers, petty traders, or unpaid housewives.

While women are legally entitled to a paid leave of absence for illness or pregnancy, it is difficult for women to defend this right. Even when women do secure a higher position, such as Iris' job as supervisor, they are not guaranteed equal pay for equal work, despite legal protection. The union does not ensure that these rights are protected. There is clearly a weakness in terms of identifying and addressing issues of special concern to women within the unions and co-operative hierarchy. The lack of female union leaders is problematic. Finally, the political situation is one which presently does not address the concerns of the working class. The demise of the sugar co-operatives affects all rural labourers, but particularly women, whose opportunities to find alternative work is limited. In this case, Iris is forced into the petty trade sector, like countless Jamaican working class women.

Sistren encouraged the Hayes women to organize themselves in order to deal with their problems. The most urgent problems expressed by the women were unemployment and inflation. However, because the women felt powerless to deal with these issues, they chose to organize around the pressing problem of the lack of water in the community. Hayes had been without water for three weeks, as the pump had broken down. Using drama, the women acted out the situation in skit form. This was followed by discussion and

analysis: What was the problem with the pump? Who controlled the pump and water supply at the local and national level? Why had the community representative not been successful in getting water? The women set out to gather the necessary information to answer these questions, and returned with the idea of sending a delegation to the community counsellor. In play form, the women enacted the delegation before the counsellor, predicting her questions and their responses. The counsellor was known for making life "nasty", which led to a discussion of her role as counsellor, why she made the women wait to see her, and how she used her power for her own benefit. This was enlarged to criticize representation at the national level. The following day, the group insisted upon speaking to the counsellor. The results were tremendous: a water truck was sent the next day, and the service continued for several months.

The women at Hayes community also organized themselves around the issue of legal titles to houses. Co-operative housing was built for the sugar workers by the government, with the assumption that the men were the household heads. As a result, the legal titles were in the men's names. Women were therefore excluded from the property rights. Realizing the potential impact of this situation (for example, a woman could be forced to leave her home by her partner without legal recourse), the women insisted on signing the titles jointly.

The workshops in Hayes community have continued on a bi-weekly basis and different concerns of the women have been expressed, dramatized and discussed. Problems such as the use of chemicals in

in the fields, male attitudes, discipline problems with teens, community organization and fair representation, wage rates, and political corruption have been raised by the women's group. Those concerns which the women feel they can change are dealt with, such as discipline problems with teens.

The Hayes women's group is presently well consolidated with its own local leadership. Funds for the group have been raised by the women through concerts and tea parties. Again, while Sistren would like to diverge away from the traditional "female" methods of fundraising, the Collective realizes that change in attitude takes "plenty, plenty time" especially in the context of the present socio-economic environment (Interview with theatre director, August, 1985). Sistren continues to work with the group on a regular basis, with the ultimate aim of leaving the organization to function on its own.

While Sistren has successfully helped the Hayes women to organize around the concerns of water and house titles, problems have been encountered. Initially, the atmosphere at Hayes was tense. The community has a history of political violence and the women were afraid to organize. In addition, the history of the community does not include women organizing to demand their rights. Nor have the issues of domestic work, the sexual division of labour, and exploitation been explored and discussed. As a result, the men felt threatened by Sistren's presence. The union was also watching Sistren's activities, wary of Sistren's work. However, Sistren was able to gain the confidence of the women, and thus overcame these obstacles.

New problems have emerged over time. Attendance has been declining, largely due to the time and financial constraints felt by women. The problems of unemployment and poverty combined diminish the enthusiasm of the women. Local politics is a continuing problem. For example, the youth group at Hayes enjoyed watching Sistren's work with the women and wanted to join. They insisted on membership using the rationale that the women were using their clubhouse for workshop meetings. This caused a great deal of antagonism, and women began withdrawing from the group. Sistren solved the problem by helping the youth to organize a separate meeting time, which Sistren facilitates bi-weekly.

The Collective experienced problems itself. With the major thrust in 1984 turning to workshops, the number of plays declined and the number of workshops (both urban and rural) increased. The Collective found that the workshops were seriously cutting into theatre time, and an increasing number of actresses were absent from the workshop preparatory sessions. In addition, workshops were cancelled when Sistren was performing on the road. To maintain a more consistent presence, a division of labour occurred within the Collective, with two actresses forming a workshop team in 1985.

The workshop team is clearly understaffed, and Sistren is now faced with an important decision. Group building is a major task, which must be consistent and ongoing. It requires a great deal of resources, in both time and finances. It is also frustrating, as Sistren must deal with the rise and fall of enthusiasm, the lack of initiative and leadership in the groups, small town politics, and an antagonistic political environment.

While Sistren can successfully raise consciousness, the Collective cannot possibly mobilize and organize all the women it works with. Thus, the actresses must decide if the main thrust of the Theatre Collective will be towards grassroots organization or consciousness raising through drama. The need for more rural and grassroots work is felt by various members, despite the discouraging structural constraints Sistren faces. For the moment it is likely that Sistren will maintain its work with the women's groups it is presently involved with, while choosing not to expand further.

TEXTILES

Workshop participants have not only acted out their personal experiences, but have drawn them as well. For example, in Sistren's first meeting at Riverton, the women were asked to draw. Most of the drawings depicted the horrible living conditions in the ghetto: the filth, poverty, and hunger. Just as skits evolved into plays, drawings became textiles.

Sistren takes the themes of their plays and workshops and puts them to ink. With starkness and clarity, the themes of teenage pregnancy, domestic work, oppression, and change are illustrated. The designs are by individual actresses, the collective creations of workshops, and the co-ordinated efforts of the Collective. The textiles are sold to generate income for the Collective, which relies upon grants from non-governmental organizations. In this way, Sistren works towards one aim, that of economic self-sufficiency.

The textiles are remarkable in terms of how they originated and what they represent. Art is used by the actresses and workshop participants to illustrate their own reality. Art is not only for the elite, it is used by working class women to explain their situation in the productive and reproductive spheres. It is thus a tool for self expression. It is also a means of self transformation; the self-worth of ghetto women rises as they explore their creative potential. In short, this is art "functioning as it should: healing, lifting, transforming the human mind and its reflected experience - the world we live in. Sistren's original textile printing has a message for all of us. It is a part of Jamaican Art. Call it "Folk Art" or "Intuitive Art" or just "Art" - for that is what it is: Art in action." (Sistren, May-August, 1985:7).

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION: RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION

Sistren is actively involved in research and documentation. Through research, the Collective examines the situation of women in Jamaica, finding facts to support the initial themes of their plays and workshops. For example, research on the role of women in the Maroon resistance was used in "Nana Yah". QPH was based on research that Sistren carried out after a terrible fire in the overcrowded women's ward of Kingston's Alms House in May, 1980. As actress Lillian Foster describes, "At the time of the fire we were down there. And we talked to people. A lot of charred bodies, just bones, pure bones. Oh, my God!" (Wasserstrom, 1985:168). One

hundred and sixty seven destitute women were burned to death in the Alms House, which was literally a fire trap.

The research carried out by Sistren is documented, largely in play form and workshops. However, Sistren has also produced the film "Sweet Sugar Rage", which reveals the harsh conditions facing female workers on a Jamaican sugar estate. The story of Iris' clash with the union and management over her right to equal pay as a female supervisor is re-created on film. Through this dramatization, the appalling conditions facing women sugar workers are revealed: "Clad like scarecrows in ragged men's trousers under torn work-clothes, women sugar workers toil under a blindingly hot Jamaican sun. The mud on the field hides the needles of the cassia macca. The women work barefoot." (Sistren, 1984). These powerful images are accompanied by oral interviews with individual sugar workers describing their situation. Played to urban audiences, Sistren uses the film as a tool for provoking discussion about the conditions female sugar workers face daily. As a means of consciousness raising, the film is very good, and has been shown in Canada and several European countries.

The Collective also prints its own newsletter, which discusses key problems facing women in Jamaica. For example, the May-August, 1985 issue discusses the U.N. Decade of Women Conference. "Sistah Ansa" chats about "de decade", congratulating Caribbean women for the advancements made in consciousness raising and organization, but acknowledging that "we material condition a get worsen and worsen." The article goes on to explain how women suffer under the system, with high unemployment, inflation, and the closure

of schools and hospitals. Sistah Ansa claims that "restructuring (IMF program) directly a tek place pon toppa woman back." In the January-April, 1985 issue, the results of a forum on "Women in Politics" is summarized, an event jointly sponsored and organized by Sistren and three other women's organizations. Participants focused on worsening economic and social conditions in the Caribbean, including the increasing foreign debt, IMF harsh conditionality, widespread unemployment, reduction in social services, and inflation. It was acknowledged that the full impact of this situation is felt by working class women, who largely raise their families alone. The forum demanded greater female representation in the political sphere, new economic policies, laws to combat domestic violence and sexual abuse, the revision of discriminatory legislation against women, the control of pornography, and the right for women to unprize. Representing working class women, Sistren was able to bring their concerns to the floor.

The newsletter also remembers "Our Past", describing important events in the history of Jamaican women. For example, an article on the First Jamaican Women's Conference held in 1939 describes the passing of a resolution calling for the colonial government to allow women to vote on equal terms with men, provide more schools for infants, open vocational schools for girls, and ensure that fathers are registered in respect of children (Sistren, December, 1985).

Sistren works with women of other classes both within, and outside the Collective. "Friends of Sistren" is a group of middle

and working class women who came together in a workshop to discuss their common problems. In conjunction with the Theatre Collective, Friends of Sistren chose to focus on sexual violence, not because it was considered the most pressing problem, but because the women felt they could have some impact on this area. Friends of Sistren wrote and published "NO! to Sexual Violence", a booklet which illustrates "the seriousness of the crime of sexual violence, how the society we live in encourages it, and how we can fight against it." Between 1979 and 1982, reported crimes of rape and carnal abuse increased by 22% in Jamaica (Friends of Sistren, 1983:1). Sexual violence is encouraged by male attitudes, such as the belief that men have a "natural right" to women's bodies. It is also encouraged by the society, which portrays women as weak, dependent, passive sexual objects whose primary role is to serve men (Friends of Sistren, 1983:10). Women are powerless to fight back, because they are often economically dependent on the men who abuse them and their daughters. Those women who seek legal recourse find themselves against male police and judges who often scrutinize the woman's past and excuse the offender. Sexual violence is linked to poverty and unemployment, which reduces women to a situation of vulnerability and dependence. Ghetto life gives rise to frustration and extreme violence. The booklet suggests that women get together to discuss the problem of sexual violence. Key demands are made: employment; safe, cheap housing; an end to the negative portrayal of women in songs, films, and advertisements; better medical and legal protection; and increased education to inform women of their rights in instances of physical and sexual abuse (Friends of

Sistren, 1983:26-27). The response to the booklet has been very positive, and it has been widely distributed by schools and various women's organizations.

Sistren's work in theatre, workshops, textiles, and educational information aims to raise consciousness concerning the material and ideological structures facing working class Jamaican women. The themes draw on both historical and contemporary conditions, examining women's work in the domestic sphere and labour force, class relations, the national and international political economy, and patriarchal ideology. Sistren proposes a strategy for change based on consciousness raising, organization, and the mobilization of women. Sistren has facilitated the organization of women in Hayes and Riverton and these women have devised strategies to address their own immediate problems and needs. These workshops exemplify that concrete collective action is possible through consciousness raising and organization.

U. CONCLUSIONS

Sistren aims to raise consciousness concerning the material and ideological conditions facing working class women in Jamaican society. Sistren also encourages the empowerment of women, advocating that women organize to examine their problems and devise strategies for change. The overall goal of Sistren is to facilitate action which will ultimately alter the oppressive and exploitative material and ideological conditions facing Jamaican women.

The success of Sistren in achieving these aims can be determined by considering the following:

i) Have the working class actresses in Sistren increased their own consciousness?

ii) Have Sistren's members been empowered? Power implies the ability of an individual to control her/his own person and activities and the persons and activities of others (Schlegel, 1977:8). In order to be autonomous, that is, free from the control of others, individuals must have access to skills and education and attain economic self-sufficiency.

iii) Has Sistren raised the consciousness of individuals concerning the situation facing working class women? How has this been achieved? How many individuals have been reached?

iv) Has Sistren facilitated the empowerment of women?

Sistren's first achievement was the consciousness raising and empowerment of themselves. When the women first came together in 1977, some members lacked formal education. A workshop was devised to teach reading skills and develop critical consciousness. A wide

variety of work was done, including physical exercises based on the shape of letters, rhythmic sound games to link letters to their sounds, and writing and reading exercises. Literacy is an important step towards the empowerment of women, as it enables women to write, read, and participate in society. In addition, Sistren learned to translate the Jamaican local dialect into English, the official language of the island. This is crucial for Sistren to communicate their ideas to women of other classes and to break down their isolation.

While Sistren is able to translate their material in English, patois is used in theatre productions and workshops to maintain the women's cultural identity. Sistren has successfully used theatre as an expression of the Jamaican culture, gaining international recognition as a grassroots popular theatre company. This is a great achievement, particularly in a society inundated by American culture. Sistren's drama is a means of resisting Western media and advancing Jamaican culture and history. This is another step in the empowerment of the working class, as it allows individuals to recognize the value of their own language and culture.

The very process of recording and performing the theatre productions is a means of raising consciousness. By sharing, analysing, and recording their personal experiences, the actresses increasingly understand how and why women are oppressed. As one actresses explains, it is "...by meeting as a group of women and talking about our lives" that she became aware of women's oppression in the home, workplace, and society itself (Interview, August, 1985). The actresses link the oppression and exploitation of women to the

material and ideological conditions in Jamaica. For example, one actress discusses the problem of overpopulation and contraception in terms of the economic situation. As she indicates, the problem is "not the method", but the lack of education and the presence of poverty. Girls in the upper classes do not experience multiple teen pregnancies nor do women in the upper classes have large families. In addition, the belief among working class men and women that a girl must have children before she is considered a "woman" is conducive to multiple pregnancies. The root of the problem is material and ideological, and not the lack of contraception. There is anger expressed when discussing Jamaica's population control program, which pushes contraception without addressing the fundamental material cause of overpopulation. The actress herself has suffered the side effects of depo-provera, a contraceptive drug banned in most Western nations.

There is a sense of self-confidence, pride, and accomplishment felt by the actresses after the production of each drama. As actress Mae Thompson explains, "It was a dread scene for me the first time I'm going on stage and see so much people look at me. Man, I tremble sometimes! I remember when we went on stage and I use the cardboard that say 'Strike!' to put in front of me because I was trembling. But anyway, it work out after that. I feel confident." (Wasserstrom, 1985:163). It is this new confidence which incites the actresses to further their knowledge and awareness. This is increasingly occurring beyond the bounds of the Collective, as exemplified by one member's participation in the ISIS

conference in Switzerland and another's participation in the international youth conference in the Soviet Union.

The actresses have been further empowered by becoming economically self-sufficient. Each actress is paid a monthly sum equivalent to that of a trained teacher. In present times of high inflation, this is barely adequate to "make do". This has been accomplished by organizing the theatre collective, actively soliciting funds, and marketing textiles. While the Collective as a whole is not yet "self-sufficient", as the theatre company relies upon external funding from the non-governmental community, the actresses are ensured a monthly salary and a retirement savings. Sistren considers economic self-sufficiency a critical factor in reducing women's dependency on men and guaranteeing self-autonomy. As actress Lana Finnikin indicates, women must "get together to organize around different things. Helping themselves, common projects, self help, income generating projects, where they don't really have to depend on anybody." (Wasserstrom, 1985:175). Pauline Crawford uses Sistren as an example for other women, "Sistren itself, we start in the bottom of the ladder, and just climbing gradually...Togetherness is the key." (Wasserstrom, 1985:179).

This process of empowerment has not been a simple task, especially under the present socio-economic conditions. Sistren began during the PNP era, and was fortunate to work within a socio-political climate more conducive to raising women's concerns and organizing for change. Sistren received transport subsidies, access to pre-established women's groups (eg: female prisoners, schools), and free publicity. Under the present government, however, Sistren

faces problems. - The JLP offers no support whatsoever, perceiving Sistren as a "thorn in the flesh" (Interview with theatre director, August, 1985). As a result, the government inhibits Sistren's work at times. For example, Sistren was banned from television in 1980 due to what was declared a "subversive" poem performed in *Mama Yah*. A documentary on the Alms House fire was not aired, as the issue was considered too controversial at the time. In addition, all travel subsidies and access to formal women's groups by the government have been halted. These actions reduce the potential efficacy of Sistren's work, inhibiting easy access to certain women's groups and denying financial support. However, Sistren manages to reach the groups on their own. Sistren deals with the problem by remaining non-aligned with respect to party politics. Sistren is willing to perform at both PNP and JLP functions. This is extremely important in Jamaican society, where an alliance to one party causes difficulties under the government of the other party. This allows Sistren enough flexibility to reach women of divergent backgrounds and to make public the problems facing poor working class women.

Sistren also faces financial constraints, which is a reflection of the general economic crisis of Jamaica, as well as the lack of support from the government. While the textiles and theatre performances are important sources of revenue, the Collective must also rely upon external funding to maintain economic viability. This leaves Sistren potentially vulnerable in times of global financial restraint, as funding from non-governmental organizations is never guaranteed. However, Sistren has managed to contact reliable resources, which will hopefully continue in the future.

It is through the empowerment of themselves that Sistren has been successful in working with other Jamaican women. Sistren aims to raise consciousness through theatre, workshops, textiles, and educational information. Over the past nine years, Sistren has written and performed six major theatre productions. These have reached middle and upper class audiences in the professional theatre circuit and working class individuals in the free community performances. Until recently, Sistren has been performing in full theatres and the number of individuals who have heard their message is large. The performances have been well received and publicly acclaimed, with "Bellywoman Bangarang" winning the Gold Medal from the Jamaican Festival Commission in 1978 and first place in the Mass Media Contest of the Interamerican Commission for Women. "Bandaloo Version" was awarded the Certificate of Merit for promoting the role of women in development in 1979, and "QPH" won the Jamaican National Theatre Critics Award in 1981. "QPH" toured Canada and Barbados, and "Muffett" played in New York, reaching audiences of different nationalities.

The message has had an impact, as exemplified by the formation of the group, Friends of Sistren. Individuals often approached Sistren, asking if they could be of any help. Sistren suggested that these individuals form a group to act on a common problem of their own. Friends of Sistren was formed and organized around the problem of sexual violence. As previously discussed, the informational pamphlet "No! To Sexual Violence" was endorsed by the Jamaican Human Rights Commission and distributed to schools and organizations. At one point, the demand was so great that Friends

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of Sistren had to print additional copies. The fact that Friends of Sistren organized to produce this booklet is evidence that Sistren is influencing women to take positive action to change their situation in whatever way possible.

Workshops have been even more effective in raising consciousness, as dialogue and analysis is possible within smaller groups. Sistren has conducted workshops with a wide variety of groups; including school children, ghetto women, female prisoners, University students, pregnant teens, rural sugar workers, and other women's organizations. The themes are varied and diverse, depending on the needs and interests of the group. Topics range from unemployment, teen pregnancy, child care, the sexual division of labour in the household and the work force, sexual violence, education, and male attitudes. The participants clearly enjoy the workshops and gain new knowledge from the meetings. As one woman from the Jamqican Construction Collective said concerning a workshop on child care, "It was great, man! Me laugh an laugh! ... Me no beat me niece no more." Attitudes are being changed!

The Popular Theatre Periodic Report from January 29 to June 16, 1985 indicates the number of workshops held in just over a four month period. Twenty four urban and rural workshops were held in local communities, two workshops were conducted in New York by Sistren members attending the Intermedia Conference on Adult Basic Education, and three special workshops were organized to teach Sistren's method and skills to women involved in community organizations. Consciousness raising is occurring in the workshops, as best exemplified by the women in Hayes community. As previously

discussed, the women have become increasingly aware of the material and ideological forces which oppress and exploit them.

The textiles visually depict the situation of women and are an innovative means of raising consciousness. For example, the drawings of the horrible material conditions in the Riverton ghetto lead to discussion. Why these conditions exist is examined in the context of the wider socio-political and economic environment. The textiles have been publicly displayed and sold, and thus reach individuals of all classes, who visually see the problems facing working class women. For example, the textile accompanying Bellywoman Bangarang is very amusing and almost chaotic, with young men seducing young women, mothers admonishing their pregnant daughters, and girls getting together to discuss their situation. A scene like this is not easily forgotten, and the message is driven home.

Sistren's educational information and research are important tools for raising consciousness. Sweet Sugar Rage has been viewed by urban women's organizations, youth groups, school children, and organizations abroad. The powerful images and testimonies of the women in the fields effectively raises the viewers awareness concerning the horrible conditions facing sugar workers. It also allows the viewer to understand the work that Sistren is doing, as workshops are recorded.

Sistren's newsletters are extremely informative and widely distributed. Individuals keep in touch with the activities of Sistren and other women and contemporary events affecting Jamaican women. For example, the December 1985 newsletter featured a

fascinating interview with two prostitutes, which explains how women, facing high unemployment and no child support, turn to prostitution to make ends meet.

On the whole, Sistren's work has been very successful, as their powerful message reaches women of all classes and different nationalities through drama, workshops, textiles, and educational information. However, the Collective has faced several constraints. Sistren's theatre aims to raise the consciousness of the middle and upper classes concerning the material and ideological conditions facing working class women. Consciousness can be raised through viewing the plays only if the audience is willing to listen and think. Unfortunately, the present socio-political environment is no longer as conducive to groups such as Sistren. The middle and upper classes are less interested in listening to the message of working class women. As a result, attendance in the Jamaican professional circuit has declined. While the class barriers prove extremely difficult to break down, Sistren persists at "hitting away at the middle class" (Interview with finance administrator, August, 1985). As one actress states, Sistren is giving the middle class a "taste of something different" (August, 1985). Another insists that it is important to deliver the message to the middle class if change is to occur.

Despite declining interest, Sistren has successfully rallied reliable support from middle and upper class individuals, who work directly and indirectly with the Collective. For example, a professional journalist assists in the publishing of the newsletter and a local artist has helped in the textile workshop. Sistren has

thus successfully facilitated the meeting of women in different classes within and outside the Collective, which is an important step in overcoming class barriers.

Another problem is raising the consciousness of men, which is an extremely important aspect in breaking down the patriarchal structures and ideology which oppresses women. While men do attend the theatre performances, it is difficult to determine how seriously they consider Sistren's message. Male attitudes are extremely difficult to alter, as exemplified by some of the actresses' partners, who give little support for Sistren's work. For example, in the early stages of the formation of the Collective, one actress was dragged off the rehearsal stage by her "baby father", who did not want her involved in a woman's theatre group. This, however, did not dissuade the actress, who returned to the stage with Sistren.

Sistren is open to working with both men and women in the workshops, as exemplified by the Hayes community youth group, which is composed of both male and female teens. However, on the whole, Sistren works with women's groups. Therefore, Sistren's message is largely reaching women, and not men. It is hoped that the consciousness of men will ultimately be raised via women working for change.

While Sistren cannot possibly "empower" women, they can facilitate the empowerment of women for themselves. One of Sistren's most commendable achievements is their role in helping women in the Riverton and Hayes communities to organize. The first step was the raising of consciousness through the community

members' personal testimonies. The women's experiences were analysed in reference to the wider socio-political and economic framework. This understanding led to organization and action. In Hayes, the women successfully rallied together to demand water. When this was achieved, the women then chose to act upon the problem of housing titles. Women's names were added to the documents, which ensured legal rights to the property. By taking these actions, the women felt a great sense of achievement and empowerment. The women began taking greater control of their lives and actions, and reducing their dependency on their male partners. The next step involved projects to ensure economic self-sufficiency for the Hayes Woman's Group. Tea parties were organized to raise revenue. In Riverton, the women began their own income-generating project, based on newly acquired skills to make handicrafts. While the Riverton women are still dependent on Sistren to facilitate their meetings, the Hayes women have an autonomous leadership. This is an important achievement, as autonomous organization and action is the ultimate aim of Sistren's consciousness raising work and key to overall ideological and structural change.

On the whole, it is clear that the work of these thirteen working class women in conjunction with several middle class professional women has been successful and impressive. Not only have the actresses themselves become increasingly conscientized and empowered, they have also facilitated greater awareness among individuals in Jamaica and abroad. Sistren has successfully encouraged women to organize and work towards social change.

It is important to determine how Sistren has examined and dramatized the oppression and exploitation of working class women in Jamaica, which has led to an active strategy demanding the restructuring of Jamaica's socio-political, economic, and ideological environment. It is argued in this study that Sistren's work and forms of cultural and political activity are not explicitly "socialist feminist". However, the Collective's method of analysis corresponds implicitly to the Western socialist feminist framework and the political activities which follow from this framework. The key elements of socialist feminism are apparent in Sistren's theatre, workshops, textiles, and research. Socialist feminism analyses the historical and material position of women in relationship to ideology and the socio-political and economic environment. It examines power relations in terms of their class origins and patriarchal roots, showing the links between class and gender, domestic and wage labour, and ideological and material conditions. Socialist feminism offers enough flexibility to respond to the needs and problems of women in different regions, societies, and times. It can be diverse in its issues, aims, and methods, while maintaining its underlying commitment to change the socio-economic structures of gender subordination and exploitation.

Whether Sistren's approach parallels socialist feminism can be discerned by examining the Collective's work in light of the key elements of socialist feminism. It is argued that Sistren also examines the same linkages as socialist feminism and acts upon them. Sistren became increasingly aware of the material and ideological conditions facing working class women by discussing and analysing

their own personal experiences. The actresses understood that, as working class women, their role in the family is clearly defined. Many of the actresses support their children alone. In addition, by virtue of their class and gender status, their options for employment in the labour force are limited to low wage, low skilled jobs. Through drama, discussion, analysis, and research, Sistren became increasingly conscious of the position of women in light of their material and ideological environment.

Sistren is aware of the historical socio-economic and political forces which have influenced and shaped the status of Jamaican women. In "Nana Yah", Sistren dramatizes the exploitation and brutal violence endured by female slaves at the hands of white plantation owners. The economic system at that time, the slavery - plantation mode of production, facilitated this exploitation and violence. The Maroon struggle against this injustice was led by the runaway slave Nanny. Sistren relates this historical period to present times, indicating that contemporary women must also fight for their rights against those who exploit and oppress them:

"Fe food put in we children belly
 Fe de end ov poverty and hunger
 Fe peace and love between sistren and brethren
 Fe get rid ov da gunman an de violence...
 Fe we people ave pride in demself
 Fe we learn to help an share wid each odder
 Fe we people take note of we heritage
 Fe Nanny stay wid we an guide we."

Sistren also examines the participation of women in the 1938 uprising in "Ida Revolt Ina Jonconu Stylee". The testimony of character Hortense Campbell, based on the interview of a woman who participated in the 1938 strike, describes the terrible conditions of the 1930's. The colonial government's refusal to deal with the problems of unemployment and hunger led to the rebellion. "Just de same as nowadays", comments one observer in the audience (Sistren Newsletter, December, 1985). Thus the theme of the play, which connects the political and economic system to the exploitation of the working class, has relevance for women today. Working class women make history when they struggle against those who exploit them in order to gain autonomy.

Sistren also uses history in the workshops to understand today's situation. For example, the past conditions of rural sugar workers are comparable to the contemporary forces which relegate women to the low-waged, menial sectors of the plantation: corporate or foreign ownership of the land, the lack of technical training for women, male attitudes which perceive women as "unfit" for skilled sugar labour, the lack of female representation in the labour union, and the links between unpaid household labour and unskilled field work.

Sistren reveals and examines the attitudes and ideology which perpetuate the subordination of women. In the theatre production, Sistren's female characters of all classes are responsible for "women's work" in the home: cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. While upper class women can hire working class women to perform the domestic chores, the household is considered the

responsibility and domain of the "lady" of the household. It is believed that women are "naturally" suited for the domestic sphere, which is not valued by society. Men in Sistren's plays are never found in the household performing domestic chores. They are in the streets or in the office. Women of all classes are oppressed in the household, as exemplified by "Muffet Ina All A Wi", when the middle-class housewife rebels against her dominating husband.

The attitude that women are "fit" for "unskilled" domestic chores carries certain ramifications for women in the workplace. Men believe that women are suited for low-wage, unskilled occupations. This is exemplified in "Muffet Ina All A Wi", when the Boss hires Muffet to work in his factory. Similarly, "Downpression Getta Blow" dramatizes the position of women in the garment industry, who are hired as the family's "secondary" income earners for low wages. The attitude towards women in the workforce is clearly illustrated in "Tribute". Gloria's request for construction work is met with, "Sorry baby, men only!" Gloria finds work selling vegetables in the market, which is considered a more suitable job for women.

Current ideology portrays the ideal woman as passive and "beautiful". The attitude towards beauty is largely guided by the Western media, whose ideal woman is blonde, fair, and slim. Women in Jamaica try to attain this ideal by straightening their hair, bleaching their skin, and buying imported American clothes. This ideology is satirized by Sistren in "Muffet Ina All A Wi". Muffet, the Beauty Queen, tries to fit this image as she walks down the aisle to the tune of the wedding march. Advertisements tell her to

use Senola, "the fragrance of the loveliest perfume... It's Senola, means you're nice to be near" and Odofono roll-on, it "does a lot for you... Closer... dryer... delicate... ah..." Flora Nightingale tells the audience about "her first time"... "He was very romantic. He leaned close to me and he whispered-wine? I've never been shy about anything before so I answered, wine it will be!... That's Spermantil!" This ideology raises high consumer expectations among working class women who cannot possibly afford to purchase expensive perfumes and fine wines. It also portrays a romantic ideal between men and women which is far from the reality of Kingston's ghettos. In addition, a very low level of self-esteem is experienced by women who do not "fit" the model woman, as dramatized in "Bellywoman Bangarang": "When me go a store fi go buy on brassiere, every one me try on, dem cyant fit me. Dem too small! He breast dem too big."

Social values and attitudes, as portrayed in the media, view women as sexual objects. As "No! To Sexual Violence" explains, men believe they have a right to women's bodies. This is dramatized in "Bellywoman Bangarang" when Dennis convinces Didi to come out for lunch. As they leave her yard, he pinches her bottom. Didi gets more than a free lunch, and finds herself pregnant a month later.

Women of all classes face sexual violence. Men view women essentially as weak and dependent, and women are therefore victims of beatings and rape. This ideology crosses class boundaries, and Sistren portrays scenes of violence and rape in several plays. As actress Lillian Foster explains: "...you know another type of problem that all women face: rape. And, oh mercy, I would really like you to see that show. When the rape is going on, we don't do

it with a man and a woman. We are only pure women; we do it in a different form. I tell you, that thing come off. We have some people crying." (Wasserstrom, 1984:168). In the pamphlet "No! To Sexual Violence", rape is exposed as a common problem facing all women, be it young girls in the ghetto or middle class women in their bedrooms.

Sistren examines and dramatizes class differences between women in various ways. While all women are potential targets to sexual abuse and violence, working class women are more vulnerable than women in other classes, as the material conditions of ghetto life are insecure and conducive to high levels of tension, frustration, and violence. Sistren links the material conditions of unemployment, inflation, and poverty to male attitudes and ideology. In the previous example, it is because Didi is hungry that she accepts Dennis' offer. In "Miss Mavis Yard", Althea and her partner are both laid off at work. Unemployed and angry, he takes out his frustration on Althea, "...the IMF cause so much lay-off and him (partner) say me bring government business to him, and him start to beat me up." In "No! To Sexual Violence", the links between the material conditions and prevalent attitudes are clearly made. Unemployed women in the working class often find themselves economically dependent on men. Women have less jobs, receive very low wages, are often economically dependent on their male partner, and therefore accept physical abuse. This is characterized in cartoon form in "No! To Sexual Violence". A woman's teen daughter comes crying to her mother, complaining that her mother's partner is "troubling" her. Her mother slaps the girl, "Yu out of

yu mind, gal? Is how bonu' little gal can lie so. Yu too ripe." In the next scene, the woman reflects on the situation alone, "It coulda true, yu know. But a can't say anything or Wilton wi' let me. Me jus haffe met it gwaan." One woman explains how gangs of boys rape young girls: "Dem have these boys in my area. All the time them coming behind my house wid some young girl. One take her, use her, go out, den another one take her, and so on. Sometimes is a little girl on the way to shop for her mother. Sometime dem even ask me for newspaper, and I have to give dem. I can't say nothing because dem have gun and knife."

The material conditions facing the working class are not only conducive to violence, but have further ramifications for women as well. Unemployment, inflation, and poverty have a divisive impact on the family, making it difficult for men to fill the role as the primary income earner. Women are aware that their men may never provide steady support for a family, and are therefore reluctant to choose a single partner. Women find themselves alone, caring for and supporting their children with little help from the fathers. This proves advantageous in some ways, as women are not "bossed" by their male partners. As one actress explains, single women are free to do as they wish, while the movements of women in common-law unions or marriages are greatly confined (Interview, July, 1985). However, the situation is difficult financially, as women face high unemployment and often cannot earn an adequate income.

In Sistren's plays, the majority of working class female characters run their households alone, and have "visiting" male

friends. In "Tribute to Gloria Who Overcame Death", Gloria's husband is unemployed and leaves, "One day her man up and went off to the farm work scheme" and never returns. In QPH, Queenie does all she can to raise her daughter, but with little success: "Look how me try, me try everything. All wey me do, just fe see ponu grow up properly... Me send you a school, you go fight, you go tief, and government have to tek you and bring disgrace pon me. What else me could do? Me do everyting a modder 'could do." In this case, Queenie is a prostitute who cannot overcome the material conditions of poverty and unemployment to adequately support her daughter, despite her efforts.

There is very little a "modder" can do in the working class. Sistren shows the links between the working class woman's role in the home and the sexual division of labour in the work force. In "Downpression Get A Blow", women are employed as cheap labour in the garment industry. Sewing is an extension of women's "unskilled" work in the home and is therefore poorly paid. In "Domestik" and "Muffet Ina All A W.", women are exploited as domestic workers by middle and upper class women, because the service industry is considered an offshoot of unskilled labour at home. The rural sugar workers in "Sweet Sugar Rage" are employed in the least-skilled jobs for low wages. As Iris' testimony indicates, women's representation in the union is minimal. The gradual de-feminization of the sugar industry has left rural women with very few alternatives. Either they persist to work in the low-wage, low-skilled sectors of the sugar industry, or they migrate to the urban centers in search of work, often as market women, domestic workers, or prostitutes.

In workshops, women explore their role in the household and the labour force. For example, one "sistah" in Riverton makes ends meet by sewing and selling pillows in the informal market. Through discussion, it is acknowledged that she performs this work because she has little formal education and is unable to find wage labour. In addition, this work accomodates child care. This example integrates the key elements of class, gender, production, reproduction, and material and ideological conditions. Working class women have few formal skills. Faced with high unemployment and the need to support a family, women seek work in the informal sector to "make do". Women enter along a sexual division of labour, performing "women's work" such as marketing and sewing. These occupations are considered an offshoot of "unskilled" domestic work, and are therefore considered of little value.

Sistren clearly dramatizes the material conditions and ideology facing working class women, and their ramifications in the household and the workforce. While women in the middle and upper class must contend with some of the same problems, such as sexual violence, not all women are "sistren". The Collective is fully aware of class conflict between women, and dramatizes this in their theatre productions. The scenes between the domestic worker and the "lady" of the household best exemplify the exploitation of working class women by upper class women. Poor Lucy in "Muffet Ina All A Wi" is run frantic by "Missis", who orders her to clean, cook, and "fix" herself "properly". The attitude of middle and upper class individuals towards the working class and unemployed keeps the latter "in their place". For example, the nurses in "Bellywoman."

Bangarang" offer no sympathy to pregnant teens from the ghetto. The nurses blame the girls for their carelessness, failing to link teen pregnancy to poverty and inadequate social services.

It is clear that Sistren's activities and mode of analysis closely parallels the key elements of socialist feminism. By discussing and analysing the personal experiences of themselves and other women, Sistren has become increasingly conscious of the material and ideological forces which shape and define the position of working class women in the home and the labour force. In the Collective's theatre productions, workshops, textiles, and educational information, the historical, material, and ideological conditions facing women are linked. The problems of unemployment, inflation, teen pregnancy, single-parenting, child care, low-wage labour, inadequate social services, male attitudes, and poverty are examined in light of the overall socio-economic and political system. In other words, Sistren examines women's oppression and exploitation in terms of gender and class, production and reproduction, and material and ideological conditions.

The socialist feminist framework can be enriched and expanded by the experiences of Third World women's organizations such as Sistren. Socialist feminism calls for change at both the local and national level. While the ultimate goal of socialist feminism is the demise of "capitalist patriarchy", the framework does not indicate exactly how this change is to occur. The gap in terms of strategy can be filled by drawing on the experiences of women's groups such as Sistren. Sistren shows the realistic limitations

facing women's organizations. At the same time, it demonstrates what a group of thirteen working class women can achieve.

Sistren's greatest constraint is the present socio-economic and political environment, which makes drastic change at the macro (national) level impossible and inhibits work at the micro (local) level. The social climate and current ideology is no longer as open to raising women's issues, forming groups and collectives, and mobilizing women. Sistren is working against very powerful propaganda machines which portray women in a stereotyped Western ideal. This makes consciousness raising all the more difficult and all the more important. Sistren is also constrained by the lack of political and economic support to help organize and mobilize the women they contact.

Sistren is further constrained by time and energy. There is only so much one group can realistically do, and the Collective's limits are already stretched. For example, Sistren was finding that workshops were seriously cutting into theatre time, and therefore opted to divide the labour between the two. In 1984, a workshop team of two actresses was formed to deal specifically with rural and urban community workshops. Theatre has remained the primary focus, and many members feel the need to increase the effort in the communities. Sistren is now facing the decision of whether to continue to focus on theatre and consciousness raising or workshops, which facilitate both consciousness raising and action for change. The actresses are committed to working at the grassroots level. Therefore, in all likelihood, the workshops will

continue to function. The number of groups which Sistren helps to mobilize, however, will remain limited.

In practice, Sistren exemplifies the constraints of raising consciousness and organizing women. However, Sistren also shows what is possible. Sistren is largely involved in consciousness raising to examine and link the personal experiences of working class women to the socio-economic and political institutions which shape them. Sistren has empowered themselves through their own process of consciousness raising and by initiating their own income generating project. As previously mentioned, Sistren has

successfully used their own empowerment to make public such problems as teen pregnancy, rape, sexual violence, conditions in the sugar industry, and the sexual division of labour in the household

and the work place. The Collective has also successfully facilitated the organization of women in Riverton and Hayes communities. These

women's groups have begun a process towards greater empowerment and autonomy themselves, by discussing and analysing their problems and devising strategies to change them. The fact that the Hayes women

chose to organize around the problem of water and the Riverton women chose to develop craft skills as an income generating project

indicates the real limitations of what is possible for working class women's groups. The more critical problems of unemployment, lack of

adequate social services, and inflation are felt to be beyond the influence of these women. By organizing around pressing local

concerns which bring tangible results, the women experience a sense of accomplishment and empowerment, which motivates them to examine

other problems and devise further strategies.

Many women's organizations suffer from class conflicts and class biases within the groups themselves. This can be detrimental to the efficacy of the organization, as programs may tend to address the concerns of the upper and middle class women and patronize the poor (ISIS, 1984-71). Sistren offers an example of a woman's group that has come to terms with class conflict within the Collective itself. Sistren is composed of working class actresses and middle class professionals. Initially, the working class women were too intimidated to challenge the professional women. However, the middle class women insisted on an almost "excessive collectivity" to minimize class tensions and maximize input from all members (Interview with resource personnel: August, 1985). A real exchange took place between the two classes, as skills, ideas, and understandings were shared. Over time, as the actresses acquired greater skills and confidence, the working class women took greater initiative and shared increasingly in the decision making process.

While class difference is a source of conflict at times, it no longer poses a major problem. What is important is that the class difference in attitudes and methods is acknowledged, conflicts are confronted, and problems are resolved. As the workshop facilitator explains, "We fight, quarrel, and curse each other, and then get back to work." (Interview: August, 1985). One actress maintains that the class difference "doesn't really pose a problem (as) anything we have to say, we bring it to the general meeting." (Interview: September, 1985). Another agrees that "all decisions are made collectively with equal input: 'Sistren is Sistren'." (Interview, August, 1985). By allowing each individual the opportunity to share

power and resolve conflict, women's groups can alter the accepted hierarchical forms of decision making in organizations.

Sistren also works with major traditional women's organizations, such as the YWCA. It is important that the consciousness of these women concerning the situation facing working class women be raised. Sistren proves that working class women are intelligent, imaginative, innovative, and self-sufficient, and should not be the targets of middle and upper class women's charity. Rather, the groups should work together to address the problems facing women under the existing ideological and material conditions and organize for change. As actress Lana Finklin expresses, "My dream would be for Sistren to really work up internationally and locally, and find women to get together. We would like to have links with women in different Caribbean countries and in Canada and share each on of us experiences. I would like to see other countries or other communities come together and get women together, common projects, self help, income generating projects, where they really don't have to depend on anybody." (Wasserstrom, 1985:175)

It has been argued by Third World women that Western "feminist" models are not applicable to the situation facing women in developing nations (Bandarage, 1984:505; 1519, 1984:70-76). This study offers evidence that socialist feminism, which originates in the West, is a useful framework for examining the status of women in developing societies, as used in the historical overview of women in Jamaica in Chapter III. Socialist feminism is an evolving, dynamic framework of analysis. The ability of the Western framework to be

used in different cultural settings is exemplified by the activities of Sistren, which, while not explicitly "socialist feminist", parallel the key elements of socialist feminism. Through theatre, workshops, textiles, and educational information, Sistren examines the position of working class women in terms of the over-riding material and ideological conditions and their position in the family, workforce, and class structure. Sistren has successfully raised the consciousness of Jamaican individuals concerning those factors which maintain the oppression and exploitation of working class women. Of most importance, Sistren has actively sought change through their own consciousness raising and empowerment process and through the encouragement of other women to organize and mobilize. It is this active, grassroots approach taken by Third World women's groups such as Sistren which can enrich the Western socialist feminist academic discourse. Sistren demonstrates that thought, feeling, and action must be linked in order to facilitate change. Understanding combined with action is key. As Sistren claims, women are all, to some degree, "in the same boat". By sharing experiences, ideas, and strategies, social change is possible.

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