

# “From the West, Clouds Come Hurrying with the Wind” - Caribbean & African Feminism: Trends Examined

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## ABSTRACT

To describe Caribbean and African feminism as interwoven is an understatement. Their correlation is irrefutable, sharing commonalities across concepts of gender and sexuality, labour, and feminist organization. Both feminisms share the distinctive characteristic of being in constant flux, being especially influenced by the colonial structures that continue to pervade our society today. As a result of colonialism, the gender identity and sexuality of the Caribbean and African female subject have been subject to regulation and policing, in order to ensure that the recipients of patriarchal privilege are made explicit. Likewise, attempts have also been made to control the Caribbean and African entrepreneurial community. The space these women have created for themselves in order to escape the racialised and genderised barriers associated with formal labour, is being constantly devalued through the implication that this space is in need of legitimisation. Over time, these feminisms have grown to centre a multitude of social, economic and political concerns. The contributions they have made to society however, are under constant threat of erasure.

## Introduction

Described in David Rubadiri's 'An African Thunderstorm', these clouds "From the West" are "pregnant" and "stately", grandiose in nature while also evoking feelings of ominous expectancy. The wind that carries them "[toss] up things on its tail Like a madman chasing nothing", trees "bend to let it pass" and clothes fly off in its wake, exposing "dangling breasts". These clouds "perch on hills Like sinister dark wings", marking themselves as an omen of swift, destructive change. Destabilizing everything in its path, this African thunderstorm is an allegory for colonialism. Moreover, its reference to the stripping away of the women's "clothes...like tattered flags", symbolises not only the stripping away of a culture, but also makes reference to the specific violence African women faced at the hands of this system. Sylvia Tamale (2020) defines coloniality as "a concept related to colonialism [that] goes beyond the mere acquisition and political control of another country. As an ideological system, it explains the long-standing patterns of power that resulted from European colonialism, including knowledge production and the establishment of social orders. It is the "invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism. [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012]" Thus, as one seeks to explore feminisms that have emerged from post-colonial societies (the Caribbean and Africa in this instance), one must concern themselves with decoloniality.

The definition of feminism is one that is constantly metamorphosing, as over the years, a plethora of feminist theories have arisen, evolved and pervaded. Such feminisms can be categorized by time period, interests, geography and more. For the purposes of this research paper, feminism is investigated as it relates to geography. Historically, Black feminism has been used to examine the gender relations relating to all African women. However, a key aspect of the realities of African women from the Caribbean and Africa specifically,

is their identities as colonial subjects, often unaccounted for in Black feminism as a result of its American centrism. Thus, one of the many emerging strands of feminism, decolonial feminism, seeks to question the role of colonialism in feminist thought. Feminisms specific to the Caribbean and African region have emerged in order to respond to the lived realities of its women.

This research is aimed at investigating not only the evolution of these feminisms, but especially their interpenetration, particularly as it relates to colonialism, by asking the question: “Given their similar colonial histories, what commonalities and disparities exist between African and Caribbean feminism?” Through the review of literatures pertaining to colonialism – and other branching theories, Caribbean feminism and African feminism, I intend to gain a comprehensive understanding of both feminisms, and thus produce a nuanced comparison between the two, particularly as it relates to the extent to which race-related historical events impact their evolutions. To that end, this paper is structured as follows: First, the complexity involved in the definition of these feminisms is explored, followed by the concept of colonialism itself, and finally, the comparators of sexuality, labour and feminist organizing are analysed.

## Framework for Justification

Over the years, conversations about Black feminism have largely focused on African American feminism while research in respect to other Black women’s experiences, such as in Africa or the Caribbean, remains comparatively scant. Though research discussing Caribbean feminism, African feminism and African feminisms exists, little to no discussions have been specifically held about the Caribbean versus Africa.

Why compare the two? Both the Caribbean and Africa share colonial histories but also possess distinct difference from North American society in that they are not only largely ‘Third World’, but also have a Black racial (and therefore female Black racial) majority. Thus, while racism is an irrefutable experience in North America, arguments continue to be held about the prevalence of racism in the Caribbean and Africa. Upon further inspection however, it is the intersection of coloniality, race and other social identities that seems to play the largest role in the evolution of feminism in these societies. This research attempts to investigate the extent to which these characteristics have affected, if at all, the similarities and differences shared between Caribbean and African feminist theories, in order to not only bridge this gap in literature, but also contribute to the exploration of intersectionality and post-colonial feminism at large.

## Defining ‘Caribbean’ and ‘African’ Feminism

### Caribbean Feminism

Caribbean feminisms are characterized by dynamism and fluidity. “[They] are heterogeneous: transnational and diasporic, academic and activist, at once heteronormative (even homophobic) and queer. They emerge from multiple disciplines and locations, prioritise a variety of issues and strategies and draw from diverse epistemological, philosophical and activist groundings. Caribbean feminists strategically select from multiple “feminist genealogies and particular histories of struggle” (Alexander 2004, 22). Caribbean feminisms may be radical, reformist or conservative. They may be hyper-attentive to particular axes of oppression (gender, race/ethnicity, class) while taking others for granted or leaving them under-examined (ableism, heterosexism, transphobia). (Haynes, 2017)”

The heterogeneity of Caribbean female oppression has led to the notion that the establishment of a singular feminist lens through which to examine Caribbean women is impossible. Moreover, like African feminists, Caribbean feminists have often found the term ‘feminism’ implicit of the White upper-class and thus coined their own, more open-ended, interpretation: “My own definition has something to do with a perspective

on the inequalities in the world which places at its centre, the subordination and oppression of women. But I'm still battling the whole thing." (Andaiye cited in *Feminism in the Caribbean* 1989, 19). As a result of the disparities that exist between the concepts of the Caribbean versus feminism, as Haynes puts it, an understanding of Caribbean feminism as heterogenous, constantly in flux and open to (self-)critique emerges rather than the adoption of plural feminisms.

Despite its lack of stability and instead perhaps due to this fluidity, Caribbean feminist thought has proved its functionality in evaluating gender through the promotion of changes in multiple facets of society, such as law, the economy, the home and community and the state's relationship with its citizens.

Plaguing Caribbean feminism however, is a lack of consensus on the 'Caribbean feminist subject', reminiscent of the importance of 'centricity' defining African feminist theorizing. In attempts to identify the centre of Caribbean feminism, the conflation of the Black Caribbean experience with the Black American experience and conflation of the Caribbean itself with 'Black', has contributed to the erasure of the multiple ethno-races existing in the region. Additionally, some believe that Caribbean feminism exists outside of Caribbean intellectual tradition. It is implied that as a result of the previous denial of patriarchal privileges to Black men, Afro-Caribbean masculinity is easily threatened by Black female liberation. Thus, Caribbean feminism may contribute to the oppression of the Black Caribbean male subject. However, this sentiment firstly implies that patriarchal masculinity is not only the birth right of all males, but its affordance is somehow in society's interest. Additionally, its adoption contributes to the sacrificing of Black women's interests in the name of 'Endangered Black Man Theorem'.

The continued engagement with, and thus proven applicability of, Caribbean feminism to Caribbean society is a testament to its vitality to Caribbean intellectual tradition. So that its dynamism is not reduced, Caribbean feminism can be viewed as "overlapping and emerging consortia that provide cyclical strength and possibilities for sustained growth of a feminist and gender consciousness. (Mohammed, 2016)"

## African Feminism

Likewise, Africology, the study of all things concerning the African diaspora, has yet to agree upon the relevance of African feminism to Africana theology. (Blay, 2008) This is due to the fact that the applicability of feminism to African societies has been met with much scepticism as it is thought to be of Western origin, and therefore irrelevant to the global African context. While some scholars agree that the analysis of gender is pertinent to any societal discipline, others argue that Africology must strictly deal with 'Black people', irrespective of gender. However, some constructions of Africology do locate Africana Women's Studies as an area of interest, but do not necessarily dictate its analysis, and thus liberation of Africana women. Therefore, the lack of a primary methodological framework through which to analyse gender, has led to the use of other models to approach its examination as it relates to Africana women.

Blay argues that "African Feminism (s)...is an inherently African-centred methodology", meaning that this feminism must operate from a distinctively African perspective as opposed to a Eurocentric paradigm. She describes the most notable models used for African feminist theorizing as Black feminism, Womanism and Africana womanism. However, due to a lack of this Afrocentricity, each perspective is fraught with problematic tendencies and shortcomings.

Black feminism attempts to apply U.S. Black feminism to global issues thus ignoring the nuances that exist in African society. Via a similarly paternalist approach, Womanism undermines the autonomy of culturally African societies. As dictated by Alice Walker, coiner of the term, a womanist is a "black feminist or feminist of colour...[who] appreciates and prefers women's culture". However, Walker has gone on to continually valorise Western society over African society through culturally arrogant comparisons, reminiscent of the trivialization of African culture done by European colonists. Lastly, Clenora Hudson-Weems asserts that feminist theory is inherently problematic to Africana women as it prioritizes gender over race and class, thus failing to

account for the intersectional challenges of Africana women specifically. Thus, she asserts that Africana womanism is characterized by an Afrocentricity that enables the addressing of these issues. However, this Afrocentricity is largely historical, focusing mostly upon the United States enslavement project therefore failing to account for states where the pervasive institution is colonization, and is thus arguably inapplicable to the current state of Africana women's affairs. In attempts to explicate Africana womanism, Hudson-Weems "does not seemingly provide guidance or an investigative framework for addressing issues of gender relevant to Africana communities", a trait necessary for the functionality of an Afrocentric ideological framework.

Blay asserts that like Caribbean feminism, fluidity and dynamism mark African feminism. Moreover, "rather than provide an exhaustive definition, the [truly] African feminist framework provides a blueprint for action." This informs the notion that there exists a multitude of African feminisms, and Africa's vastness leads to a single common trait defining the lenses applicable to its women: African origin (Afrocentricity). Essentially, any functional feminist framework borne of African female scholarship, is arguably African feminism.

## Trends and Commonalities

### Colonialism as the underlying theme

"In what is one of the classic texts on colonization, Franz Fanon (1963) argues that the success of decolonization lies in a "whole social structure being changed from the bottom up"; that this change is "willed, called for, demanded" by the colonized; that it is a historical process that can only be understood in the context of the "movements which give it historical form and content"; that it is marked by violence and never "takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally"; and finally that "decolonization is the veritable creation of new men." In other words, decolonization involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures. It can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts. The end result of decolonization is not only the creation of new kinds of self-governance but also "the creation of new men" (and women). (Mohanty, 2003)"

We live in a society deeply entrenched in sexism, heterosexism, and misogyny, able to be traced back to colonization. These concepts find themselves interwoven with obviously race, but also capitalist domination and exploitation. Such structures profoundly affect the world at large, limiting themselves to the lives of no one, but extending to women, men, girls and boys alike. In addition to sexism and social and political inequalities, women in 'Third World' countries face a sexism deep-rooted and untraceable, further intertwined with class, caste, religion and ethnic biases in addition to struggles for liberal governments and human rights. Therefore, decolonization has become essential to the feminist agenda, especially that of 'Third World' origins such as Caribbean and African.

## Sexuality and Gender

### The Coloniality of Sexuality and Gender

Both Caribbean and African feminists have had conversations about sexuality and gender. Before colonialism, indigenous African societies had not tied biological sex to ideological gender. "The gender system was relatively flexible, it was not unusual for women to play "male" roles "in terms of power and authority over others" because roles "were not rigidly masculinized or feminized [and] no stigma was attached to breaking gender rules." (Tamale, 2020)" Likewise, the precolonial Caribbean (and elsewhere) had lenses through which non-binary individuals and same-sex relationships were not only viewed, but also accepted. However, this system

was not conducive to the norm of ‘dominant male’ and ‘subordinate female’ that existed in European, classic heteropatriarchy. In order for the white, male ruling class to maintain its dominance, “it was important to ascertain which individuals were entitled to male privilege.” Thus, it was upon the enforcement of European heteronormativity that ‘ambiguous’ bodies and homosexual relationships became criminalized and othered.

It is to be noted however, that the Indigenous acceptance of same sex relationships does not resemble today’s LGBTQIA+ movements, especially as it relates to the concept of being ‘out’. Instead, “Indigenous conceptualizations of same-sex erotics generally had no desire to pin them down or to burden them with identities; they kept its content in flux and left it elusive.”

## Family as an Instrument of the Patriarchy and Capitalism, through Law

Masked under the guise of protecting family life from state intrusion, was the legal separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ by colonists (upon which many modern societies are built today). Before their arrival, it could have been said that there existed an interpenetration between both the state and domestic sphere, where “the home was both an enclosed space and a political economy”. However, in order for European powers to effectively exploit the colonies, it was important that familial gender relations were reshaped through the subordination of the pre-colonial laws that governed such relations. It is suggested that the regulation of domesticity was not only intended to subjugate women, but also to ensure that this subjugation served the heteropatriarchal-capitalist regime.

Tamale examines Ugandan family law in order to further investigate the coloniality of the modern family:

Outlined in the Ugandan constitution is the provision that “The family is the natural and basic unit of society, and is entitled to protection by society and the State”. This provision brings into question however, a myriad of questions: Why is the family so important to society? What familial structure is being outlined? Who dictates the familial structure entitled to protection? etc. “The legal regime constructs the idea that the institution of the family will only be protected by the law if it is based on a legal marriage.” The detachment of “the prisms by means of which the law legitimizes the family and enshrine rights to its members” from the realities of the multitude of Ugandan family forms makes it clear that the protection of the family is not intended to serve those families, but instead to protect economic, political, and social interests. For example, a 2002 National Population Census revealed a 60 percent increase in cohabitating couples. These arrangements, in addition to same-sex couples, are not recognized by the law as marriage, and therefore not granted any of the legal benefits accompanying such status.

Societal opinions regarding what is “normal” is heavily dictated by legal rules. To that effect, the establishment of laws upholding heteropatriarchal marriage effectively condemn/“others” opposing lifestyles. The law is therefore more accurately described as an instrument, “a formidable tool of operationalization.” In reshaping the laws that governed the Ugandan family, colonialism redefined domesticity, now “women were charged with the unpaid tasks of material and psychological subsistence of the household while men were incorporated into wage labour; traditional polygynous marriages were reconstructed as primitive and backward while promoting church marriages as moral and civilized; Christianity upheld the father-led family as the basis of social (read capitalist) order; and the state was to oversee and maintain the new order of domesticity.”

Additionally, the early days of British colonial rule in Uganda saw the introduction of taxes demanding 4 rupees from men, in order to generate revenue while mobilizing labour for agricultural production (as Ugandan men were forced to turn to farming to pay these taxes). Evidence suggests however that it was women who bore the burden of growing the new crops thus informing a pattern across Africa of increasing workloads for women while men still controlled the household finances. Therefore, “women’s work was vital for monetizing the Ugandan economy and building the requisite infrastructure to facilitate the export of raw materials and trade of goods.”

“In Uganda, as is the case elsewhere on the continent, women are primarily responsible for sustaining their communities and families through voluntary and unpaid labour. On a daily basis they are involved in energy- and time-intensive work: subsistence agriculture for home consumption; care work for the needs of others including husband, children, the elderly and the sick; and various forms of non-market work that involves collection of water and fuel for cooking. Women also engage in voluntary community activities such as funeral wakes, weddings, rites of passage ceremonies, etc. And, of course, in addition to this work, many also labour in the formal and/or informal market sector, effectively working double, even triple shifts, simply to ensure that family needs are met.” The unpaid community and family labour expectations of women, borne from heteropatriarchal ideals, financially supports the State through the provision of a free workforce. Coupled with the role of women in biological reproduction, the post-colonial interpenetration of ‘public’ and ‘private’ and central role of the ‘family’ in the capitalist regime is illuminated.

Similarly to Uganda, the regulation of the family was also ensured in the Caribbean through laws such as the Mass Marriage Movement in Jamaica. This movement was a response to calls for “an organized campaign against the social, moral and economic evils of promiscuity” believed to be innate to Afro-Caribbeans. (Kem-padoo, 2003)

It is to be noted however, that gender roles did indeed exist within the family before colonialism, these roles however were exasperated by colonialists through the enforced adoption of their rigid familial ideals.

## The Regulation of Sexuality and Gender

The supposition of Afro-Caribbean relations being characterized by ‘deviance’, ‘promiscuity’ and ‘immorality’ later evolved to propose that such characteristics developed as a result of cultural dynamics learnt from West African customs and heritages. Nevertheless, ‘loose’ sexuality remained associated with blackness as seen through earlier twentieth century studies and research about Afro-Caribbeans. As society continues to move away from these concepts, condemnation of ‘promiscuous’ Caribbean women continue to pervade society, while external sexual partnerships are deemed acceptable for men. Donna Hope proposes that the hyper-heterosexualization of Jamaican masculinity is rooted in their “lack of access to resources around which they can legitimately site their masculine identities” which she argues, forces them to “use their sexuality and ability to sexually conquer and dominate women to symbolize and access their entire cache of masculinity and manhood”. Thus, women become pawns in men’s quest for power and dominance, their sexuality only valued when producing children.

Today, the continued unfounded regulation of the female gender can be investigated through the case of Semenya Caster:

An elite world-class athlete, Semenya Caster had been suspected of an unfair advantage in track and field due to her biology, particularly, her heightened levels of testosterone as a result of intersexuality. Though the basis of athletics is biological advantage, Semenya’s case has been a source of much discourse due to its challenging of the gender binary. The arbitrary nature through which sex is defined can be examined through her case. Semenya’s cultural and social status as a woman, as opposed to her biological and legal status as otherwise, is indicative of the socio-political construction of sex. Moreover, despite the fact that the IAAF and IOC uphold this popular belief, there is no evidence to suggest that the presence of testosterone improves athleticism. Though there are many biological markers of sex, none are decisive. No person subscribing to either gender possess all the biological traits believed to be markers of that gender. (Tamale, 2020) The juxtaposition of Caster to swimmer Michael Phelps further proves that biological advantage is simply inherent to athletics, and undertones of sexism and racism is in fact what pervades Semenya’s situation. He too possesses ‘abnormal’ physical traits that provide an advantage in his sport but due to his social identity, is not subject to any medical or pharmaceutical intervention.

The historical, unfounded correlation between testosterone and female gender is an illustration of the regulation of women's existence and has especially been used as an instrument to subjugate women of color. Who dictates acceptable levels of testosterone in women? How rigid is this 'cap'? Does the presence of 1 nanogram per deciliter above 'acceptable' ranges exclude one from womanhood? Do women of color naturally have heightened testosterone levels as opposed to their White counterparts? If so, this 'cap' was designed for their disenfranchisement, continuing the exposure of a Black woman's body to various technologies of violence.

## Labour

### Colonialism and the Genderisation of Labour

Labour on slave plantations was a gendered system, marked by the regulation of Black women to "the domain of domesticity" (Hamilton 2019). As opposed to the designation of Black men to skilled jobs such as butlery and wig-making, Black women were tasked with midwifery, housekeeping and seamstressry. These roles resulted in inequity between genders, and their implications have transitioned into the present-day business world.

Both African and Caribbean (and other 'Third World') women who immigrate to the West in search of job opportunities, are met with the reality that they are limited to professions in childcare, eldercare, or care of the sick, regardless of their level of education, confirming the 'memory-political nexus'. This concept refers to the linkage of identity formation to social status in the past, traversing into the present. While these women may be educated in medicine, law, education., they find that it is only when the skills they possess are in short supply, that they finally have access to better paying jobs. Not only are they regulated to the occupation of childcare, but their status as immigrant women of colour often accompanies the expectation of unpaid childcare from other family members.

Self-evidently, slavery established a racialized social hierarchy but before and after its abolition, the continued subjugation of Black persons was also ensured through the transferences of inheritance through wills, the purchasing of freedom (manumission) and strict adherence to social conventions. Firstly, persons of African descent were legally prevented from inheriting wealth while children of miscegenation received only minuscule portions of that of their White fathers. Wills were used to ensure that the majority of inheritances was passed on to white, male heirs, therefore preventing Black families from amassing capital. To this day, this lack of generational wealth places both Black men and women alike at significant socioeconomic disadvantages, as they lack the 'safety net' needed to receive and explore opportunities. The monetary price of manumission, the legal release from slavery through purchase, made its obtainance difficult, with Black women the least likely candidates. The illegalization of marriage between Black women and White men also stood in place to prevent the legitimisation of Black women's socio-economic status. Thus, the racialization on which colonised societies were built was upheld outside of slavery itself.

Today, both the gendering and racializing effects of slavery and colonialism have predisposed both African and Caribbean women to precarious socio-economic positions.

### Entrepreneurship as Resistance

Interestingly, Hamilton reports that enslaved Black Jamaican women were still found to have purchased their freedom using proceeds from the sale of livestock they produced in 'pens' owned by white and mixed persons, thus marking the beginning of entrepreneurship as an antidote for the gender and racial barriers associated with labour. Immediately after the abolition of slavery, was the system of Apprenticeship, which continued this ushering of Caribbean women towards entrepreneurship. Apprenticeship was founded upon the notion that freed Black persons need 'learn to be free'; thus, they received paid 'employment' from their previous 'owners' and

were now legally protected from abuse at the hands of their now employers. However, as it relates to female apprentices, they were now subjected to psychological abuse as opposed to physical injury at the hands of the property holders and overseers. Misogynistic and sexist language was employed as an instrument in their mental abuse. Unfortunately, these women found that the magistrates responsible for punishing those who violated the laws regarding female apprentices, were unwilling to protect them. “Based on this premise, the politics of identity, according to the state and legal system, dictated that the women were not victims; they were situated outside the law and disregarded as citizens and therefore unworthy of protection.”

As a result of these conditions, Black Caribbean women ‘created their own economy’ after the Apprenticeship period by raising livestock and growing crops (such as coffee and pimento). Black entrepreneurial progress was significantly hindered however by British laws aimed at evicting Black landowners. But again, ex-slaves, especially the women, persevered by successfully ushering their businesses from the local to the global market: “The self-employed business owners, especially the women, grew yams for export to Central America. In the 1970s as small traders, they sold escallion to Central America and Florida. In addition, the female entrepreneurs were the chief suppliers of bananas to the United Fruit Company for export to the United States. 37 Decades later in the 1980s some of the female traders transitioned from the agricultural arena to the importation and distribution of goods and small-scale manufactured products. The group was officially recognised and classified by the government as the informal commercial importers (ICIs) (Weis 2005, 122-123; Brown-Glaude 2011, 120)”.

Likewise, African women’s labour distribution is heavily skewed towards self-employment, not only for the purposes of financial security, but also as the ultimate exhibition of autonomy. Economic growth of the mid-1980s led to a surge in female employment, and African women were no exception. During this surge, the majority of women were self-employed or employed in the informal economy. African women labour for necessity but also “out of a sense of shared struggle to provide for their communities, undertaken through centuries of dispossession under slavery, colonialism, and under contemporary neoliberal capitalism...history tells us that under colonialism in various African contexts, what might have been considered as women’s informal work in fact comprised of elaborate “life-centred social relations” that included trade and self-help network among women’s groups and links between women’s groups and other community, church and labour organisations”. (Ossome, 2015)

## The Devaluing of Female Labour: Globalization and Neoliberalism

These economic spaces that Caribbean and African women have created for themselves as discussed above, continue to be threatened by globalization and neoliberalism.

Globalization has led to the dislocation of women from ‘Third World’ regions lacking worthwhile employment and foreign investment, to Western countries, in search of better job opportunities. Upon arrival to these countries however, these women have found that despite their expectations of “a united front of all women against the marginalization and oppression of the patriarchy, there was a hierarchy that privileged Western women, who were controllers and conduits of funding, the published scholars whose ideas were widely disseminated worldwide, the advisors that recommended and prescribed solutions to women in other regions of the world, the dominant voice at international conferences, workshops and negotiations to whose advantage the mobilization of bias worked, since they were able to set the agenda to which women from other parts of the world respond.”

In the Caribbean, we can observe the material consequences of globalization and neoliberalism through the impact of the International Monetary Fund on the Caribbean economy. To remedy their adverse macroeconomic trends, Caribbean countries adopted the IMF’s intermediate monetary policy in the 1980s. However, this policy had the opposite effect, increasing countries’ inflation rates and thus stagnating Caribbean female entrepreneurs through the impediment of their potential to borrow money from lending institutions. (Hamilton, 2019)



Similar policies were applied in Africa leading to a similar reorganisation of labour. As it relates to African women, governments grapple with the trade-offs involved in integrating the informal job market African women have created out of necessity and for solidarity, in order to extend its benefits to the formal job market. Neoliberalist capitalism is what drives this desire for formalization, which in turn however, adversely reinforces the problematic notion that women's work lacks intrinsic validity, risks the degradation of African women's community and possibly hampers job and growth creation. These practices are reminiscent of the marginalizing effect of the integration of women's labour into the colonial economy. For example, pre-colonialism, pastoral women of Kenya were responsible for herding livestock and processing essential products such as milk and skin and therefore awarded authority where those items were concerned. The post-colonial Kenyan government however, sought to integrate this pastoralism into the colonial economy, stripping these African women of their influence in society.

Moreover, colonizers insisted upon only negotiating with male African chiefs as it related to economy, thus diminishing the role of the already few female chiefs. Therefore, especially coupled with the regulation of the family through law, African women were effectively excluded from meaningful participation in African society and pushed into the informal economy.

Today, domestic roles such as childcare, eldercare, housewifery etc. receive little merit as a result of their feminized identities through slavery and colonialism. This is especially made clear by the fact that many modern women, from the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere, perform both these duties in addition to employment outside of the home as opposed to men who are usually only participatory in the public workforce. Such women are forced to perpetually labour as their home is now also a workspace. Female domesticity is further made worthy of merit as the support provided by women in the family through cooking, cleaning, washing etc., allows their children, spouses, and other dependents to excel in the public labour force as their focus and energies are allowed to be entirely fixed upon public endeavours. Therefore, the role of the family in the exploitative capitalist regime is restated, as women continue to participate in formally, informally, and indirectly, and bolster the economy with little reward.

## **Feminist Organizing and Movements**

### **The Erasure from Political History**

Throughout history, African and Caribbean feminists have played crucial roles in the advancement of not only women, but all members of their societies. Interestingly, Caribbean feminism has been largely found to operate under the umbrella of religion. "The large-scale organization of women continues to take place within religious bodies. On the one hand religion represents a legitimate space within which women can freely participate outside of the home, without question or need for justification. On the other it provides that spiritual solace and community in a world in which hard work, social and economic and physical or emotional violence are the order of the day. (Reddock, 1990)" From the Young Women's Christian Association, Trinidad's first Rape Crisis Centre under the support of the Caribbean Conference of Churches to the Hindu Women's Organization, religion has notably served as a facilitator for feminist organizing, perplexing, given its role, particularly Christianity's role, in the early establishment of colonial ideals in both the Caribbean and Africa. Outside of religion however, formal Caribbean feminist organizing can be traced back to the early 1900s. Trailblazers include Una Marson, Amy Bailey, Mary Morris-Knibb, Nesha Hanniff and Gema Ramkeesoon who championed the establishment of various women's centres, foundations and organizations.

Likewise, African feminists can be found operating in the realm of politics and resistance, especially alongside their male counterparts during the liberation struggles against colonialism. "By joining [these struggles], women – consciously or subconsciously – embraced the fundamental principles that are embodied in

feminist activism: they acted from their desire for the fruits of substantive equality. Women were game-changers in fighting the racial and gender oppression of colonialism (Saungweme, 2021)” Such women include Bibi Titi Mohamed, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Mabel Dove Danquah. As it relates to women who remained in villages rather than travelling, organising and mobilising, they too played crucial roles, acting as informants, protestors, maintainers of the home and providers shelter and hideouts.

Unfortunately, however, many of these women were still not protected from rape, beatings and abuse both from the men they fought alongside and those who supported colonialism. “Even after independence, the disregard and diminishment of women’s participation in liberation struggles were reflected in the naming of major institutions and infrastructure. The names and faces of male liberators were affixed to universities, airports, roads, business centres and national currencies. Women were rarely afforded the same level of national recognition and respect.”

Knowledge of this threat of erasure therefore lends itself to the previously discussed outlining of the existence of both African and Caribbean feminisms outside of their respective society’s intellects and also the ever-present devaluing of female labour. Noted in their theorizing, labour contributions and now political organizing, it can be said that one of African and Caribbean feminisms most salient challenges and prevalent trends is their constant undermining.

## Interests and Introspection

Amilcar Sanatan (2016) asserts that from the 1970s, Caribbean feminism developed a unique identity, separate from Euro-American liberal feminism, Black feminism and Soviet-based women’s movements, as a result of its unique political geography. Today, Caribbean feminist are said to organize around “sexual identities, Afro and Indo-Caribbean feminism, critical masculinities work, women and climate change”. As previously stated however, Caribbean feminism does indeed seem to concern itself with all facets of life, contributing to a plethora of societal movements. Sanatan particularly marks the female spearheading of the Garveyite movement.

Likewise, African feminism organizes around themes of society, culture, policy and economy, limiting itself to no one domain.

Despite their long-lasting history of activism, both Caribbean and African continue to be disenfranchised by oppressive forces emanating from pre-colonial society, bringing into question their impacts.

The causes that permeate both feminisms include education and domestic violence. However, as a result of their distinct dynamism, these feminisms span all realms of society, advocating for women, men, LGBTQIA+ persons, children, labour rights, voting and political rights and more. As it relates to the Caribbean especially, “A narrow definition that sees feminist actions derived primarily from a consciousness of female subordination, denies those whose actions were impelled by political, class, ethnic or national identity concerns, as underscored by gender. Such an inelastic definition also fails to contemplate fully the distinctive nature and evolution of feminist activism in the Caribbean, a region framed first by its decimation of indigenous populations and settlement, through different European colonial systems of migrating labour, including African slavery and Asian indentures (Lewis, 2004). This legacy of varied languages, vastly differing cultural practices and gender belief systems makes the construction of any master narrative of feminism in the Caribbean, including one that denies male solidarity, impossible to construct. (Mohammed, 2016)”

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the commonalities and trends that exist between Caribbean and African feminism span gender and sexuality, labour and feminist organizing. As it relates to gender and sexuality, both the Caribbean and African female subject share the experience of being regulated and confined. Previously, both Caribbean and African societies had lenses through which gender non-conforming persons were viewed. However, this was

not conducive to the system of genderised oppression ordained by European colonialists and thus, law and religion were exacted as instruments through which the gender binary was enforced. As it relates to labour, both Caribbean and African women have historically been excluded from the formal economy and therefore, went on to create their own informal marketplace, marked by prosperity and solidarity. However, the desire for the ‘legitimization’ of these spaces seems to be an ever-present threat, devaluing their merit while also co-opting their fruits. Feminist organising in both the Caribbean and Africa centre around a plethora of concerns, not only limited to those regarding women. This is perhaps due to the fact that these feminisms are characterised by a distinct fluidity. Similarly to the devaluing of female labour, the societal change brought about by Caribbean and African feminist organizing also faces the threat of undervaluation. Overall however, perhaps most salient, is the inability to ‘pin down’ African and Caribbean feminism, as a result of its dynamic past, marked by colonialism.

“As jiggered blinding flashes Rumble, tremble, and crack Amidst the small of fired smoke and the pelting march of the storm.”

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