Counting Women's Caring Work: An Interview with Andaiye

David Scott

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> Upon an evening like this, mother, when one year is making way
> for another, in a ceremony attended by a show of silver stars,
> mothers see the moon, milk-fed, herself a nursing mother
> and we think of our children and the stones upon their future
> and we want these stones to move.
>
> —Lorna Goodison, "Mother the Great Stones Got to Move"

Preface

During the 1970s when the Caribbean generation of 1968 undertook the struggles for the revolutionary transformation of our societies, they formed political organizations—sometimes formal political parties—through which to mobilize the masses of the population and to confront the apparatuses of the neocolonial order. The Workers' Party of Jamaica, the Working People's Alliance, and the New Jewel Movement were among the more prominent of these revolutionary organizations. Shaped in varying degrees by Marxism (and sometimes by Leninism), their overall goal was state power, and a good deal was surrendered to the anxieties and immediate strategic (and security) instrumentalities involved in pursuing that pressing objective. The problematic

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of gender was one of these (race, of course, was another). Needless to say, there were women in these organizations, sometimes in positions of leadership, sometimes taking exception to the sexism and masculinism of the men at the helm. But "gender" as a category of historical understanding and political intervention was largely invisible, or at least it seemed always dependent upon the "final instance" of the economic and class. Like race, the relative autonomy of gender had yet to emerge as a distinctive zone of social criticism.

By the mid to late 1980s, however, the whole landscape of political opposition in the Caribbean was in a state of considerable upheaval. Sheltered by the new political context of international capital (these were the Reagan/Thatcher years, remember), the political right in the region reasserted itself with great ferocity, and the left began to spiral into crisis. The assassination of Walter Rodney; the collapse of the democratic socialist experiment of Michael Manley; and most damaging of all, the implosion of the Grenada Revolution and the US invasion—these seemed to mark the beginning of the end of the Caribbean left as a revolutionary project. And yet, in a very curious way, this period of left decline was at the same time a period of remarkable growth and transformation in Caribbean feminism; it was a period in which women's organizations and networks that were independent of male-centered political formations emerged—the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, for example—and they set about recasting the agenda of women's activism. In short, "gender" emerged as a visible category of criticism, and in so doing destabilized the very idea of radical politics.

But there is a sense in which this is paradoxical. The context is one in which the hope of an alternative to capitalism is rapidly receding, and a politics of identity is displacing a politics of social transformation. Moreover, it is a context in which transnational capital is focusing surplus-value extraction on women's labor (in free trade zones, in service industries, and so on); and therefore capital itself now has a vested interest in the question of women in economic development. In other words, just as what constitutes "politics" and the normative consensus on its "progressive" direction becomes ambiguous, "gender" emerges as a site for the proliferation of NGO development work. And as the Age of Projects arrives, the old political left, both men and women (understandably looking for sources of income in a hostile neoliberal environment), are urged to transform themselves into technical experts writing assessment reports for international funding agencies.

This is *not* the whole story, obviously, but it is an important part of it. And one member of that insurgent Caribbean generation of 1968, who, from the mid-1980s onward, became preoccupied with thinking through the distinctive predicament of gender, is Andaiye. It is hard to imagine anyone who more completely embodies the

antinomies and complexities of the discontinuous history that joins the politics of class in the 1970s to the politics of gender (and indeed also to that of race) from the 1980s and 1990s onward. A child of the Guyanese 1950s when great hope for decolonization was transformed into great despair in ethnic rivalry; and an adult of the Guyanese 1970s when that despair began to rekindle (for a while) new hope in revolutionary futures, Andaiye is a restless, embattled, and uncompromising woman whose impatience with stupidity is legendary.

Andaiye is of course an *activist* for social transformation. This, so to speak, is her vocation, and her style of intellectual and political engagement is shaped by the necessities of her circumstance no less than by the vicissitudes of the political moment. But this vocation, it needs to be underlined, is of a certain sort. Her practice is not mere activ*ism*, but rather what Continental Marxists used to call *praxis.* In other words, Andaiye is a social critic of the *concrete.* This is her gift: she is a public intellectual (as opposed to an academic one) whose proximity to a world-to-be-changed is never measured in more than the distance between the sisters she marches with, and whose practical engagements are always saturated with an internal reflexiveness, a systematic *language* of criticism.

For Andaiye, gender stands at the center of a dialectics of the concrete (to use Karel Kosik's famous phrase) whose principal term is "labor," by which she understands not merely the activity of factory workers but the *whole* activity involved in the formation and transformation of human life, the starting point of which is women's *caring* labor. For her, *all* women, whether or not they do waged work, do *unwaged* caring work (this is a conception she borrows from the work of Selma James). For Andaiye, therefore, the historical—and consequently the political—question of gender turns on locating the distinctiveness of women's *caring* work within the enlarging framework of productive labor. This, as I understand it, is the point of *counting* women's work, of identifying it in its variously embodied and quantifiable concreteness and actuality—all of it, including that which is typically considered unquantifiable. To call this mode of comprehension and action—counting women's caring work—reductive is to miss the *strategic* lesson it seeks to teach, the complex conception of work and capital it depends on, and the futures of community it aims to value and embrace.

Formerly Sandra Williams, Andaiye ("a daughter comes home") was born in Georgetown, Guyana, on 11 September 1942. She is an inspiration to many, those who agree with the details of her understandings and those who do not. Her commitments are passionate. But commitment is too slight a word for the virtues of courage and integrity and humor and resolve and irony she brings to her outspoken engagement with the varied faces of dominant power. A founding member of the Working People's Alliance,

a cofounder of Red Thread, and a member of the Women's International Network for Wages for Caring Work, the Global Women's Strike, and Women Against Violence Everywhere (WAVE), Andaiye has been actively involved in the critique of, and mobilization against, the cynical violence disfiguring contemporary Guyana.

The Interview

The People's Child

David Scott: Andaiye, you've described yourself as coming from an urban Afro-Guyanese middle-class family. Tell me a little bit about your parents. Where were they educated? What did they do for a living?

Andaiye: The minute you say that I realize that when I say that I come from an urban Afro-Guyanese middle-class family I'm only talking part of the truth. My father's family would have come from the country, from a rural area where his father was a teacher—certainly what in the context of the countryside would have been an important person among Black people. Then my father [Frank Williams] came to town as a child to go to school. And eventually his other brother and his sisters came as well.

My mother's story was a little more peculiar. When Walter Rodney was doing his *History of the Guyanese Working People*,[1] and he was looking for Black middle-class men of a few generations ago, he discovered what would have been my great-grandfather, Cornelius B. Carto, who was one of the first Black head teachers. But that doesn't quite describe who my mother [Hazel Williams, *née* Carto] was. On the other side, my mother's mother was very light-skinned, the product of what in those days would be called a mulatto woman and a white man. Poor, and growing up with her unmarried mother and her Black grandmother, she married into what really was the urban Black middle class, to a man who worked as an accountant at a company in town. Both sides of the family would have thought their side could do better, hers, in terms of color; his, in terms of class. To cut a long story short, my grandfather was said to have committed suicide when he and my grandmother were in their thirties. My grandmother thought he was murdered by people to whom he had lent money from the company. At the time, she had six children. Later on she married again and got another child. When my grandfather died the family had nothing. And so my mother grew up poor, is what I'm trying to

1. Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

say. Brown-skinned, with middle-class aspirations and maybe pretensions, but poor. She talked with great bitterness about not finishing school, and about my grandmother keeping up appearances although they didn't have enough food to eat. My grandmother told me she wasn't going to have "them" say that her Black husband had left her to suffer.

DS: So, having come to town, your mother and father were themselves educated and went on to be professionals?

A: No, it was far more torturous than that. The reason that I'm grinning is because George Lamming said somewhere that he doesn't know why we ever talk about class in the Caribbean because all we mean to ask is, was it your generation or your father's generation that had a hoe in his hand? Your very family is a mixture of people from different sectors: my father was a middle-class professional; his aunt, who visited all the time, was a domestic worker. My mother didn't have much high school. My father completed high school. Both were nurses—that's before I remember them—which in our kind of culture was not considered the professional middle class. My father was also a dispenser at some stage, and people always mention that to me because that was supposed to be why he was such a good doctor—because he was a dispenser and a nurse. Then when I was two my father left and went to London to study to be a doctor. And when I was three my mother went, and she worked while he studied.

DS: And you remained in Guyana.

A: I remained in Guyana.

DS: So you were brought up by who then?

A: By my mother's sister and her husband.

DS: In Georgetown?

A: In Georgetown. And I lived with them until I was about eight or nine.

DS: Which was when your parents returned to Guyana?

A: Yes.

Andaiye speaking at a rally following a march of 500, mainly women of all races, to mark the Global Women's Strike in Guyana on 8 March 2003

Photos courtesy WAVE

DS: I want to talk about your memories of that childhood in Georgetown. Talking about your early girlhood you've said that you were educated by books that not only ignored but *negated* you. Can you elaborate that a little bit?

A: Well, can I go further back?

DS: Sure.

A: I remember being quite happy when I lived with my aunt. It was a perfectly straightforward and ordinary and ordered life, and either I was born with a desire for order or I developed it from what happened after my parents came back. In that early childhood I lived in a house with my aunt and her husband and their four children, with always at least one grandmother, either the grandmother that my cousins and I shared, or their other grandmother. And always, my aunt was that person in every family that I've ever met in the Caribbean, around whom others gathered. So there were always one or two or three other cousins from somewhere else living there as well. It was very full, and it was very . . . just normal.

DS: "Normal"? As opposed to what?

A: As opposed to what happened afterwards. With my aunt, we lived on a street called Hadfield Street, and opposite was Queen's College in those days. Every day had a rhythm, because you knew, for example, when the Queen's College bell sounded where exactly you were supposed to be. The whole house was very orderly in the way that people sometimes organize a house when there are too many children; I knew, for example, that if I was still at the table trying to swallow the porridge that my aunt insisted that I have because, according to her, when the people come back . . .

DS: "The people"?

A: "The people." She not goin' tell "the people" that their child dead. I was "the people's" child. That's how my aunt referred to my parents all the time. So if "the people's" child was still at the table, trying to force down this porridge when the college bell went, "the people's" child knew perfectly well that she was in trouble both in the house and school, because that was the wrong point to be at when that bell rang. School was just about a block away and I was really young; I went to primary school when I was about three or four. One of my mother's other sisters was still alive (she died young) and she was a teacher there. It was a normal thing, you went through little ABC, big ABC, and they beat you to make you obey. But I used to tell my parents much later that in all the years until they came back, I completely understood what the rules were. The first time that my aunt ever remonstrated with me—earlier it would have been beat—that I did not know what she talking about, I was seventeen. I thought she was talking nonsense, but I knew exactly what she was talking about. Just as we always knew where she was and what time she was coming home. So the whole confusion began after my parents came back; because the first part of that confusion is the shift in class.

DS: An abrupt . . .

A: It was *extremely* abrupt.

DS: When your aunt refers to you as "the people's child," is she ascribing a distinctive status to your parents, or a status different from what they would ascribe to themselves or to other members of the family of your parents' generation?

A: Maybe. I didn't think so then. I just thought it was a way of saying, "I have to safeguard you in particular because I am accountable to somebody other than myself." I remember one time when my two cousins and I played hospital and my male cousin, the "doctor," cut my leg with a razor blade (he was a "surgeon"), and the female cousin (both of them are slightly older than me) was a "nurse." My aunt, who was very even-handed, put a fleet of abuse, a fleet of blows, on all of us. But I remember that when she was beating them, she kept on saying, "And what am I to tell the people?"

DS: So the confusion starts with your parents' return.

A: Because my mother is brown-skinned and because my grandmother is what I described, three-quarters white, and because I really grew up in those years with my

mother's light-skinned family, I did have some awareness at that stage what color meant, but not too much. When my parents came back [from London] and we moved, that's what I mean by coming from the urban Black middle class. It is from the time I'm nine years old. Everything changed at that stage. First of all, in ways that my cousins, I think, were perfectly conscious of, I kind of shifted slightly.

DS: You mean *away* from them?

A: Away from them—although through my grandmother and the same aunt that I grew up with, we were always close. But there is a way that my life shifted from theirs. I have cousins who will tell me what they thought of me [then]. And what they thought I had and who they thought I was.

DS: What would they say?

A: Oh, one cousin said one day, years later in New York, that when we were growing up she really felt extremely bad about Granny. I felt supported by my grandmother and she obviously didn't. My light-skinned grandmother was the person in my life who told me that I was okay—Black like her beloved husband, and bright like her because we both had big heads and were called names about it. She said, "Yuh head big because it full, like mine." My cousin said that my grandmother had told her that she (my cousin) would do something with her hands and she knew perfectly well that my grandmother didn't think that I would do something with my hands. And then she went on from that, which is at one level the story of who is bright and who is not, to other things. And other cousins who were present began to chip in, and two or three began to talk about this sense of me as having everything. That we had money, that my father was a doctor, that I was an only child, that I was totally spoiled, that I had everything—this is what they thought.

DS: Your parents returned when you were eight or nine. So there was a period with your aunt when you would have been in primary school. Does the reference to reading books that ignore and negate you refer to that primary school period, or to the secondary school period?

A: If I look back, I can think of things that I read then that negated me, but what I felt until I was about eight years old was *comfortable.* That's all I remember, feeling comfort-

able. I didn't feel ill-at-ease, either with my immediate environment, or in any disjuncture between that environment and what I was reading or the movies. It just all seemed normal to me. Even though it would have been true in those days that occasionally you were allowed to go to the movies and you were sitting down just like all the other Black people in the region laughing at the Pygmies and backing Tarzan. But it seemed utterly normal. The period that's difficult is the period from which it's no longer normal, and that's because of a whole lot of changes that took place.

DS: I want to come to those changes, but I want to stay with this for a moment. You are a child of eight, nine years old, and you are periodically going to the cinema and so on. Do you then have a sense of a world that is non-Black, whether white or Indo-Guyanese?

A: I had a sense, probably. Remember that Guyana probably had fewer white people than a lot of places in this [Caribbean] region. So I would have seen white people in my own life, say at church, but you are talking about one or two people, and you are talking about people who are . . . somewhere there, and in what would have appeared to everybody around me as in their appointed place. But there are not a lot of them, and they are not in my face in the way that white people were in George Lamming's face.[2] They're not there. And the world that I grew up in when I was with my aunt, was also, I would say, somewhat closed in race terms. So it's not that I didn't know any Indo-Guyanese, but if I think of all the people that up to then I called aunt and uncle, they would have tended to be either Black or what was called in those days "colored." At my primary school, there would have been Indian children, but a minority. And in that kind of environment (this is important in terms of what happens to me later) Indian children would have been dismissed in the way that Black people often dismissed Indo-Guyanese then as "coolie"—you know, with all the stereotypes and prejudices like using coconut oil on the hair. But my actual world tended to be quite confined and closed in terms of who was there.

DS: Your parents return and you are nine, ten, so you are almost about to go into secondary school.

2. George Lamming grew up in colonial Barbados. For a discussion of Lamming's life and work, see David Scott, "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming," *Small Axe*, no. 12 (September 2002): 72–200.

A: I went to Bishops' High School almost as soon as they came, at nine.

DS: What changes with secondary school? Your parents have come back and there is a sharp shift in your class location and your sense of social status. Are there also changes in secondary school and what you're reading and your appreciation of what you're reading that are beginning to alter the way you think about yourself?

A: It seemed to me at that stage that *everything* changed. First of all, in purely personal terms, I moved from being part of a very large household to being part of a very small household. At that age that is fairly strange. I moved from an aunt and an uncle who were predictable; I mean, my uncle was very eccentric but he was also very predictable. He came home by the same route at midday and arrived at the same time every day. My aunt and uncle were not in the slightest bit social. They lived, they looked after the children, they went to church, and so on. My parents were *very* social. They not only went to a whole lot of functions, they also belonged to a whole lot of groups. So I moved into this household where it's not only just the three of us initially, but where they are almost never at home. So, for example, my parents and I did not eat together most of the time, because our schedules didn't work in that way.

DS: Did your father work in a hospital or was he in private practice?

A: He worked in the Public Hospital, Georgetown, to which we shortly moved. So we're in the hospital compound. There are other Black doctors, but a lot of the doctors are not Black; they're of various races and both local and foreign. I am now in secondary school, and everything is in your face at the same time. When I got to secondary school, something suddenly became *wrong* about color. As near as I can remember it, what happened was that I was now in an environment where except for the children who had come to the school via scholarships (and that was really a very small minority), everybody else was the daughter—it was a girls' school—of a professional, a civil servant, and so on. That playing field is now level [in terms of class]; so something has to distinguish who is who. And what distinguished you was race and color. So even though there were Afro-Guyanese girls who went to school with me, and whose fathers were not doctors, and who saw me as being privileged (in fact, one even wrote a book in which I'm all over the place as the person she wanted to be), privileged is not what *I* felt. Because what was very clear to me was that once everything was even, once the fathers were all the same, then race and color did it. And that put me somewhere at the bottom. I remember that *very* clearly.

DS: Was this school largely Afro-Guyanese?

A: No.

DS: There were Indians as well.

A: Yes, and Portuguese, and Chinese, and mixed and white. And that is why when people ask me about all the complications of the way in which I try to deal with race now in my adult life, these are not new complications. I first started thinking about race and race in relation to class when I was in my early teens. I thought about race and class because I had to think about it in self-defense. Because nobody explained to me what was going on; nobody explained to me why it was that I had just been in a world in which the few Indians that were around could be dismissed as being "coolie," and now Indians in front of me are superior to me. Why, in a world where material possessions were so important, my father's car couldn't trump another girl's father's bicycle because she was not Black. There's no place in which you can even put that on the table except if you *feel* it. Occasionally, one or two honest people might even say something that made you know that you're not totally crazy. Like a light-skinned Black friend who said that she really sorry for me because I would always have much less choice than she.

DS: By "less choice" she meant in regard to boyfriends.

A: She meant boyfriends in the first place.

DS: But also girlfriends.

A: Yes. She meant *less choice.* The day she told me that, I felt very reassured, because I had spent a lot of the time thinking I was mad. Because people told me that everything was great. And I just felt so absolutely unmoored.

DS: So there weren't other girls like you in the school that you could identify with?

A: Well I had one friend who was as ill-at-ease as I was, Monica Jardine, but I can't remember that we talked about it in quite these terms. I certainly think that I was too insecure to be going looking for anybody who was as miserable as I was.

DS: Let me ask the question this way, because you suggest that it was curious that there had been a world that you had been ensconced in where difference was marked in such a way that you felt secure, and then you were in a world in which difference was marked in a way that made you feel ill-at-ease.

A: Yes.

DS: This is also the late 1940s, early fifties, so this is also a period of nationalist politicization. In trying to think now about what was shifting in your own family's change of status and your parents' new social roles, can you connect this to the emerging sociopolitical environment of Georgetown of that period?

A: Like virtually everybody that I knew, my parents were in the PPP [People's Progressive Party] of 1953.[3] So part of what the world was about was this excitement of change; that was all over my house, as it was of the houses of some of my other relatives as well. In Guyana in those days, politics was what people talked about all the time, at the table and everywhere. So yes, at the same time that at a personal level, I am having these difficulties, it is also true that I'm part of this other world in which things are changing and in which you have all this confidence in the possibility of change. But I didn't know of any way to put those things together at all. It's true, though, that part of what was changing in my world had something to do with the results of everything the PPP did. For example, there was a period in which the professional class, the urban professional class, tended to be [white]; then it was light-skinned; then it became Black; and then there was an almost overnight moment in which I remember Black people around me panicking because all of a sudden there were so many Indian doctors and Indian lawyers, and so on. I remember the real sense that they [the Black middle class] were being kind of knocked out of place. Now even though it was true that the PPP, led by Cheddi Jagan, was left-wing and communist, I think in that same period the roles—racial roles—in the society also changed. It's not just class that changed, race also changed. In other words, the fact that there was something called the PPP, the fact that Indo-Guyanese

3. The year 1953 was one of triumph and catastrophe for the PPP. In April it won the first general elections based on universal adult suffrage. But after 133 days in office, on Friday, 9 October (the first "Black Friday"), Her Majesty's Government under Winston Churchill used the pretext of preventing communist subversion to suspend the Waddington constitution, give emergency powers to the governor, Sir Alfred Savage, send troops to "prevent public disorder," and remove Cheddi Jagan from office. See Cheddi Jagan, *Forbidden Freedom: The Story of British Guiana* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), and more fully, Jagan, *The West on Trial: The Fight for Guyana's Freedom* (London: Michael Joseph, 1966).

were so important in this political movement, also had an effect on how races related to each other and the roles that they took up in the rest of the society. But again, none of this was acknowledged in any open way.

In my family, like everybody else's in the Caribbean, family was not just your blood family; there were also the other people close to your parents, and one of the things that was good about growing up in my mother's and father's household is that they really did know everybody. So in my household I would be in this other kind of confusion, but this confusion that *excited* me. Everybody would be there, ranging from Cheddi sometimes, certainly always Burnham, and the various writers passing through.[4] More than that, there would be both the types who were left-wing and their opposites, men who were in some backward party and completely opposed to everything that was going on. And there you are, this child, listening to all this stuff, because at one level they are retaining their personal relationships, and at another level, you are conscious even then that things were, not fracturing, but being strained in ways that nobody could quite come to terms with.

DS: I mean, this is quite literally a moment of very significant alterations in which the old world (which perhaps is associated in your mind with your mother's sister's house) is being superseded by a new world. And in this new world of your parents' house you can actually see some of the new kinds of social and political alliances taking place.

A: And also whatever the opposite of "alliance" is. I mean, you could see old relations breaking as well, right there.

DS: I want to come back to the social and political world of your parents and the impact of that on you, but I want to return for a moment to school and to your personal sense of yourself, and to the emerging apprehensions about difference. You mentioned awhile ago (as you mentioned in your Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture)[5] that your emerging sense of difference as a young teenage girl turns importantly around rivalry over boys. In this

4. On Jagan, see Percy C. Hintzen, "Cheddi Jagan (1918–97): Charisma and Guyana's Response to Western Capitalism"; and on Burnham, see Linden Lewis, "Linden Forbes Burnham (1923–85): Unraveling the Paradox of Post-colonial Charismatic Leadership in Guyana." Both are in *Caribbean Charisma: Reflections on Leadership, Legitimacy and Populist Politics,* ed. Anton Allahar (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001).
5. Andaiye delivered the 2002 Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture at the University of the West Indies, Mona, on 2 March 2002. It was entitled "The Angle You Look From Determines What You See: Towards a Critique of Feminist Politics in the Caribbean," and is published by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies.

world, is this rivalry taking place within community—that is, within race or skin-color community—or are there members of each community who have access to boyfriends and girlfriends *across* community? How porous were these divisions and boundaries? And at what levels of the community would there be porousness, if there was any at all?

A: In the world that I inhabited, I mean even where I lived, there would be families of different races. And certainly via secondary school, but also via my parents, my friends were from various races. And then you turn, I don't know, maybe twelve, thirteen, and this begins to be a problem. The first time I remember really noticing it very vividly was when I went to parties.

I have to go back two years and tell you that I had gone to Scotland to school for a year and a half while my father was doing a degree, and there were no Black-skinned children—there were two light-skinned Black children who were born there and everybody knew them and so they were accommodated. I was eleven. At one level I thoroughly enjoyed myself because I'd never worked hard in school and I didn't do that well at school here [in Guyana] and then I went there and I came first and they moved me to the next class and then I came first again, and I enjoyed that. But at the end of the school year, just before I came back, there was a graduation, and (I'll never forget this) my mother dressed me up. Did I tell you this story before? It haunts me. My mother dressed me up in this dress that was made of pink and blue netting, and had my hair in ringlets, and sent me off to this function where I sat and sat until the headmaster danced with me. Skip to two years later and I am at the party of one of my friends, an Indo-Guyanese friend, back in Guyana. I think it was probably the first time any of us were allowed to invite boys, so her parents were there. And I had to dance with her father. Because what I found out was that if you were a Black boy and you played basketball then, although the parents didn't like it, you were attractive to all the girls. You had *choice.*

DS: Choice *within* middle-class Afro-Guyanese families?

A: And Chinese and Portuguese, and Indian

DS: In other words, *across* communities.

A: *Across.* That room had a cross-section of people; everybody was there from the middle class.

DS: So boys had access.

A: Yes, but you had to bring something like basketball or whatever.

DS: Not just brilliance.

A: No, that would not have been sufficient; you had to have some form of stardom, and brilliance was not anything too admired at that stage. There's a period there where it begins to shift. Because, even as I'm talking, I remember when it began to open up in relation to girls; but it didn't start with us, it started with the boys. That you had access across race definitely began with the boys.

DS: And this was never the kind of conversation you could imagine having with your mother?

A: No, positively not. And that's why I said that the day I was leaning through my dining-room window and my friend said to me that she wouldn't like to be me I felt such an enormous sense of relief. Because it was the day that it was clear to me that I was not making it up. Up to this day, I know many people who tell me, "Man, Sandra," as they will insist on calling me whenever I'm talking about the old days, "You know, it wasn't like that."[6] Very few people admit that it was. But the day leaning through the window, I felt, "Goddamn, it's true, I did not make this up." Because what I had felt in relation to everybody else was that, you know, there you were with all these advantages and just refusing to be happy. Twelve years or so later I changed my name to something a name-book told me meant "daughter comes home" as a kind of vomiting up of unspoken rage, as a way of saying that I could finally reject that what is Black, what is African, is ugly and inferior.

DS: The acute recognition of your own race difference is simultaneous with your recognition of gender difference.

A: Yes.

6. Andaiye changed her name from Sandra Williams in 1970.

DS: Let us come now to the books, and your remark in the Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture that you grew up with books that not only ignored but negated you. These are books that would produce characterizations of Black girls of what sort?

A: The first negation would be that sometimes you weren't there at all; there would be little pictures (this is where it would start) and the pictures would be the opposite of what you were—except when your mother insisted on putting your hair in ringlets like the girl in the book. But yes, sometimes there would be a Topsy; Topsy would figure. And a kind of—what was the word?—pickaninny, a kind of drawing of a pickaninny with what I would now think were nice dreads, but that's not what I thought at that stage. I don't know how I would have responded to the books by themselves, but the books came in a certain *context.* The books came in a context where, especially as you grow a little older, the early teens, you're looking at magazines and they are telling you how to dress and how to be and how your hair is to be and so on. And everything there is saying no, no, to everything about how you look. You're reading *Ebony* magazine and it's telling you how to lighten your skin—I remember reading something once that said that if you drew a white line down the middle of your nose it would look straight.

These experiences of mine fifty years ago were of course not only my experiences; I'm one of millions. That bias against Black skin was deeply entrenched not only in Guyana, but everywhere. It was debated and exposed, especially in the US, in the 1960s and 1970s. But it remains entrenched, including among Black people.

DS: So your memory is of reading these texts and feeling negated, not *retrospectively* knowing that those books negated you.

A: No, no, *feeling* negated, right then.

DS: The world of your family, of your mother and father, is a world of emerging social and political consciousness, and a world of social gatherings in which people—literary people, political people—would participate. I want to come to talk about that world a little bit. Your parents return in what year?

A: I think it would have been 1950.

DS: Nineteen fifty. Would they have been participants in the PAC [Political Affairs Committee] prior to the emergence of the PPP?[7]

A: I don't think so, no.

DS: But they are founding members of the PPP, or founding sympathizers?

A: I would put it more as sympathizers. I mean I actually don't have a clue as to whether my parents held party cards. And I don't know if that's what people did in those days. What I remember, for example, is party meetings happening in my uncle's house. I don't know what that means about your formal status in the party. But certainly, they spoke and acted as people totally supportive of the PPP.

DS: Was your mother as politically inclined, politically active, as your father?

A: I don't think so. I think that when I look back at my mother's life—like a lot of women of her generation, and generations after, she did what my father was doing, and I'm not sure what she would have done instead. But in terms of how it seemed at the time, she was very good-looking and dressed up a lot and always seemed to be at the center of these gatherings that you're talking about.

DS: Are you saying that she decorated him?

A: Oh yes, she did. One of my strongest memories is looking up at my father's face. . . . They must have been back about a year, so I was living with them, but it was Old Year's Night so they were going to go out. I was over at my aunt's and they came to tell me good night. I told my father afterwards—and he laughed—"You didn't come to tell me good night. You came to show off your wife." I have never seen such a face! Up to this day I remember what she [my mother] had on. It was a peach, what was called in those days *peau de soie* dress. I have never seen such a look on a person's face as on my father's. It [the dress] was a kind of cross between satin and silk. Nobody in my family dressed like that. They were just normal people. My mother dressed kind of film-starry. Such a look!

7. The PAC was founded in 1946 to give the emerging nationalist voices a political platform. The founding members were Cheddi Jagan, Janet Jagan, Jocelyn Hubbard, and Ashton Chase. See Jagan, *The West on Trial*, 63–64.

DS: So she wouldn't have been part of that women's organization that emerged in 1946.[8]

A: No. I don't know her in that, although I know some of those women, like for example, Winifred Gaskin, who I called Aunt Winnie. She's a part of who is in the house.

DS: So this is a small and intimate middle class at that point.

A: It was, but with overlaps. There was another Black middle class that tended to be more, I would say, solid, and more having to do with church, education, and so on. Of my parents, my father was the person who connected those worlds. Because of how he had grown up everyone remembered him as a young boy playing the organ in the church where many of that class went—Smith's Congregational Church; he was "Frankie" to that more solid world. But the actual world of my household tended not to be so church-going. This was a world in which at one stage my father was president or chair of the Theatre Guild. I also remember my father being one of the first people that I ever knew to buy paintings as a normal thing.

DS: So they were self-consciously both secular and progressive. They would have had a sense of themselves as being distinct from that older churchgoing middle class. They would have been forward-looking and that would have been part of the progressiveness of their nationalism.

A: I think so.

DS: You've said that you have a memory of those gatherings, of their intensity. Do you have any inkling of emerging battle lines (for want of a better phrase)?

A: You mean the ones that developed around race? Or *any* battle lines?

DS: First of all, any battle lines. Any major issues around which those gatherings seemed unable to come to some sense of a resolution, or issues over which people or your parents might have violently disagreed.

8. This was the Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO) led by Winifred Gaskin, Frances Stafford, and Janet Jagan.

A: I don't remember specifically enough, but one group of people that I knew—and the main person I would think of is John Carter—would have been at total variance with the other group in relation to everything ranging from independence to the whole question of socialism. Men like John Carter were completely opposed to the PPP platform, which proposed a different power relation between classes in Guyana.[9]

DS: But he [John Carter] would nevertheless have been invited to the gatherings, as a member of the larger social group who could have a conversation of a certain sort.

A: Yes, yes. And there would be a kind of . . . joshing is the only word I can find, which [Forbes] Burnham in particular was very good at it. Burnham could put you down in a way that suggested that this is just a social thing, let's continue [to be friends], but it really was a putdown. Other people would have been more inclined to just do the social thing. This is my point. The person I have the strongest memory of who was always saying something to mark the difference, but saying it in a kind of jocular way, is Burnham.

DS: Do you have any memory of 1953 and of the intensity of that year, and the victory (the unexpected victory) of the PPP, and the aftermath?

A: I remember the intensity leading up to 1953. But I wasn't here [in Guyana] in 1953; I was in Scotland. So the only thing I remember about 1953 itself was how peculiar it felt to hear the BBC talking about where I came from.

DS: Were your parents concerned?

A: Yes. There's no way that either of my parents would ever have described themselves as communists or Marxists. I don't think that they were in that way really political. But my father would certainly have used the word "nationalist." He would have thought himself part of something that was utterly legitimate, and that people (the British government) had no right to tamper with it in the way they did in 1953. But my only specific memory of '53, I'm afraid to tell you, is of going to the dentist in Scotland and of having the

9. John Carter (later Sir John) was an early member of the Harold Moody's League of Coloured People in London, a branch of which he later established in British Guiana. In 1951 (with Lionel Luckhoo) he founded the National Democratic Party, an elitist, anticommunist party. He later served under Burnham's PNC. See Maurice St. Pierre, *Anatomy of Resistance: Anti-Colonialism in Guyana, 1823–1966* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 56.

dentist say that the fillings on my teeth were really superb, and asking where I'd done them. When I said, "In British Guiana," he got very excited because the arrival of British troops in British Guiana was all over the BBC news. He asked, "Who is your dentist?" and I said, "Cheddi Jagan." Oh, and he went berserk! But going back to your question, I do remember and I always feel—and Rupert Roopnaraine, Walter Rodney, and I talked about it—a kind of privilege to have been surrounded in a way that could not happen to a child anywhere in the Caribbean now, with that kind of certainty that we could change our world if we wanted to.[10] That's what we got. Before they [the leaders of the PPP] fell out and fell apart, what came out of those men was a real kind of confidence that we were not too small or too poor to transform our world.

DS: You think a confidence greater than the confidence of the 1970s?

A: Yes. But that may be because the earlier time I was a child. Nineteen seventies where? Guyana, Grenada, and so on?

DS: Yes, Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica.

A: Grenada always seemed to me very self-conscious. That's not what I remember '53 as being like at all—very self-conscious of whose ideology was correct, and who had the right line. It [Grenada] was very full of that. That's not what '53 felt like.[11]

DS: Early 1950s Guyana is not about who has the correct line; it's that we are all, whatever our line is, heading for national sovereignty.

A: I'm sure by that stage there must have been all kinds of ideological differences inside the small narrow group. But that's not what you felt from outside, with all these relatives you have, all of whom are perfectly normal people, and all of whom are part of this movement that really believes that what we're about to do is to take control.

DS: Do you have any memory of your parents beginning to become disenchanted with Cheddi Jagan?

10. Rupert Roopnaraine is a filmmaker, scholar, and political activist. He was a founding member of the WPA. He is currently completing a book on the painter Stanley Greaves and working on a volume of the writings of Martin Carter.
11. See also Walter Rodney's reflections on the same period in *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual*, ed. Robert Hill (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 5–8.

A: No, no. I don't think that's how it went. I don't believe that there was any mass discontent with Cheddi Jagan in those first years after the PPP was thrown out of office. I don't think it's any accident that people like Eusi Kwayana stayed with Jagan. No, I don't remember that (disenchantment) happening then at all. What I remember is that when they later split [Jagan and Burnham], whatever agonies my parents and others may have gone through in their own minds—I wasn't conscious of them; what I was conscious of was that in a very short space of time it was clear to me that my parents were, and in particular my father, *with* Burnham. But my father never said to me, or in my presence, "There are these six things I believe that Forbes also believes, and that Cheddi doesn't." It always seemed to me to be about *racial* loyalty.

DS: So you have a memory of a growing polarization, when you become aware that your father is now with Burnham and not with Jagan, and your sense is that it has something to do with race. Are you able to generalize that beyond your family? Do you have a sense that something more broadly is happening here that has distinctively to do with race?

A: Yes. But you didn't have to have "a sense" of it. The undercurrent was there in everybody's [conversation]. Remember, we are talking about days in which it is still true that politics is daily conversation for a whole lot of people. It was very explicit, I thought, the impulse to racial loyalty. Whereas Eusi stayed until after the 1956 congress where the Jagans refused to include Martin Carter, Rory Westmaas, and Lionel Jeffrey, among others they called ultraleft, on the list to be supported at party elections. Because of this, when Eusi was offered the position of chair he declined, and after that he and many others quietly withdrew from activity while others resigned without making a public statement.

DS: So by the time of the split there is an explicitly politicized racial discourse.

A: The split was what, in '55. I'm only thirteen then, and the PNC is formed in about '57. That is about the same period in which I am also beginning to hear Black middle-class people talking with worry about the possibility of Indian domination. That's the first time I remember hearing the "they." This category "they" who have the land and the business, and now "they" will have the professions and so on. There was a very watchful eye on the increase of the Indian presence in what used to be Afro-Guyanese preserves. That was explicit. Although the PPP platform was a working-class platform, I have no recollection that anyone around me was speaking in terms of class.

DS: As a primary school student you had a sense of differences, that people are called coolie, and so on, and are not present in and around your mother's family's household, and you have a sense of that shifting in the early 1950s, of your own difference, and prejudicial things being said about you. But there is a difference between those worlds of stereotyped difference and the newly emergent post-'53 or post-PPP split sense of the difference between Africans and Indians. Does that make sense?

A: I think that up to a certain stage, there was a kind of division of spoils. There would always have been a division of spoils that was based on class but if we suspend that for a while, and just look at the division of spoils in relation to race, the division of spoils in relation to race said that business and land were Indo-Guyanese, that civil service and professions were Afro-Guyanese.

DS: This was understood in the pre-1953 period?

A: Yes. Well, the population of Portuguese and Chinese has always been relatively small, but they also would be seen as being mainly business. That they were also present in the other places, didn't matter because they were so few. Indigenous people were no part of any division of spoils. When you come to the middle of the 1950s, when Cheddi and Burnham are still together, I think in any case that is just before the shift begins to take place to more and more Indo-Guyanese entering the civil service and professions. And coupled with the fact that the shift has not yet taken place is the fact that because Forbes and Cheddi are together, there is an assumption that there is a sharing [of] political spoils, and it probably almost follows, therefore, that each of you has a foot in. That's a language in which we speak now, that kind of addition, this is one side and this is the other side and we're adding them together.

We didn't speak in that kind of language of addition and subtraction *then.* I don't remember a single soul ever saying what I just said when I was growing up—[namely,] that they felt reassured by the fact that Forbes was there, in the pre-1955 PPP. That was partly, I think, because middle-class Afro-Guyanese still felt secure in their education and the status that came with it. You hear Afro-Guyanese who are seventy, eighty years old say up to now, "Where would they (Indo-Guyanese) be without us?" Every time they say it you want to crack up because it's as if no time has passed; they live with such a con-

sciousness that the education which the British allowed them first is theirs, and it is they who bequeathed it to others. Anyway, in the early 1950s Afro-Guyanese still felt fairly secure in their professions. And besides, we had the two of them [Jagan and Burnham] together. And then two things happen: (a) they split; and (b) there is this move of Indo-Guyanese into the "Afro-Guyanese locations." And that would be the first time that I remember what I would consider nonracist Afro-Guyanese speaking in a certain way.

DS: You mean using racial categories in an explicit way?

A: The first thing that I remember was the worry and the bitterness and the anger. I remember that. And I don't think that my father easily permitted himself to use words like "coolie" so I didn't hear that too often, but certainly there was a "they." There was a definite *they* being discussed.

DS: Do you think, looking back and trying to understand that emerging sense of apprehension, that undergirding it was a sense of differential *entitlement*?

A: You mean that *they* should have less than *us*? Yes. There certainly was a sense that they had, I think, *enough.* But above all, there was a sense. . . . Let me answer you this way, David. One of the curious things in my own life is that the people in the generation before me thought of Indians as rural, not speaking English too well, somewhat alien in the way that they dressed. By the time I was eleven or so, that was no longer true. I knew when I was eleven that who I went to school with was the granddaughter of the person that they [the older generation] were still looking at. So I knew something at eleven that it seemed to me the generation before me woke up to all of a sudden, which was that Indo-Guyanese were no longer only rural and poor, they were right here, the same place as the Black middle-class professionals were; certain locations were not meant to be Indo-Guyanese, and the entitlements that went with those locations, the closer proximity to status and importance, *these* were not supposed to be Indo-Guyanese. They had *not been* Indo-Guyanese. And they [the older generation] had not noticed, it seemed to me, when it began to change.

DS: Might there then have been a sense for Afro-Guyanese that Cheddi's centrality to the revving up of the nationalist movement—PAC then PPP—was, in a certain respect, anomalous?

A: What does that mean? Not what "anomalous" means; what does the whole question mean?

DS: Once this apprehension emerges and the Black middle class is trying to mobilize to ensure that they have the spoils that they think themselves entitled to, in the context of the growing movement for decolonization, in retrospect, was there a sense that it was anomalous that it was an Indo-Guyanese who had been central to that inaugural moment of nationalist political organization?

A: I think in part of the Black world that would have been true. Remember that the part that I came from was peculiar in a lot of ways. I don't think that they felt that. But the one thing that I'm leaving out is that you can't underestimate the speed with which hope *went*.

DS: In 1953.

A: Yes. The speed with which it went!—beginning with the British intervention (which I don't think anybody anticipated) and then moving all the way through to the split between Burnham and Jagan and then the split between Jagan and Kwayana, Martin Carter, Rory Westmaas, Keith Carter, and others. So that what feeds all the various kinds of negative responses and apprehensions is that nobody is any longer talking at that stage—at least, not around me—as if Guyana is about to make any big change. We're back, in other words, into this fairly small, narrow, confined, and fixed world in which it then becomes even more important, what I get and what you get. All that euphoria and confidence seemed to me just to *go*.

DS: A slightly different kind of question: What is your sense, as you remember it as a teenager (middle/late 1950s), of the region? Because this is of course a period in which the region as a whole is moving toward national sovereignty. What is your sense of the region, and what is your sense of the debates about Federation? Because the PPP was . . .

A: Opposed.

DS: But initially they were pro-Federation, weren't they?

A: Yes, until a campaign began which played on the fears of Indo-Guyanese working people. In terms of my sense of the region, first of all, I was too young to have been part

of any discussion about Federation. Where else would I have developed a sense of the region? Remember that most of us who lived in Guyana then almost didn't know the region. When I was somewhere in my teens I would have gone to Aruba, because my aunt lived there. But when I went to UWI [the University of the West Indies] and people talked about this movement between islands, I had no idea what they were talking about. So "region" was not as real to us. These were countries, and you talked about it in relation to an abstraction called Federation and another abstraction called the cricket team, and so on. But we had not been to these places. The first thing I knew about [the idea of] region came from people like George Lamming. It wasn't only that they were from another part of this region, but they were politically into the notion of region. That's where I would learn about that. But a lot of Guyanese, I think even those who would have opposed the position Cheddi developed in relation to Federation, Guyanese who would have been politically engaged in 1950, 1953, or who like me and Walter and Rupert Roopnaraine are little children running around it, also had a certain kind of wariness of the region because of how they opposed the PPP. The region ganged up with the white people against us. So that also interfered with the development of any sense of region. There was also, I would say, a little arrogance. We really thought that we were ahead of the pack [on the path to sovereignty]; I mean, I felt that way at age eleven.

DS: So you *did* have a sense of the region.

A: Well, the conversations that you would hear were about these processes towards independence in which others were engaged, which compared to what we were like were quite unradical. In that sense, I did inhabit a world that included the people like George Lamming, who saw the PPP, the early PPP, very much in the vanguard (in the non-Leninist sense) of what was taking place across these countries. But *region* as something *real* to which you might feel loyalty? I feel a sense now of loyalty to something called "region," especially in relation to US domination; I absolutely did not feel that then. I didn't know what that was except in relation to cricket.

DS: You leave secondary school round about when?

A: 1960, I think.

DS: In February 1955 there is this famous congress that Burnham insists on having. By the time of the 1957 elections the PPP is PPP/Jagan on the one hand and PPP/Burnham on the other. In '57 Burnham wins the elections. In 1958, Eusi Kwayana (then Sydney

King) joins the executive of the newly formed PNC [People's National Congress], and this gives a considerable boost to its prestige. Some three years later Kwayana creates an organization which is for people of African descent, distinctively. The African Society for. . .

A: African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa.

DS: No, African Society for Racial Equality.[12]

A: The one before.

DS: Yes. Is there a sense that Eusi is responding to what he senses is the racialization coming from *elsewhere*? Is part of the apprehension of the Black professional middle class a sense not only that Indo-Guyanese are advancing but that the PPP is racializing politics?

A: Yes, but remember that Kwayana is in no way part of any of the worlds that I have described. I think I met Kwayana when I was in my twenties, possibly. I doubt that I had ever seen him before. He is literally a country boy—a person of the grassroots—who really would not make any of his decisions in relation to, say, a Black middle class—that's not where that would have come from at all.

But there was this whole series of developments inside the PPP that he was responding to, yes. From inside the PPP he felt what the people that I'm talking about felt from outside, which was that Jagan was racializing politics while at the same time claiming, or continuing to claim, that he was organizing on the basis of *national* and class interests. I think the breaking point was what he saw as Jagan's racial opportunism (he has said that he didn't think Jagan was racist) vis-à-vis Federation. For those outside, it crystallized, I remember, around the '61 election when there was a victory parade. In [a place like] Barbados all that would have happened is that one set of Black people would have marched triumphantly through [the neighborhood of] another set of Black people. Unfortunately

12. The African Society for Racial Equality was formed in mid-1961. It was later transformed into the African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA), of which Eusi Kwayana (then Sydney King) was the coordinating elder. See David Hinds, "The African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA): A Short History," *Emancipation* 4 (1996–97): 32–38. Kwayana is a great survivor of 1953. A founding member of the PPP, he went on to be a founding member of the WPA. A study of his life and work is long overdue.

for us, what happened was one set of people who were rural and Indian marched into this place that was urban and African, and for weeks and months and forever one can hear Afro-Guyanese talk about this, what felt to them like an invasion, and people saying, "a we pun top" ("we are on top"). Oh, it hurt. It not only hurt, it frightened! So from several directions, whether it was that you felt your nose pushed out of joint as a professional or a worker, by then there was a spreading view among Afro-Guyanese that what Cheddi was into was Indian domination.

DS: So people who might not have entirely sympathized with Burnham's orientation might nevertheless have felt that it was important to put a brake on the racialization of politics that Cheddi was perceived to be promoting. I'm trying, in other words, to get a sense of what Eusi's calculations might have been.

A: He obviously would have to say if this was true, but my perception is that it was much clearer for Eusi than anybody else that in response to what seemed to be clearly a movement towards Indian domination, it was necessary to put a brake on that by creating other alliances. I believe that was what he was explicitly doing. But I believe that he also thought that there were certain things that could be done via Burnham. As far as I know, the author of cooperative socialism is not Burnham but Eusi. He would believe in that; he would believe that was something you could actually do. Eusi is not a very rigid or orthodox person. So, for example, when other people are making speeches about "the commanding heights of the economy," and all you do is nationalize this and nationalize that, he would be looking very precisely for a way in which poor Afro-Guyanese (he really was not too concerned about the professionals) could develop an economic stake.

DS: Would ASCRIA have been an organization that your father or that your parents would have had any affiliation?

A: No, no. You know, even when my parents went with Burnham, they retained their relationship with Cheddi and with Janet. Janet used to be minister of health, so she and my father would work together. And he always claimed that she was the best minister of health. He retained a personal relationship. My father is a very unradical person in certain ways. So that he would feel a need for racial self-protection, I think, but I have never heard my father say the things about Cheddi that other Black people say. I have never heard my father say that Cheddi was racist. And I don't think that that is just a question of not saying it but feeling it. But he *did* feel, from his own location, that whether it was

willed or not willed, whether it was directed or not directed from the top of the PPP, that changes were taking place against which it was necessary to defend oneself—that Black people had to do a certain kind of self-defense. But Eusi's view would not have been so simple. Eusi's view would have been very deep. What I mean is that up to now (and I'm sure it's one of the things that drives him mad) there are all these Black people in Guyana fighting for what they call African-Guyanese liberation in a way that does not change the actual location of African-Guyanese to the economy, to the possibility of a livelihood. Certainly, that does not challenge capital itself. *That* has never been Kwayana. What Kwayana attempted to do at a certain stage was not only the cultural thing (learn Swahili and so on), it was really about recognizing that after you had finished screaming that this race or that was doing you harm, the *actual* location of [most] Afro-Guyanese in this economy and the actual organization of the global economy ensured that they could never have any security.

DS: You leave secondary school in 1961, and you do what?

A: Go to UWI.

DS: UWI where?

A: Jamaica. There was only Jamaica then.

DS: That's right. And you're there for three years. What do you major in?

A: French.

DS: Oh, I think you did tell me that.

A: I probably laughed in exactly the same way.

DS: Why do you laugh?

A: Well, because it was so un-thought-out. All that happened is I liked French; I used to come first in French so everybody assumed you do French, you go and do French. I really was a very thoughtless person in that way. And then—it's not like the American system, you don't get credits—all of a sudden, in the second year, I'm saying, "Oh my God, what am I doing?" But I couldn't change.

DS: And you return to Guyana round about '63?

A: In '64. But I had been coming back and forth [between Guyana and Jamaica].

DS: And you take up a position in Guyana?

A: No, first I went away. I went to France for one year. By the time I was finished my degree, of course, race relations in Guyana were absolutely fractured in ways that I couldn't find any way of being comfortable with. I remember a friend of mine showing me some poetry he had written and I didn't really know what to do with that. It was an Afro-Guyanese friend, and it was so absolutely bitter.

So I was glad to go. What had happened was that, before my year, the people who were doing French used to do a gap year; they used to go for a year to France before they did their final year. So I'd always had at the back of my mind the possibility of going, and I was glad to go; I was really fleeing from a scene that I didn't know how to deal with. I was in France for a year.

DS: The years that you are at UWI Mona are also crucial years for the emergence of an intellectual sensibility of which New World was perhaps the first embodiment. Lloyd Best is at UWI Mona for part of that time. Are you hooked into any conversations?

A: No. I had an utterly frivolous three years at Mona. I treated Mona like an extension of high school. I went to Mona very full of all the insecurities that I was attempting to describe earlier, and therefore that's what I used Mona for. I was friends with a group of girls and we spent a lot of time doing what some girls do, dressing up and checking out boys. It was the most prolonged period of willed frivolity in my entire life. I wanted to be this other person. I think I told you that people have pointed out to me that when Walter Rodney ran for some post or other I didn't even back him. These things are now thrown in my face. Of course, part of what I remember is that I backed the woman running against him because she was a woman (although, as I remember now, what left-wing friends called backward). Because of the trouble in Guyana, the only thing I did become a member of was a Guyana Society.

DS: This is the trouble between 1962 and 1964.[13]

13. On the violence between Black Friday, 1962, and the destruction of the Indian community at Wismar in 1964, see Maurice St. Pierre, "The 1962–64 Disturbances in Guyana," in Susan Craig, ed., *Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader* (Maracas: College Press, 1982); and Thomas J. Spinner, Jr., *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945–1983* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984).

A: Yes. And we [Guyanese students at UWI] were in total trouble. We could get no money, we couldn't come home, we couldn't pay fees, we couldn't pay for the [residence] hall—we couldn't do anything. I was secretary of the Guyana Society, and we had to work very hard because things were really perilous. But our work was practical. We were trying to work out how we were going to survive. For example, we were coming towards summer vacation, and the university said we couldn't stay on the campus. And none of us had any place to go or any money. We would go lobbying government and that kind of thing. The only thing faintly "political" about that (and I remember that because of what you raised before about region) was that you really felt isolated. You felt that Guyana did not belong to this region. There wasn't a lot of solidarity. There were individuals who helped individuals, but there was no sense that we were so intrinsic a part of region that there was some responsibility. The university authorities found it possible to tell us we couldn't stay on campus. Full stop! I remember having to go on the radio—and I remember how bitterly we resented it—I remember having to go on the radio with other Guyanese (I think I was on with the president of the society, Lorrimer Alexander)—begging for places to stay. I resented it; I think we all did. So it was when I came back from France that I went around New World.

DS: It's interesting what you say about your sense of not belonging to the region because I've heard from others that this is a moment—1958, 1959, 1960—of intense discussions about Federation supported by the university. The university, so it is said, sponsored a supportive atmosphere of discourse around region and regional solidarity.

A: You know, I think it has always been true in the Caribbean that there is a world to which I did not then belong. There is a world that accepts and promotes certain ideas, including region, and then there's a mass of the ordinary people—to which mass I very actively belonged—where that's not true. So I have no doubt that everything you're saying is true, but that's not where I was. Where I was with other students or with Jamaican people, or the Jamaican government, and in all of those places where we had to kind of try to navigate just surviving, no, I did not feel any sense of solidarity or sense of region.

DS: You are going back and forth between Kingston and Georgetown until '63, '64. Best once described Georgetown in the early 1960s as being possibly what France was in 1789. What Lloyd is getting at is not necessarily the *direction* of political movement but the sense of *intensity* of political discussion, political conflict, and so on. Do you have a

sense of a heightened intensity of political stakes and the political polarization of political claims in the early 1960s?

A: Yes, even though it is true that I was living in the way that I described, when I came back to Guyana I was always conscious each year (I went to UWI in 1961, so I would have come back for the first time in '62, then in '63, and so on) that the contradictions had grown, I don't want to say more acute, or sharper, but more visible. And the divisions, and the discussions over what to do, were increasingly in your face.

Now, there were different discussions taking place, because by then you had Lloyd and David de Caires and Miles Fitzpatrick and all the rest. I don't know if they were already New World, but those were the people who became New World, and that would be one kind of intensity of discussion. And then you would have the whole rest of the population without that sense of possibility of a way out of these fractures. They [New World] were into a certain kind of, not just analysis, but planning; and full of ideas of what could be done. That's not what I was feeling when I went home or when I went to my aunt and those places. I just felt as if we were moving closer and closer to something truly awful that would rupture Guyana in an unspeakable way.

DS: And that is your sense of '63, early '64, that the violence constituted a fundamental turning point. In what sense was this so?

A: First of all, what struck me as a kind of outsider . . . because I wasn't resident here [in Guyana], but also because it's what people accuse me of up to now. I'm always being accused of not feeling strongly enough about the location of the Black person. I don't know why you can't feel more than one thing at the same time, or why you can't see out of both your eyes. I perfectly well feel the location of the Black person. That doesn't stop me from seeing other people's location. I don't know . . . what struck me when I came back was something that I told you the last time, which was that I knew then that there wasn't yet any possibility that we [Africans and Indians] would be living the same history or telling the same story. Since I was not here, I would come and I would ask what happened. And they would tell me what happened, but each group would start at a different place. Because their starting point was always what had been done to *them.* Any atrocity that had been performed from their side was not an atrocity because it was self-defense. It's typical of what happens in all these places. But I don't come from all these places, I come from here. I had left a Guyana in 1961 that I knew had the possibilities of trouble, but had never thought that it could be so bad that one Guyanese would cry as

he's telling you about an atrocity against his group and another cry as he's or she's telling you about the atrocity against their group. After a while you weren't even sure that you knew the chronology of anything: even dates would shift. We do that up to now.

One of the things that strikes me about now is that if you talk to Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese they can tell you the same story as *two* stories; and it's now crystallized even into what [television] stations we look at. Afro-Guyanese get their news from some stations, and Indo-Guyanese get their news from others. That first started for me in the 1960s: these two different stories from these two people living in the same place. I went into a room three years ago where an Indo-Guyanese woman was going to launch a book that she'd written, and I'm uncomfortable because it seems to me that she's bitter against all Afro-Guyanese and I don't know what to do with that. The origin of her bitterness is incidents that took place in Linden in the early 1960s when Indo-Guyanese girls and women were raped. She walks with that on her chest. You can tell that. You could tell that people would walk with this thing on their chest. Then there are Afro-Guyanese who tell you of another atrocity, and say that the Linden atrocity was revenge for that atrocity. I don't fully understand the chronology even now; I only know that raping a girl child or a woman and pushing broken glass up her vagina is, for me as a woman, an unspeakable horror—indefensible as "revenge" for any other horror.

DS: Is it that 1964 constitutes a distinctive kind of violation? Or is it that the context in which these violations take place is new and different? Is the scale of 1964 different? How does one get a hold of the *difference* that constitutes the particular violence and violations of 1964?

A: One of the things that you will hear Guyanese saying up to now is that we all get on very well. I don't believe that. But I had no acquaintance with Guyanese—with all the mutual disrespect that had been present in our relations—I had no acquaintance with the two sets of Guyanese dehumanizing each other until *then.* The violence was both product and producer of that. In that sense it represented a break.

Ratoon and MAO

DS: You return from France in 1965. And you do what?

A: Well, I had been invited back. My father sends to tell me that my uncle Odo [Forbes Burnham] had sent to tell me that the country was moving towards independence and so they would have a diplomatic service and I should apply. And I put up a sign. I put

up signs. And apparently a lot of applications came in. And he told my father that I was a fool. Because this apparently was some favor he was doing me.

DS: He told your father that what?

A: He told my father I was as stupid as he, he my father.

DS: Oh. He didn't need the signs.

A: He wasn't sending to invite Guyanese to apply for any job; he was giving me a job.

DS: As a favor to you.

A: Right. And I didn't get it. Anyway, I came back and we weren't independent yet. So I went to work at the Ministry of External Affairs. During that time we were given a thirteen-week course of training to enter the diplomatic service. And I did that course because that was where I was supposed to be going.

DS: I see. And around that time you became associated with New World people?

A: Yes, I just kind of fell into it. On the one hand, I think I was ready to stop being totally frivolous. On the other hand, it's a small world, and this person introduced you to that person, and so on. I remember the first night going into this house and there meeting Lloyd Best and all the others.

DS: When do you become part of Ratoon? Tell me a little bit about what Ratoon is and when your relationship with them begins.

A: You know, the decisive move towards a political life was not Ratoon, it was later, with MAO (Movement Against Oppression). I came back [to Guyana] in 1965. I'll go back to Ratoon just now, but let me just say that in 1970 I joined MAO, which was really formed largely out of Ratoon and people in a particular community in Georgetown, Tiger Bay. That was the first time that I think I made as definitive a step as that. So from '65 to '70, I'm around New World, I'm around Ratoon. Those are the same years that at the personal level, I'm moving almost by instinct away from the sector that Kwayana once called "the crucible of my rebellion."

I'm around New World and Ratoon, which are not organizations in which you have membership. In Ratoon, which was largely located in the university, I'd be helping with publications. My strongest memory of both Ratoon and New World is the excitement of being part of a world of ideas, because, after all, my other world is one that has increasingly moved far away from the ferment and enthusiasm of the fifties to something that behaves as if there's no way out. Then came New World and then Ratoon. But I didn't do much more in either New World or Ratoon than help occasionally with the production of publications.

DS: Ratoon was principally a paper?

A: Yes. Because in the 1950s, if you were looking for the ferment of ideas, you were looking to the political parties, to that political world. Now that was no longer true, and the only place I knew in which ideas were coming up at all and being discussed was in the university world and in that kind of very small intellectual world. It made some sense to me, but not totally. I remember David de Caires and Lloyd Best used to be filled with enthusiasm as these documents were being produced. Even now when I look back at them, some of those things were a little dense, but Lloyd would be totally enthusiastic and he'd be going around to all kind of rum shops and so on, trying to sell [*New World Quarterly*].

My point in raising this is that while I was excited by this, it couldn't quite hook me; because I didn't see how to make the connection between this world of ideas and everybody else (by which I would mean, in those days, poor people). That's what MAO represented for me—when Ratoon saw the need for a link between itself and that actual community, beginning with something as concrete as the murder of Black men by the police. That made sense to me. That made more sense to me than being what Ratoon proper was about.

DS: But Ratoon had a relationship to New World. There was an overlap.

A: It's a large overlap. It's hard for me to remember across these years precise details about New World versus Ratoon. Clive Thomas, for example, was in both.[14]

14. Clive Thomas is one of the most distinguished Caribbean thinkers. A key member of the Ratoon Group and the WPA, he is the author, among many other things, of *Dependence and Transformation: The Economics of the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), and *The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

DS: But not everyone who was part of Ratoon became part of Movement Against Oppression.

A: No, but central people did. Clive did, Josh Ramsammy did, Maurice Odle did, Bonita Harris did. After we formed MAO they attempted to murder Josh; we too often forget that. There were other people in MAO who, like me, might have been around Ratoon; I really don't remember well. I'm thinking about a man like Brian Rodway; and Freddy Kissoon. And all those people continued in politics. Those are some of the same people who then became founding members of the WPA [Working People's Alliance].

DS: New World was less an oppositional *political* movement than an oppositional *intellectual* movement, concerned to think about the problem of the new nations. But Ratoon is the beginnings of a much more aggressively oppositional political sensibility in the Guyana of the 1960s?

A: Yes. What Ratoon was, certainly to me, was the nonparty political opposition. In other words, nobody there was going to join one of those two political parties [PPP or PNC]. But nobody there was content, either, with being on the outside of politics. I was never part of any discussion that said, "And one day we're going to form a political party." I know of no such thing. But certainly we felt as though that political struggle, which was owned and dominated by the two political parties, needed something else; that one had to oppose what was going on, but not by joining a party. So it was much more *interventionist* and *activist* than New World was. Or at least, as I knew it.[15]

DS: Can you put a date to the emergence of Ratoon?

A: I think of Ratoon as being 1968, but that may be too late. But I think of it as being '68. I think of New World as being from the beginning of the sixties, and of Ratoon as emerging around postindependence.[16] That may be purely subjective, because that's when I moved towards them.

DS: So Ratoon is oppositional, and Ratoon is critical of both the PPP as well as the PNC. But, of course, it is the PNC that is in power. So is this an emerging critique of the Burnham regime as a whole, or is it a critique of *aspects* of Burnham's policy?

15. On Ratoon, see Andrew Salkey, "Interview with Dr. Omawale," in *Georgetown Journal* (London: New Beacon Books, 1972), 410–16.
16. British Guiana became independent on 26 May 1966 and henceforth became known as Guyana.

A: No, it was more than aspects of Burnham's policy. Even if the critique was not as well worked out—no, that's not what I want to say. Clive did a lot of the writing around Ratoon. Clive also did a lot of writing around the early WPA. You can trace a line from the one to the other. It's not a circuitous road at all. Much of the analysis that fed the WPA was present in Ratoon. You can't say "the whole analysis" because there was all that others brought from their experience, most prominently Eusi and Walter. Moses Bhagwan as well. But the analysis of both Ratoon and the WPA was that what Burnham was doing was not socialism. The later analysis of his use of the state to consolidate his own very narrow class interests had its roots in Ratoon. So it wasn't *aspects*. Although it was true that as good socialists we agreed in principle with many of the things that Burnham did—parts of the foreign policy, the nationalization, and so on—there was always the position from Ratoon days that he [Burnham] was doing them for the wrong reasons and putting them to the wrong use.

DS: But was there a sense *then* that he was a positive danger? Or did that come later?

A: Later. But I think there was no question that we were opposed to him and opposed in the sense that you weren't thinking that maybe if he corrected some things he could be acceptable. It was far stronger than that. But the sense of *danger,* no. I think that was later.

DS: Ratoon is emerging at a time when Walter Rodney has been denied reentry into Jamaica in October 1968 and is no longer in the region.[17] Why does Rodney not come back to Guyana at that point and be part of this emerging set of discussions—New World, Ratoon, MAO, and so on?

A: I don't know. I only know what I told you, which is that at the beginning of the seventies he said that he couldn't come back until the race situation had reached a point where you could begin to do more than talk but actually (meaning, on the ground) bring the two together. That's a very bad way of putting it, so let me try again. What he actually said was that he could not possibly join [the existing parties]. Burnham was out of the question. He could not possibly join Cheddi. He did not at all agree with Eusi.

17. See Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1998).

DS: Eusi in ASCRIA.

A: And that was a dilemma; that was a problem for him. Nor could he see how you could do anything multiracial. And until he could see that, he would not be able to find what his work was here [in Guyana].

DS: Does gender emerge as a visible, significant category in any of the organizations of the late 1960s, early 1970s, whether Ratoon, MAO . . . ?

A: No. Unequivocally, no.

DS: When do you become a schoolteacher, and where?

A: In 1967, at Charlestown. I wanted to teach in a working-class area. I didn't want to teach at Bishops'. So I chose Charlestown, and it was one of the best choices of my life.

DS: Eventually, is that the same school that you become acting head of?

A: No. I want to mention a quite extraordinary headmaster called Edgar Wilson. He managed to inspire several of his teachers to such a quantity and quality of work that a class of working-class children who had been sent over (it was a newly opened junior secondary) at about age fifteen or sixteen managed to pass their O levels before they had to leave school at eighteen. Two years to do O levels, instead of the five years that middle-class kids had. He managed to lead us to such an extraordinary kind of work that they passed.

All kinds of people came from there. Henry Mootoo comes from there; he is now a well-known stage director. So that was great, and I got promoted fairly rapidly; I think I was acting senior mistress within about a year. And then Shirley Field-Ridley, who was minister of education at the time, and a personal friend of mine temporarily, wanted to try an experiment. She said that what she wanted to do was to change the culture of the schools from the old authoritarian mode of beating, and she thought the best way to do that was to do an experiment with four young people. I was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight (I think we all were), and I was made an acting head teacher, much to the grief of the older ones. Now that I'm old myself, I think they were right to be grieved. But I didn't see it at the time. I just thought it was a great experiment.

DS: What year was that?

A: I went to South Georgetown in 1970.

DS: And in 1971, famously, you were fired. What are the circumstances around that?

A: I had joined MAO, which I think I told you yesterday was the first activist political group I belonged to. I had had some trouble with the Ministry [of Education] during the year. It started from the very beginning. For example, when I got to South Georgetown I thought I was starting with about one hundred children; I think there were about four hundred. That's fine, but the furniture was for one hundred. And I went down to the ministry to ask for more furniture, and they say they don't have any and I see a truck going down the road with furniture and I say, "Where is that going?" and they say, "Bishops'," and I go mad. And nobody is taking me on, so I throw a chair. I'm never sure looking back how much of my behavior was deliberate and how much [was not] because a part of it was to draw attention. Because they were all behaving as if this was normal. Now I went to Bishops' myself, but all I'm saying is that it is not correct to give Bishops' more furniture and have these poor-ass children sitting six to a chair. Anyway, I'd always had trouble.

DS: Let me interject and ask you a quick question here. Do you think of yourself as an intemperate person?

A: No, I think of myself as a person who is, a lot of the time, far too laid back; far too unwilling to challenge. I am very much my father's daughter. I once accused my father of being able to see thirty-something hands, you know, on the one hand, and on the second hand, and on the third hand, and on the fourth hand. The ability to see all sides of a question is good, but after a while it's immobilizing. I have that disability. But I lose my temper at a certain point. Sometimes I don't know until afterwards what it is I've lost my temper about. It's usually about something that was enraging me silently for a long time.

I'd had some other trouble with the ministry. The kids didn't have any books and didn't have any money for books in the "free" education system, and I frankly did not understand the terms of my employment. What does the ministry decide and what do you decide? It seemed to me a quite normal thing to get parents together and teachers together and to discuss and decide that what we would do is to pool money and buy

books in common. To me, the issue was, were the teachers willing to put up with the strain of this, were the parents willing to risk it, were you going to be accountable for the money? But the ministry objected because, I think, I didn't go through the right channels.

All this time, while I'm having trouble with the bureaucrats in the ministry, the professionals, Shirley Field-Ridley does not find any of this peculiar, she finds all of it amusing; because she knows it, either from them, or because she and I are friends. None of this grieves her. And then all of a sudden one day, a vehicle arrives and the driver gives me a note which says, "Honourable Minister instructs you to report to the Ministry without delay." I had sent for some parents to talk about their children, and this was a battle between me and the parents because they preferred me to leave them alone to do their work and discipline their children by beating them. I didn't beat children and I did not allow any teachers in the school to beat children, so I had to do it another way. And the other way has a lot to do with talking. You can't send for parents who work in the market and then tell them you gone to the minister, no. So I wrote to the minister that I was seeing some parents and I would be there as soon as I was finished. Then I went. She was sitting behind a desk and held up this piece of paper and asked if I was responsible for this caricature of the prime minister. I laughed. I said, "That's not a caricature."

DS: What was she referring to?

A: A leaflet from MAO. I said, "It's not a caricature." MAO was so poor that we often didn't have—all of those organizations, the early WPA too—a typewriter. I remember vaguely that what had happened was that somebody's personal typewriter that we'd expected to use had broken down, and we wanted to put out this two-page thing so we actually wrote it by hand. And in this small, little kiss-me-ass country, Shirley said to me, "Brian [Rodway] wrote this part," and I said, "Yes he did." "Omawale wrote that part," I said, "I think so." And she said, "And you wrote that part." I said, "Yes, I did."[18]

DS: Was she identifying the content, or the handwriting?

A: Both. So I said, "Yes, I did." And she cried and said, "But Sandra, I defended you at Cabinet this morning." And I said, "Shirley, you discussed me at Cabinet and this piece

18. Brian Rodway and Omawale were both founding members of the WPA. Omawale was also a member of ASCRIA and the Ratoon Group.

of paper? In this country with all these problems, you discussed me and this piece of paper in your Cabinet?" I was still laughing. She continued. And I muttered, I thought under my breath, "What a damn good thing I have been thinking of resigning from the blasted work." And she said, "You resigning?" I said, "Oh, don't be so cheap. I didn't say I'm resigning. Don't leap on that. I did not say I'm resigning. And now that you leap on it, the answer is no, I'm not resigning." So she told me to go back to school and I went. Then I was summoned before the hierarchy of the ministry, and it was very weird, because these were men from the world of my parents. You're summoned into this room and there's Uncle Basil Arno and others like him, and they're looking as if they really wish they were not here; this child does not behave properly but they don't want to be here. Besides which, I'm sure they had not really agreed with the experiment, so, even from that point of view, they must have resented that they were left holding the baby. Anyway, they asked me what happened, and I told them. They told me to go outside and I realized that what they were going to do was to call Shirley. So I picked up the extension. And they told her that they couldn't find the grounds for firing me. So she dictated a letter which accepted my resignation.

DS: They pitched it as though you had in fact offered your resignation.

A: They didn't. She did, yes.

DS: Did you contest that?

A: Well, I tried. I tried, but I didn't do very well. The letter accepting the resignation I hadn't tendered instructed me to proceed on leave without delay. So I went to school the next morning, because I wasn't going to proceed on leave. You know, you really don't know what you do on purpose to get out of things. On my way to school, I think in a taxi, I don't drive, I'm afraid to drive—so somebody was driving me, I don't remember who, and I saw my aunt, the one that I'd grown up with. I think it was normal to offer my aunt a drop home with her market things, but I think I was also afraid to go into the school. I was going, but I wasn't ready. So when I got there, the deputy head was sitting in the office. When I got there she said, "Sandra?" and I said, "I'm here. Are you asking me if I'm here *as* head? Yes, I am." So she got up and she left, and then this noise erupted and it was the children. And I made a mistake then. They were massing to march.

DS: In support of you.

A: Yes, shouting, "We want we Miss," and chanting against other individuals—including the teacher they thought was replacing me. None of these people had contributed in any way to my being removed. I don't think the children would have wanted to see—certainly most of their parents, as PNC party supporters and members, would not have wanted to see—that I had been removed by a government which could less and less brook opposition. I remember that as I listened to the children chanting I thought, "But they don't get it. And therefore it's almost as if I am using them." So I stopped them. My refusal to go on leave continued for a while, but unfortunately what happened in the end was that I gave in. I was ill. I had a hysterectomy. So I was in the physical pain that led to the hysterectomy. And then—I was, after all, only twenty-nine—I found the fact of having a hysterectomy quite devastating. And so my spirit gave in.

DS: Do you think that you were being singled out? Were there other persons involved in MAO who were also finding themselves victims of state discrimination?

A: As far as I remember, nobody else was in my position. Remember that MAO was a coming together of people who worked at the university, and people from the community. I don't remember that we had a lot of people who would have been employed by the government in the kind of civil servant position where they think they have a right to tell you what to do. I don't remember that that was true. I did think that it was personal, but personal in the sense that somewhere embedded in it was how Shirley herself had changed over the year, during which she had married Hamilton Greene. She had not been hardliner or authoritarian or unwilling to work with non-PNC people, but he was. I don't have a right to say why she changed; I will just say that she changed over that year. What I said to her the day she was crying was: "But I have done nothing to deceive you. When you made me acting head teacher [we were all acting because we couldn't be appointed] not only was I already in MAO, already opposed to the government, but you told me that members of your party asked, 'What kind of choices are those?' So why are you behaving now as if I changed? You changed, not me." We are talking about 1971, and by then I think the PNC was beginning to become more demanding of obedience and loyalty.

DS: Was there a sense on her part, and perhaps on the part of those members of the committee that met to decide your case (all people who were friends of your family), that not only was this person they knew as a child misbehaving, but that misbehavior now constituted something like political betrayal or social betrayal?

A: Certainly *disloyalty,* yes. That has characterized my whole adult life. It's still so now, but in a different way. But from that period, through the years of the WPA, I was regularly told that I was, or treated as though I was, disloyal. I was very conscious of the fact that the place from which I came, and I don't just mean Black people, I mean the Black professional middle class, found me not only disruptive in an annoying way but *disloyal.*

DS: Because, in a certain sense, you were still the "people's child."

A: The people's child, yes.

DS: Was Bill Carr also a member of MAO?

A: No, no. I am trying to get my years correct. He wasn't a member of MAO. He was around it but he wasn't a member.

DS: But he was part of Ratoon?

A: He wasn't in Ratoon either. The one side I remember Bill being attracted to was the PPP, and, in fact, it was a source of great strain in the relationship.

DS: When you are involved with MAO and this whole business is occurring with the Ministry of Education what was your parents' view of who you have become?

A: I think that a large part of my parents' response to me, also because of the degree of personal turbulence in my life, was fear. Fear for me.

DS: Fear *for* you.

A: But we didn't have a relationship in which this was discussed. They never said anything to me about anything I was doing. Nothing that I did either personally or politically was discussed; little chance things only. At the same time, somewhere inside, they were very loyal to me, and it would come out in two ways. Many years later, when I was in the WPA, and my father was Burnham's doctor, the police went to search their house. You asked me if I was intemperate. My mother is an intemperate person, so she was expressing her anger quite openly. My father is a very quiet man, but I gather that when

they said I was seen going into the yard with arms and ammunition he said, "Whatever else might be said about my daughter, she is extremely bright. And I know that you're not suggesting that she came in here with a box marked 'ARMS AND AMMUNITION' in big letters." That would be his notion of a defense.

DS: So although it sounds as though there was not a great deal of emotional closeness between yourself and your parents, they nevertheless had a very significant regard for their daughter.

A: I think so. But also, I think it was a mixture of the fear that I mentioned, a kind of incomprehension sometimes; but I think there was a lot of comprehension as well. I think that a lot of how I think is like my father. After all, it's largely my father who is responsible for the fact that I didn't grow up with parents who were in any overt way anti-Indian. So part of how I think comes from them. I also think a lot of the dislocation I used to feel was like my mother. I think my mother would have been sympathetic, whether she agreed or not, to the disruptiveness of my personality and my life, because even though she had become this person called Mrs. Williams, this society lady, there was something inside her that wasn't that at all. She did not like the world as it was.

DS: Let me ask you the question from a slightly different angle. Do you have a sense, as Burnham is becoming increasingly authoritarian, that there is a worry about Burnham on the part of the Black middle class?

A: No. That's what I disliked most about them. Not only did I not sense it but when you asked them, the answer was no. I asked my father and he gave me a list of the reasons why he supported Burnham, which I told him were utterly fraudulent. No. Walter once asked me what it would take for my father to break with Burnham. And the answer turned out to be Walter's death.

DS: Walter's death?

A: My father walked at the head of Walter's funeral procession, next to Pat Rodney, knowing what the result would be, that he and Burnham would break.

Look, Walter, Rupert, Omawale, Jocelyn Dow—all the people that I'd grown up with and other people I'd met in the WPA—went to my parents' house during the WPA days. We were never banned or barred from the house. We went there, we ate there;

sometimes for security reasons we couldn't sleep in the same place, so that was one of the places a few of us slept. But it did not alter my parents' unswerving connection and loyalty to Burnham.

DS: So your parents' fear for your safety (and presumably it is not a fear for your soul, but a fear for your physical safety) was not connected in their minds to a regime that could potentially act with violence towards you?

A: I'm not sure if they ever thought the regime might act with serious violence. When the first two WPA men were killed—Ohene Koama and Edward Dublin—I think they would just have accepted that they were doing something illegal and were killed in the process.[19] There might have been an unspoken class thing. They thought that I would continue to get into trouble in the sense of being searched by the police, in the sense of being picked up. They knew stories about us being picked up and carried off somewhere in the countryside and left to find our way back. They knew that most of us had been in the lockup for at least one day, two days, and so on. They knew that our meetings were broken up and we were roughed up. They knew all of that. That's what they were afraid of. And so they knew that we were dealing with a regime that would do that. In all honesty, I think they believed that the regime was right and we were wrong. That's what I felt. I think that they simultaneously would have preferred the regime not to use those methods, but felt that Burnham's policies were correct and that we were wrong to oppose him.

DS: But the fear that you're describing that your parents felt for your safety is something that you detect in late 1960s, early 1970s; that is, from the time that you are becoming involved in political activity.

A: Not my physical safety; not in the early years. I can't separate the fear that my parents felt for me from the level of unorthodoxy of my personal life. I think the fear was the fear that you would have for a daughter or a son, but I guess a daughter, in particular, who does not behave as if she's going to do the normal things that make life comfortable.

19. Ohene Koama was killed on Sunday, 18 November 1979. The official story was that he had attempted to shoot at a police party that had stopped to ask him about a bag being placed in the trunk of his car. The WPA always claimed that Koama was unarmed and was shot in cold blood. See Spinner, *Political and Social History*, 176. Edward Dublin, a bauxite worker, was killed by police on 29 February 1980 while allegedly stealing sacks of cement from a cinema construction site. Again the WPA always insisted on his innocence.

DS: I have a sense of what that meant in terms of your political activity, but what else does that mean?

A: Well, it means all kinds of things. When I came back from UWI, or from France, I decided to share a flat with a friend, Monica Jardine. We turned out to be the first two young women from the middle class who had moved from their parents' house without getting married. It's almost amusing to think of now, but this was very devastating to them. Then, I lived with Bill Carr.[20] I wasn't married to him; but *he* was still married to somebody else. One of my parents' friends said to me, "Dear, even if you go home at three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning, and let him pick you back up at six o'clock; as long as the clothes are home." That didn't make sense to me. Bill Carr drank. Eventually, I did too; I learned it out of self-defense. I was living with a man who was not a proper white man but one who broke things, who frequented rum shops and who was some kind of PPP sympathizer. My parents found my personal choices unorthodox and unsafe.

DS: Unorthodox and unsafe, but also a betrayal of values that they expected your loyalty to—social values, personal values, the values that constituted in some way the core of middle-class respectability?

A: In part. In all honesty, I felt that less from my own parents than I felt it from everybody else. I believe there was a piece of both my parents that was never quite middle class. I really do. They were upset about what people said about me, they were upset about what their friends and their world thought about me, but I always felt less disapproved of as disloyal by my parents than by everybody else, the rest of my blood family and the rest of my nonblood family. The thing was almost palpable.

DS: Let me ask you one more question about this, because I am fascinated by what appears to me a sense that there were ways in which your parents were intriguing to you. They were, in some sense, atypical of their class, and although you didn't share much with them in terms of political orientation, loyalty to certain values, there was—*is*—some identification with them, however edgy it may be.

20. Bill Carr taught at the University of the West Indies, Mona, for many years before going to teach at the University of Guyana. See Salkey's warm remarks in his *Georgetown Journal*, 25. See also, Matthew Carr's memoir of his father, *My Father's House* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1998). I am grateful to Shivaun Hearne for bringing this book to my attention.

A: Yes, everything you said is absolutely true, although I always wished they *weren't* my parents. Because the piece of them that was not like the rest, that could make me therefore like and respect them, was, if you like, as *people*, not as parents. I found them extremely difficult as parents, as I explained to them many years later; but they had apparently not thought about it. You do not leave a child to grow up in such orthodoxy from age two to age eight and then, without recognizing the difficulties of transition, take her into such a different life. It just doesn't work. And so I've always felt, in an emotional sense, utterly unsupported at home because that was not my experience or my expectation of what home was. So there is a friction there, between a lack of closeness between us as daughter and parents and, yes, something that I always did see in them. First of all, they led me into a life that was sometimes very exciting; so each of those things had a positive and a negative—exciting but, oh my God, not solid, not stable, not secure. But certainly there was always a piece of them that was different from the rest of the people around them.

DS: What impression did your mother's sister's family (with whom you grew up) have of your parents?

A: Well, all of my family grew quite close to my father, who was—is—a very—I was going to say warm person, but he is not, so I don't know what's the word I want. But he's helpful, he's kind, he's supportive. He would have been everybody's doctor. Frank's or Frankie's would be a place where you go to talk, to consult. That was true of *my* friends as well. Uncle Frank's is a place where you go to say what is happening that you don't tell your parents.

DS: I had the sense of a charming, cosmopolitan man.

A: And I know it's a wrong sense, because he is that, but he's also a country boy. To look at, my father is what people would choose to call unprepossessing; that would be the best word for him. And he's not the life and soul of anything. But he is a very good person and he is a person to whom people respond. People stop me on the road to ask me where he is, people who worked with him thirty, forty years ago. That's what he was like. Sorry, I lost your question. You lost it too.

DS: Yes.

A: Oh, my mother's family. My mother's family always dealt with my household as if it was weird. That was their response to the household *as* household. Because the household did not behave in the way theirs did. And this would be everything ranging from personal stuff to the very structure of the household, to the fact that we didn't do normal things like eat together. This was notwithstanding whatever their relationships with the individuals in it were.

DS: You are an only child?

A: I am an only child with a foster brother who is actually my cousin. His name is Abbyssinian, and from childhood he was the most solid thing in my life. Later, when I had cancer, he left his home and work in New York to come to Barbados to "nurse" me. He is one of those rare men who do caring work without being forced to.

New York

DS: Nineteen seventy-one, your resignation is staged and you are, in effect, fired. And as is well known, you leave the country. You go to New York. How is that decision arrived at?

A: It wasn't. I felt, after I had the hysterectomy and lost my job, that I didn't know what to do next. I really can't overstress how emotionally disruptive I found having the hysterectomy. First of all, it has an enormous physical effect on you. But secondly, it doesn't matter who you are, there's no way of getting past the myth of what it is to be normal, and a big part of the reality of what it is to be *female*. And there you are, you're not even thirty yet, and you can't produce children. I found it very difficult. So going to New York was meant only to be a cooling out for three months. But I went and I met up with friends there who introduced me in turn to Afro-Americans. And the suggestion evolved that one of them could get me a job. I didn't know what to do next here [in Guyana], either personally or politically. But I was past the stage where I could will myself back into frivolity. So, in a sense, that escape meant that I could engage in what I would have thought of then as other people's politics. I stayed for more than five years. I never meant to. It just became habit after a while. But I did get involved again, on the fringes of things, the fringes of the Black Power movement, the fringes of the civil rights movement, the struggles in Nicaragua. There's a whole world like that in New York, as I'm sure you know. And it was even stronger, in a way, *then*.

In a less intellectual way, it reminded me of the early days in New World. Everybody that was around me was somebody that was involved in the politics of the United States and the world. It wasn't a thing that you did off on the side. So, for example, if you worked for a university, which was what I did, it was in the program with African American and Puerto Rican students, and you got involved in the politics of that. I was very involved in those politics. We had a kind of elected committee which I was on.

DS: What university?

A: Queens College [of the City University of New York]; but in the SEEK [Search for Education and Elevation through Knowledge] program, that kind of very American name. It was a program designed for "disadvantaged" students. It behaved as if it was in the university, but the job was really to try to bring the students to university standard. There was a kind of political ferment. So what SEEK becomes, especially at Queens, but in other places as well, is this highly politicized place that is always engaged, either in fighting the administration of Queens College or in the wider politics of the United States and the world.

DS: This is a period in which civil rights is tapering off, the Black Power movement is coming up, but also one in which the US administration is responding to the Black Power movement by creating spaces inside the universities, partly as a way to disarm it. And there are a number of Caribbean folk who are entering the US, entering through the emerging Black Studies programs, and are finding a niche in that moment of transformation.

A: That's right; that's right.

DS: Before we move on through the 1970s, you describe yourself as someone for whom frivolity is a constant temptation.

A: It is, as escape. At one level it has to do with insecurities that grow less the older you grow. My teens were a period in which I describe myself as being bitterly unhappy; I really was. But very few people believe that. I had this gang of friends (I'm using "gang" in the old-time sense; it had no meaning). We dressed, as the Jamaicans would say, "to puss back-foot." I remember being called at school by my form-teacher, Mrs. Jarvis, to say that she had read my name in the newspapers four times for the week at parties. I

wanted to be that. I very much wanted to be that. I was very afraid, myself, of my own capacity for disturbance. There was an incident where I went to pick up my friend who lived across the road and she asked me why I was looking sad, and I told her something or the other had happened in China. And she stopped her bike and she stopped my bike and she said, "Sandra, what China have to do with you?" I didn't know how to answer. She said, "Hear me good. China don't have nothing to do with you. You like to get up every morning and make up something to feel bad about, you have to stop! Come leh we go to school." I really did wonder about that. And so it would become very important not to be that person who looked all the way to China for things to worry about. For all I know, there might have been two dozen of us exactly like that. For all I know, we were fooling each other. But I certainly don't know any acknowledgment outside of this one person I mentioned, Monica, of this kind of disturbance with your own life, with your parents, with the world as it is. And so I dressed up every day and I went to parties. And then I went to UWI and I did the same thing. But my active political life began in about 1970 and, with only a few breaks, has continued for more than thirty years.

DS: The 1970s, early to mid-1970s, you are in New York. Do you maintain contact with folk in Guyana, people in Ratoon, people in MAO, and so on?

A: No, no. I was in fact out of contact with Guyana until I was brought back in contact probably about 1975. An African American woman who was married to a Guyanese was the first person to tell me what was happening in relation to the then pre-party WPA. And beginning in that same period, Walter began to visit the States from time to time and I would see him then. By about '76 I had begun to support the WPA, and therefore was back in touch that way.

DS: Rodney returns to Guyana in 1974. When Rodney begins to visit the US, this is largely to make a living because he's been denied the position at UG [University of Guyana]. Are the discussions for the formation of a political party in motion by the time he begins to visit in '76? This is my impression of what you just said.

A: No, not political party. The WPA was formed in '74, as soon as Walter came back, but, as far as I know, it took quite awhile before they discussed becoming a political party. The WPA was a loose formation of people who met (I think it was every two weeks), and who did enormous work, but not yet as a political party. Those discussions came later.

DS: So you were not then part of the discussions to form the WPA.

A: Yes, I was, because I came back to Guyana in January '78 to live. And the WPA was formed as a party in July '79.

DS: But you said that the WPA was formed in '74.

A: The WPA as a *pre-party* was formed in '74. The WPA *as a party* was formed in July '79.

DS: But I want to talk a little bit about the pre-party WPA and the discussion out of which that is formed. The WPA as a pre-party formation is literally an alliance of groups that are already in existence. What were these groups?

A: IPRA [Indian People's Revolutionary Association], that would be Moses Bhagwan and others, ASCRIA, WPVP [Working People's Vanguard Party], led by Brindley Benn. And Ratoon, wasn't it? Plus individuals like Walter.

DS: Yes, and Ratoon. So besides your connection to Ratoon you didn't have an ongoing intimate connection with any of these groups while you are in New York.

A: Not outside my connection to Ratoon; I had no connection with any of the groups, only with individuals. It's impossible to be totally out of touch, but I do remember that the first years that I was in the United States my far greater political engagement was with what was around me. I remember that. I felt as though I was reentering Guyana somewhere around '75, '76.

DS: You mean in your headspace.

A: In my head.

DS: So then, the decision to return to Guyana in 1978 is a decision that has to do with the point at which there is a more established, firmer discussion of the new political situation? I am trying to get a sense of why return *then* in '78 rather than, say, '75 or '76.

A: Well, that's because you always ascribe my decisions to something grand rather than to how I respond concretely to the world around me. I had begun to support the WPA,

to do things that they asked me to do, to send money. I saw Walter whenever he came up. Very few other people came up, but I saw whoever came up. But I didn't know what I was going to do. For one thing, I had started writing something that I've never finished, and, in fact, was in just little bits and pieces, but it was in my head, and I thought of doing that.

DS: Little bits of what kinds of things?

A: I didn't know what it was going to be.

DS: Fiction, nonfiction?

A: Fiction, but, you know, everybody's first piece of fiction tends to be autobiographical.

DS: But fictional, as in those passages in the Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture?[21]

A: Yes, that's where that came from. In fact, some of that came from the first page I ever wrote, which George Lamming marked as if I was a schoolchild: "Very good, very good, no, shorter word," and so on. I came back in January '78 through Rupert Roopnaraine. Rupert, Walter, and I are very close in age, and have always known each other. I don't mean we were friends, but we have always known each other. We're too close in age not to know each other through QC [Queen's College], Bishops', debating, and so on. And Rupert, in particular, for some time was in the same "gang" that I was in. We went to the same parties, we knew the same people. I had not seen Rupert since we were eighteen, when he migrated with his parents [to the United Kingdom]. I got a phone call from mutual friends in NY to say that Rupert had been to Guyana, was doing a film on 1953, and wanted me to come to look at the rough cut. And this is what happened. I went to see the rough cut. This is 1977. And there's this absolutely wonderful moment [in the film] when, against the backdrop of this turbulent politics of the 1950s in Guyana (and you're seeing images of British soldiers), the song that is suddenly played is "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?" I could not stop laughing. Rupert was really pleased, because it meant it worked. It was such an extraordinary evocation of the kind of disjunctures that I certainly had felt in those years—that there was this one thing that was

21. See Andaiye, "The Angle You Look From," 5–7.

happening which was huge and excited you, and at the same time there was something very over-conventional and stereotypical and confining about the social values into which I was being raised, exemplified by songs like "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window"—it was such an extraordinary evocation that if my headspace was not already in Guyana, it just totally entered. And so I was ripe for the picking, and was picked. A short while later, Rupert said to me that Walter had told him that he should come home and help him; and so he was saying to me that I should come home and help too. And I was ready, so I said okay. I went home to my flat in NY and I packed my books and I posted them, knowing full well I would have to follow them. Who ever sends their books without themselves? Yes, so I came [home].

DS: Rupert and his family would have migrated in the wake of the troubles of the sixties.

A: Yes. Rupert's father [Roopnaraine] was active in the PPP.

Inside the Working People's Alliance

DS: So let's talk a little bit about the WPA in its shift from a pre-party formation to a party formation. You return on the eve of its becoming formally a political party. What's going on in Guyana, and what is going on inside debates among those who are involved in the pre-party structure that is propelling it in the direction of becoming a formal political party?

A: You know, things moved much more slowly than that—and then leapt. So January '78 is far from being the "eve" of the WPA becoming a party. And maybe "pre-party" is a misnomer because it suggests that we were always thinking of becoming a party, which is not so.

Before I came back [to Guyana], they had done all kinds of work. Walter, Eusi, Clive, and others were doing bottom house classes with bauxite workers and sugar workers. They had done that extraordinary organizing around Arnold Rampersaud, extraordinary for Guyana because what it meant was that a group of largely Afro-Guyanese people rose to the defense of an Indo-Guyanese PPP man.[22] [They rose up] not only

22. Arnold Rampersaud was a PPP activist who was alleged to have shot and killed a police constable, James Henry, at a toll station on the Corentyne. Along with PPP members, Walter Rodney and Eusi Kwayana were part of a defense committee that contended that Rampersaud was being framed by the PNC government. He was acquitted of the charges after three trials.

Photo courtesy Nigel Westmaas

Andaiye addressing a demonstration staged by women, circa 1979

against the Afro-Guyanese government but against the Afro-Guyanese police. They were here and they were active, but they still thought of themselves as a pressure group, and as a group, if you like, working to change . . . I hate people who talk about changing consciousness, so I'll withdraw that. I think what they were trying to build was the possibility of multiracialness, particularly among workers—hence the concentration on bauxite workers and sugar workers.

They had an executive; that was the structure. The WPA itself met every two weeks, the whole fifty-something people, somewhat shifting. A huge core of people came all the time, but [its size was] shifting otherwise. That [executive] was their only structure, to which Rupert and I got elected at the first meeting. This stunned us because, I forgot to tell you that what he and I had decided was that we would come back and stay, but we knew we weren't going into the PPP, we knew we weren't going into the PNC, and we were not sure that we were going into the WPA either. There were some other things that we wanted to do. He in particular wanted to make films; he wanted to write. We had this group called the Victor Jara Collective, which was named after a Chilean killed in the September 1973 overthrow of Salvador Allende. Later we used to laugh at ourselves, because all we managed was to put out one or two volume ones, number ones, you know those things? We put out the first volume of the magazine, and the first this, and the first that, but we never reached the second. We were quite tickled when we both came out of the first meeting that we were attending as members of the WPA executive.

Because nothing in either of us said "No," but we really had not gone expecting to end up there.

The WPA was taken up a lot in '78 with the struggle against the referendum, which was really a struggle to stop Burnham enlarging his powers. It was really very exciting in those days. I remember . . . I don't know these official things very well, but if you are going to [have something like a referendum] you have to publish a notice of your intention in the *Official Gazette.* Nobody I know reads the *Gazette* except Eusi Kwayana. And if you read it, your eyes just glazed over. But one Sunday, Walter came to me and said, "Good God! Is Sunday afternoon and Kwayana send to say that Burnham up to something. We must come."

He summoned us all out of the holes where we were just liming and enjoying ourselves to say, "Read this thing." So we looked and we didn't get it. Only Kwayana got it. If Clive and the rest of them say they got it, I will have to concede. But my frank view is that none of us got it: that what Burnham meant was that this referendum was to end all referenda. It was the entry point to changing the whole constitution and taking extraordinary powers. The only reason we didn't walk out of that room was respect for Kwayana. But we were all quite impatient with this insistence of his that something was up. In the end we got it, and after that we really got very, very involved in organizing against [the referendum].

Somewhere within that year, I'm not sure I remember when, but it was before the summer, talk developed of a party. But I have to put it that vaguely because the other thing is still going on: the pressure group WPA is still going on. For example, workers at a restaurant go on strike, the WPA would summon out the whole fifty-something or seventy-something (whatever we had become by then), and what you would do is to go to support that strike for whatever number of days it took. I think it was the summer of 1978 that Rupert and Clive were going to be in New York for some purpose and together had the job of drafting a a party program. They were the original drafters of *Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Guyana.* The discussions really began to crystallize around the discussion of the draft they wrote. For me, that was the point at which you could say that all of us became engaged in thinking and talking about becoming a political party, and about having a program for transformation beyond what we had been doing all the time. Many people then in the WPA had come because they were opposed to Burnham but nobody there, I think, in the beginning saw ourselves as an alternative to Burnham; or as doing more than trying to change the society so that the society might in turn change the regime.

DS: When you return in '78, do you think of yourself as a Marxist, as a revolutionary?

A: I am too self-conscious a person to ascribe words like revolutionary to myself, but as a Marxist, yes.

DS: And Rupert would also have thought of himself as a Marxist by the time he returned?

A: Yes, and one who was more Leninist than any of the rest of us.

DS: Really? How did you make a living?

A: When I came back? I didn't. I remember applying—I can't remember where I was—for a job. And Walter Rodney found it hysterically funny that I was the only person who didn't even get an acknowledgment of my application. There was no waged work for some of us. We didn't have any money.

DS: When you say there was no work, you mean because of your political affiliation?

A: Yes. I worked full time with the WPA from 1978 to 1986, then full time with the WPA and Red Thread from 1986 to 1987 without a wage, and then I worked part time with the Women and Development Unit [WAND] in Barbados, going up occasionally from my base in Guyana.

DS: What was the response of the Burnham regime to this incipient organizational emergence, the WPA?

A: Well, obviously the very refusal to give Walter the job [at UG] was in the hope that he wouldn't come back. And they could not have liked from the very beginning what he began to encourage. People like Clive Thomas and Eusi Kwayana had their own independent roads to the WPA, but I think it's always true that somebody like a Walter may suddenly act as the catalyst for the coming together and movement forward of people who were walking somewhat differently. I think Walter was that. I think, from that point of view, he was always feared. Much, much later, I had a friend who used to be near the top ranks of the PNC, and she told me that Burnham used to inveigh against this pack of middle-class, urban people, who basically were opposed to the revolutionary things that

the PNC was doing. She said that was the angle from which people like her saw people like us, and therefore would accept us being dealt with in the way that we were.

DS: Let me ask you something about the *perception* of Walter. He was offered the job, and he comes back expecting to take the post; then he is denied the job. And in the Burnham regime there is not only a decision to be vindictive but a real concern that Walter might become the center of something. What's that based on? Walter has not been in Guyana for a long time. He had some role in pre-'68 Jamaica, but then he is prevented from entry, and is now away. He has become somewhat well known through *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.[23] He is involved in various East African struggles. But what is it that makes him such a seeming threat?

A: I always thought that he had captured people's imaginations before he came back. Think of how we heard of him.

DS: *That's* what I want to get at.

A: How we heard of him was by radio and newspaper and word-of-mouth—that he was thrown out of Jamaica. You had this sense, even me who *had* known him since childhood—and certainly a lot of people I knew who were younger had this sense too—of him as a person who acted in ways that made governments afraid. These are not people who began by reading *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. These are people who first heard of Walter Rodney via, say, mutual friends who were in Jamaica. There was this extraordinary relation between him and Rasta in Jamaica which Rasta here [in Guyana] would hear about—this Black university man that a Black government throw out, this Black university man that goes through the region and is thrown out of this place [and that place]. He captured your imagination. So much so that I remember these huge demonstrations for this man that they didn't know. It was a response to this person that you knew had to be—there was a word that we used to use in those days—a *forwarder.*

One of the rallies, which ASCRIA organized and invited the PPP and others to join, was savagely broken up by House of Israel boy soldiers with revolvers.[24] There

23. Walter Rodney's path-breaking book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* was first brought out simultaneously in 1972 by Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications (established by Jessica and Eric Huntley in London) and Tanzania Publishing House in Dar es Salaam.
24. The House of Israel was an organization established by David Hill, a fugitive from the United States, who was given protection by the Burnham regime. He assumed the title Rabbi Edward Emmanuel Washington and preached a doctrine based on the idea that Black people were the true children of Israel. Often associated with

was a handbill attacking Eusi in particular. Tacuma Ogunseye, who was chairing, was injured. Cheddi Jagan was physically hurt—the attack had begun when he attempted to speak. At the first rally, they had tried to drown Eusi out because they were enraged that he was appearing with Jagan.

DS: This question is about the *imagined* Walter. Because there is a curious way in which the idea that Walter might be a catalyst of something, that there was some energy in Walter, was a matter of concern to the official regimes in the Caribbean, in the region, but also a matter of concern to at least some parts of the emerging left. The WPJ [Workers' Party of Jamaica] . . .

A: Couldn't stand him.

DS: Exactly. And therefore there was a curious way in which there was a reputation or an image in circulation of a maverick of a certain sort that was to be feared or at least people were to be cautious about. But you're saying that that sense of Walter was in circulation in Guyana among people who might not have read what he was saying.

A: But people would have read *Groundings with my Brothers*.[25] That was another way he entered people's imaginations.

DS: Ah. Would there have been any knowledge of the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal in October 1968, to which Rodney had gone and from which he was returning when he was prevented from entering Jamaica?

A: I don't think so, not for most people. Well-informed people would have known.

DS: In 1978 you are elected to the executive of the WPA. From that point on, how does the WPA begin to transform itself and solidify itself into a functioning political party?

A: I'll tell you what I know and then I'll tell you what I think. I know, for example, that it was Rupert who was instrumental in getting us a center. All of the rest of us would

the PNC's dirty work, a House of Israel member, for example, stabbed and killed Father Bernard Drake in July 1979 outside the Magistrate's Court where Rodney, Roopnaraine, and Omawale were being brought up on charges of arson (see footnote 26). See Spinner, *Political and Social History*, 171–72.

25. Walter Rodney, *Groundings with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969).

have been too scared financially. We had no money. Rupert is the kind of person who could have no money and feel he must go and rent a place. And he did. He and Jocelyn Dow. It made a big difference. You were not just this group that met every two weeks in somebody else's place. You now had a place where you could go every day. And that made a huge difference. I suspect that Rupert would have had a hand in the movement towards the party program, because he is far more oriented towards structure. Clive might have been [like that], I don't know that, but I know that's what Rupert is like. So the center is very important in terms of solidifying the group. At that stage [also], you also now have to have a coordinator, and that was me. From 1978 to when Walter was killed, I was party coordinator (a job that often included unblocking blocked toilets, by hand) and party editor for *Dayclean* and all other publications. I also had another job—to be available to listen to personal problems in my house at any hour of the night; Walter coined the name Mrs. Packer (Personal Affairs Committee) for me.

So sometime in 1978 things begin to become more structured. You have a center from which you're going to produce this [political work], where you're going to meet. And then, of course, you begin to have regular discussions (I think it was at the end of that summer) around the draft program that Clive and Rupert have brought back [from New York].

DS: You mentioned a short while ago Eusi summoning you all to his house to talk about that item in the *Gazette.* And you mention Eusi's air of authority, or the regard that you all had for him. On what basis? What was the image of Eusi Kwayana for your generation?

A: Not his house, but the rest is true. Let me answer you this way. One day in 1980, Walter and I were walking between my aunt's house and the house where other WPA people lived, and he was telling me about some people who had helped him with information for *History of the Guyanese Working People*. He said what a pity it was that he wouldn't be able to acknowledge them by name, because they worked for the state. And for some reason I said, "Who do you want to acknowledge?" And he said, grinning, "Well, you for doing this, and so and so for doing that"—all of these being precise things—editing, research, and so on. Then he added, "And Eusi, for example." That's the acknowledgment I wrote in *History of the Guyanese Working People* after he was killed. And that's what we felt about Eusi: he was an incredible example of engagement. He has done some things in life even at the cost of making tremendous mistakes. He was and is an example of a will to engage, a willingness to change when he saw he was wrong, a refusal ever to be defeated. Once he asked me to explain to him what depression meant.

DS: A willingness to change himself; to change his direction.

A: Yes, and a willingness to apologize, as he did, publicly. In 1978, in a talk to the Guyana Sociological Society called "Racial Insecurity and the Political System," he apologized for dealing with race in 1961 in an insensitive way.

DS: One has a sense from hearing you talk, but also from meeting him and talking briefly to him, of a man of both indescribable integrity but also self-sacrifice.

A: This is true, although, as Rupert once said, "Boy, Kwayana," muttering under his breath, because we weren't too sure if Kwayana would find it funny, "your humility just as expensive as Gandhi's."

DS: What did he mean by that?

A: It had come up on a particular day when Kwayana was leaving the country, and when he got to town from his home in Buxton he had forgotten his toothbrush. And he thought it was very important not to buy a new toothbrush because he already had one. Buying one would be a waste of money. So, adult human beings were to drive back to Buxton to pick up, as we were muttering to each other, "probably an old toothbrush."

DS: What in those early years, in 1978, '79 (to the extent that you could gauge it), was the popular response to the WPA?

A: Which year? When?

DS: Nineteen seventy-eight, '79; as it is solidifying and as you are moving towards party formation. Is there a sense that it is warranted, not only because of the worrisome official political conjuncture that you are arriving at (Burnham's moves to lock out political opposition) but a sense that Guyanese people are ready for a new formation?

A: I would say that until July 27, 1979, there were two responses to the WPA. On the one hand, a lot of people were attracted to the call for multiracial politics. A lot of people were very attracted to what came across, I thought, as the courage of saying out loud what needed to be said about Burnham, in a context where the rest of the society was afraid. At the same time that that was true, it seemed to me that most people also assumed that there was no space for anything other than a group that did education

and wrote and demonstrated. People really thought the political party space was closed out by the PPP and the PNC. I never got the impression in that period that anybody was responding to us as a potential third force. I really never felt it. I thought that they found us significant at the level of ideas, and perhaps *changing* ideas. *And then the building burned down.*[26]

DS: That's what captures the popular imagination.

A: Yes, yes.

DS: So as the WPA is solidifying into a party, the project as you all are discussing it, has as its objective the overthrow of Burnham. That's the talk then. That what is required is the revolutionary overthrow of the Burnham regime.

A: Yes. . . . The reason for the hesitation is because it was couched in the language of Burnham must go and he must go by any means necessary. But the WPA functioned a lot, not only pre-party but afterwards, as these things do, very much on a need-to-know basis. And therefore there would not be general talk inside WPA about "overthrow."

DS: Right, I can understand that. But what is becoming central to the WPA—this is my question—is less pressure group opposition, even though that might still have been what was going on in practical terms, but the question of the extent to which state power could be captured. The question of state power has by then become part of the discussion.

A: Yes. For me there was always a built-in contradiction in the WPA. Because I don't personally know anybody in the WPA who wanted to run the state, who saw themselves as the [prime minister], you understand? It really came to a head one day when we were supposed to put up names for the national government we had proposed. We had made some very precise proposals for how many people from each party and group should be in the government. Our position was that since we had not had any free and fair elections, we should not deal with party size; each party or group should have nine representatives. For some reason, somebody outside of the WPA was looking for a discussion in which you knew the names of your nine representatives.

26. The building on Camp Street, Georgetown, housing the offices of the Ministry of National Development and the General Secretary of the People's National Congress was burned down on 11 July 1979. Walter Rodney, Rupert Roopnaraine, and Omawale were arrested and charged with arson.

DS: You didn't.

A: We didn't. There was no such thing. The discussion inside the WPA went around the room, and it was just as if people had taken time off from their real lives—Rupert from film, Walter [from history] and so on—in order to do this necessary political work but had never expected himself or herself to have to carry it beyond that.

DS: That's very interesting. I remember Rupert Lewis saying something similar about the difference between the WPA as a whole and some members of the WPJ.[27] So I want now to come to a couple of questions around this relation. This is 1978, 1979, and there is already a Marxist party in the region, the WPJ, which sees itself as . . .

A: . . . the leader of all men. You could put that in the magazine.

DS: Yes I will. What is the WPA's sense of the WPJ and what it represented?

A: First of all, we would have to break it up more than that. Rupert [Roopnaraine] would be the person subsequently who, although not totally like them, would have been far more Leninist than any of the other major male figures in the WPA in terms of the notion of party structure, democratic centralism, those things. Walter and Clive and Eusi and Moses and Josh and other men like Tacuma Ogunseye and Sase Omo completely rejected notions like bourgeois democracy. They felt and some wrote that in our part of the world (other people could speak for themselves)—those rights having been fought for and won by the working class, they were not rights that we were willing to turn our backs on on the grounds that they were "bourgeois democratic rights." That whole language that certain parts of the orthodox left used was just totally outside of any WPA discussion. Inside WPA, Walter was not a maverick. People were more like him than they were like Trevor Munroe.[28]

DS: Inside the WPA, people were more like Walter than like Rupert?

A: Yes. There are several reasons for that, one being where you have learned your politics. A lot of them had learned their politics [in the context of Burnham]. Rupert's politics

27. See David Scott, "The Dialectic of Defeat: An Interview with Rupert Lewis," *Small Axe*, no. 10 (September 2001): 137.
28. Trevor Munroe was general secretary of the WPJ from its emergence in 1978 until its disintegration in 1992. See ibid.

were not created in a response to Burnham. If your politics are created in response to Burnham, then you're not going to be attracted by the notion that certain rights are bourgeois democratic rights which it is revolutionary to do away with, because those are the rights that are being taken away from you.

DS: But would you say that Walter's politics are formed in relation to Burnham? After all, Walter is not in Guyana from the early 1960s.

A: I did not say that his politics were formed in relation to Burnham; I said that it's not an accident to me that people would find much that he is saying, and that Clive is saying, and that Eusi is saying, attractive, because what they were saying so closely matched the reality that people were living here [in Guyana]. Walter's politics were formed by growing up here and then going to Jamaica, by his work with C. L. R. James and Selma James, by his studies, by the left in England, by Jamaica again and Tanzania and Cuba—he wrote to Selma about Cuba "Man is in charge here"—meaning, human beings—not the inhumanity of capital. You had a government in Guyana that said it was socialist, that said that these rights were just being manipulated by the bourgeoisie. All of those things came across as being false abstractions in relation to people's daily experience. Not to mention, of course, that Rupert came back relatively late. Nonetheless, there's a whole role that Rupert played in terms of the period in which we did begin to solidify, to structure ourselves as a party. That was very much Rupert.

DS: So there is no discussion between the WPJ and you inside the WPA as it is emerging as a political party.

A: As far as I know the WPJ treated us with total contempt in the early years. I have no doubt that they would have spoken to an individual when they came across him; *him*, not her. Our relationship with the WPJ started post-Grenada (at the start of the revolution), and it was part of an emerging relationship in the left, and it was very clear. . . . I mean, look, outside of Rupert, I am the person who was closest to that scene and became closest to elements in the WPJ and to NJM [New Jewel Movement]. And even though I was very willing to be swept along in that, I was never so stupid that I could not see that somewhere there had been a discussion and a decision, that in relation to Guyana, what they would do is go with the WPA. This was after Walter was assassinated. That they had decided as well *who* in the WPA [they would talk to]. They had decided what it is they wanted, because they moved overnight from behaving as if we did not exist to this

sudden embrace. And as usual, who gives the game away is women. There were women in the WPJ who had never dealt with me at all, even when we were in the same place, who suddenly now have been sent to embrace me.

DS: Was there a sense, then, in which the emerging left movement in Guyana was isolated. I'm remembering some of your remarks yesterday that Guyana's isolation in the region is not new. Is there a similar sense that you were isolated by other leftists in the region who felt themselves more advanced, and that you all were minding your own business and carrying on with what you had to do here in Guyana?

A: I don't remember talking about it, to tell you the truth. Remember that you are talking about days when the WPA in Guyana is huge. Nineteen seventy-nine? *Huge.* I don't remember anybody in the WPA feeling weakened or demoralized by any sense that we are held in contempt by the WPJ. That's just true. These are *my* words. I don't remember anybody ever saying that. What we knew was that we were surrounded by orthodoxy which found us . . . well, all the various words that they would use. That was very explicit and led by the WPJ. But there were all kinds of much smaller formations, in Trinidad and so on, that were part of that. And in Guyana, that was the PPP's view. That we were—what were the various things? I don't remember now—adventurists? But remember there were also left regional parties and trade unions which were no part of the orthodox left. We had relations with those parties and unions.

DS: Let me ask you a question from the other side. Was there a sense, as the WPA is emerging, that one crucial element ought to be the emergence of a *regional* left, not merely a national left?

A: I don't know. Let me try to describe something for you. I can't answer for all the levels of discussion that took place, although I was on the executive, the Political Bureau. But after we formed, the way that our lives went here was having to discuss everyday immediate things: both the immediate politics of what we were doing, and the immediate questions of security, of safety, and so on. I honestly do not remember conversations of that kind [about the left in the region].

DS: As I am listening to myself ask the questions and listening to you answer them, I am aware that there's a certain, perhaps, Jamaica-centricity to them. Let me tell you what I mean. Listening to you—and I had a similar sense listening to Eusi when I asked

him about it—that quite apart from the arrogance of the WPJ, there was a sense among people involved in the emerging WPA that what had to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis was a crisis of a size and shape that certainly did not exist anywhere else in the region—not in Jamaica, nor in Trinidad. And therefore the space for posturing did not exist in the Guyana situation in the way that it existed in Jamaica. Is that true?

A: That is true. That's true. I think it's also true, to be fair, that there are things that are not posturing that needed to be talked about that we probably did not have time for because our lives were largely overtaken by the political crisis and by the ways in which the political crisis defined your daily life. You're talking about a whole heap of people already out of jobs, another set who lose their jobs; you're talking about a time in which it would be routine to have your meetings broken up, and to be hit if not beaten. Routine to have your home searched. Routine to be arrested, held, some charged, some not. It was like that.

DS: It was like that. What was the role, 1978, 1979, of intellectual discussion of the sort that's not immediately connected to whether we should demonstrate tomorrow, or what our position should be in relation to this strike? Was there intellectual discussion of a more general nature about, say, class, its relation to race, the question of gender? Were there intellectual discussions of that sort inside the WPA? Were there intellectual cells that met to read and so on?

A: After July 27, 1979, when we were launched, there was a point at which Rupert—with my assistance a lot—was doing something called party education. And you know what party education is, so you know that it's a very preliminary, conventional, low-level kind of thing. That would happen; the thing that you are talking about, no.

DS: So there wasn't a self-consciousness inside the party that, quite apart from educating the masses, there was a kind of intellectual work that the party needed to do internally?

A: I don't think there was. I wouldn't say that there was any lack of consciousness of the need for that. But in my perception, that [popular] response was so huge, and so unanticipated, that it overtook us. I do not even know what the size of the membership of the WPA was in August 1979.

DS: It leapt forward.

A: Shortly after launching the party we went to the Corentyne—several of us, I know Walter was there, and I think Rupert was there. We're going to stay in . . . maybe it was a school, one of those buildings. And in the morning there was this noise. So we got up to see what the noise was. *People!* Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, mixed. We asked them what they came for. They'd come to join. As far as the eye could see: *people*. Nobody knew that was going to happen. So, in fact, part of what you would have to be talking about is what to do with that; because although we were accused by various persons of never being concerned about safety, that wasn't true. But now you had to discuss what your obligation is to your own security versus that [large mass of popular enthusiasm]. And now you are struggling to come to terms with things that seemed abstractions before: like [the idea of a] cadre party. Because one of the things about a cadre party is not just the arrogance of the handful; it has also to do with safety.

DS: But safety particularly because of the kind of regime that the Burnham government had become.

A: Yes. But I mean, cadre party originally was not formed just on some arrogant idea about who has consciousness; there was also an issue about safety. As Martin Carter used to say, "Lenin write plenty plenty big big book and then white people came and do some summaries and the people in the Third World read that and they mess up everything."

DS: Martin was very scathing.

A: About left parties in the Third World.

DS: But what was his response to the emergence of the WPA?

A: He liked us. He thought we were very unlike traditional left parties, and we were. We all have images in our minds of [Martin]. There was one meeting when he was just sitting at the side of the road, just grinning. He thought that this was a new possibility. If you read some of the things that he wrote during that period in which he was talking about what had become of the Guyanese person and the Guyanese psyche and so on, he thought that we were a contestation of that, and that was important.[29]

29. See, for example, Martin Carter, "A Free Community of Valid Persons," in "A Martin Carter Prose Sampler," *Kyk-Over-Al* 44 (May 1993): 30–32. This special issue was coedited by Ian McDonald and Nigel Westmaas.

DS: How are the presences of Carter and Kwayana related and different?

A: Hmm. Well, presences?

DS: As I listen to you talk about Kwayana and you (and others) talk about Carter, there is an almost mythical character to them; they seem to appear to you and your generation as slightly larger than life—as influences, as presences, as people from a past that you have inherited and who are not simply to be succeeded, but people who form a bridge in a certain way, between what you are doing from the seventies onward and what happened in the fifties.

A: Well, that's the reason why I question the word "presences." Rupert, Walter, and I talked explicitly about what Kwayana and Martin—and Cheddi, for that matter—meant to us, and what '53 meant to us as eleven-year-olds. I remember especially one day after a WPA/PPP meeting when both Eusi and Cheddi were there, to our minds refusing to let go of the past, we talked about the way in which they were all responsible for the belief with which we had grown up, that it was possible to change the world. It came very directly from what they led. And then there would be the particular products of those men that continued to exert an influence on you, in Martin's case, the poems. In that whole period between 1979 and 1980, people who are generations younger than me, looking for a certain kind of poetry to declaim their experience, would go all the way back to Carter in 1953. But Eusi—because we worked with him, there are two different relations to him. You don't work with a man every day and keep him as some kind of *figure;* he's just there, normal. But [at the same time] he's not normal, he's in many ways a very unique person in my own experience. Martin had become a friend through Bill Carr; so [in fact] neither of them could be only *figures.* It's true to say, though, that 1953 carried its presence through them.

DS: What about the presence of *Kyk-Over-Al* and A. J. Seymour? Does *Kyk-Over-Al* occupy any kind of relationship to you and your generation of radical intellectuals?[30]

A: Not for me. I became reacquainted with *Kyk-Over-Al* in recent years now that it is being put out again by Ian McDonald with the help of Vanda Radzik. Maybe it was

30. *Kyk-Over-Al* is one of the great literary critical journals of the nationalist period in the Anglo-Creole Caribbean. It was founded in 1945 by Arthur J. Seymour and continues to be edited by Ian McDonald.

childish, but *Kyk-Over-Al* would have been dismissed by many of us, because we would have dismissed Arthur Seymour. Not as a poet; but his politics would not have been of a radical kind.

DS: I'm trying to get a sense of the place of these figures. In his great film, *The Terror and the Time,* Rupert Roopnaraine is already preoccupied with Martin Carter's poetry and presence, and he [Carter] in fact frames the film.[31] So throughout the seventies there was a concerted focus on Carter as expressing more than a narrowly political vision, as embodying a political-intellectual-aesthetic vision, a vision of the Guyanese person as she or he might be. I am asking here a question about your thinking and the thinking of your comrades in the WPA (as that thinking grows wider or looks beyond the question of the demonstration or strike) regarding the question of who we are in what we are doing. Who is providing the expressive language for that, the metaphorical language for that kind of articulation? Is it Carter's language?

A: Yes. There are two small things that I can tell you about that. One is looking at Karen de Souza, who would be maybe twenty then, eighteen years or so younger than us.[32] She and others came into that WPA in 1979, about eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old. A lot of them didn't know anything about '53. They came, captured by whatever it was that excited them about the WPA, or they came by accident, but very often with no history, no conscious history of Guyanese politics. They're now part of this other world, and they go off to look for the poet who will speak for them, and who they found was Martin Carter. I don't remember handing it to them; they looked and they came to Martin Carter. I remember them talking about whether one poem that he wrote, "were some who ran one way / were some who ran another way / were some who did not run at all / were some who will not run again / And I was with them all / when the suns and streets exploded / and a city of clerks / turned a city of men!" and asking, what was that day about? Because it looked to them just like a day they had seen, during what we called the civil rebellion of 1979—a period of uprising between July and November 1979.

The second story. Walter, when he was doing *History of the Guyanese Working People,* had asked me to find pieces for the epigraphs and all I could find was Martin. In fact, it was Walter who insisted, "Let's just put something else as well. Let us not say that in 1979, there has been no voice except Martin's." But it was Martin's voice. Martin has

31. Rupert Roopnaraine's film *The Terror and the Time* was released in 1977.
32. Karen de Souza is a member of Red Thread, Georgetown, Guyana.

the poetry that is straight political, but also poetry and prose that are about family. There always was something in the WPA and in what the WPA was attempting to do that other people dismissed as arty and soft. Not real politics. Even though we didn't have a lot of time to talk, there always was something in the politics of the WPA that had to do with something other than the mechanistic story of where you put blocks of the economy and blocks of politics, and started essentially with the kind of persons we wanted to be in the world. Who else was there for that but Martin?

DS: How do you describe, though, the difference between the way your generation and Rupert's and Walter's generation comes at Carter, and the way Karen de Souza's does? That difference is part of the fact that '53 is part of your experience, and it is not part of hers, but how do you articulate that difference?

A: Well, it's a different kind of discovery. What makes Martin an extraordinary poet is that even in relation to what you yourself lived, he was capable of making you see it, I don't want to just use words lightly, but see more in it than you saw, to see beyond the surface of it. The most obvious poems would be the poems that he wrote after the overthrow, the removal of the government, when he was jailed.[33] You've lived that and you've read the history about what the party did following the British government sending soldiers. And then there's this deeply personal thing, including the poems to his wife and his child, which makes politics not about a set of people over there who do these extraordinary things that are outside of the possibility of ordinary human beings (because that's how a certain kind of political person talks, and that's why I don't use words like, "I am a revolutionary," because it really is to make specialness of yourself. It is as though what you want isn't that all of us should be able to walk with both the politics and the personal and everything in it). And Martin's poems, which are about a period that I experienced, albeit as a child, would help me into all those places. But Martin's poems don't give me a discovery of something that I never heard of and never experienced, and what struck me about Karen's response was her excitement, both about learning that as well as the feeling that she was part of something that had some connection back to '53. So it was that I started here and she started there to reach almost the same place.

DS: Andaiye, you spoke earlier [off-tape] about the use of a ridiculing ditty in the wake of Rodney's assassination. Can you say more about that?

33. On Martin Carter see the articles assembled in Stewart Brown, ed., *All Are Involved: The Art of Martin Carter* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2000).

A: There were some leaflets left on the bridge of his house either the night of his assassination or the morning after.[34] And they began, "Hickory Dickory Dock," and then created a ditty alleging that he'd had a bomb which exploded. I personally felt (and a lot of other people felt the same) that this was not a touch that seemed Burnham-esque. In spite of the fact that one knew that Walter had really offended Burnham, enraged him with the Midas touch story (that everything he touches turns to shit), Burnham was—even when enraged—a very clever man, and a man who would know that in our kind of culture you speak well of the dead. He wouldn't want to speak well of Walter, but it would seem to me that he would know that, whether or not they supported Walter, people would find the use of a ditty to mock a man who has just been blown up, offensive—as indeed people did. And that was just one of the pieces of purely circumstantial evidence that led me for one, and several other people, to think that Walter's assassination was not the direct responsibility of Forbes Burnham.

DS: But was whose?

A: A less clever person.

DS: So, nevertheless, it was the work of the [Burnham] regime.

A: Yes; or work from *within* the regime.

DS: I've heard it said that there is a sense in which Burnham and Rodney were rival egos, that there was a very powerful rivalry between them.

A: I've heard it too. I didn't feel that from Walter's side. I never felt that that's what he was doing. To say that is to demean what Walter was trying to do, and what he did succeed in doing. We didn't follow an ego, but someone who was committed to opposing what Burnham was murdering in all of us. I saw him, we saw him, make a very deliberate decision and he tried to write about it in popular form, in *People's Power, No Dictator,* which, incidentally, I didn't at the time understand the importance of until he expressed to me his disappointment that we only had funds to produce maybe a couple thousand. Then I understood that he had meant this to be in written form what he was attempting to do orally from the platform. One aspect of that—not the total thing—was that he felt

34. Rodney was assassinated on 13 June 1980.

that given the fact that what people felt about Burnham was awe and fear, what one had to do was cut him down to size. And in that sense, yes, he was pitting himself against Burnham, as the one who cut him down to size. Somebody must do it. And he was in a sense saying, "Yes, I'll do it." But I never felt as though it was in a competition of ego. And this is not to pretend that I thought Walter was a humble person, because I didn't think he was. I'm not saying that he was without ego, but I didn't think that's what was fueling what he was doing.

The Women's Movement

DS: Andaiye, you've said that there are two developments that propel you towards the women's movement in the 1980s.[35] Before I come to these, and their implications, what would you say kept gender *out* of your line of sight prior to this?

A: Well, first of all, a lot of my politics was, and probably is, personal. The type of politics [I practice] is the organizing around something that arises personally for me in the first place. And even though many questions ago when I was talking about becoming aware of difference in terms of race, at the same time as difference in terms of gender, that's not to say that it posed itself in that way to me. Objectively, it was in relation to gender, because it was at the point at which girls and boys begin to check out each other that race then pushes itself in my face. But I didn't receive any of that as "Alas, alas, poor me a girl." All my responses were to the otherness of race.

DS: Rather than the otherness of gender.

A: Yes. I never felt anything about the otherness of gender, beyond fleeting things having to do with my relationships with men and what I would think of them. I had a series of, I would say, quite disastrous relationships. But I didn't think of those in terms of power. I didn't think of those outside of something that was a given in the world. That's what I really mean. It took me a long time to *see* "gender." I came much earlier to wanting to challenge the [seeming] givens of race, and then, in the process of wanting to challenge the givens of race, you read and you fall into things, and what made sense to me was Marx. So the movement towards class was not in a straightforward way out of my own

35. Andaiye, "The Angle You Look From," 7.

Courtesy of Crossroads Womens Collective

Meeting which formed Women of Colour in the Global Women's Strike, April 2001. Andaiye and Karen de Souza from Guyana, with women from England, Ghana, India, Peru, Turkey, Uganda, USA.

life, but in the search for explanations of the power relations that were affecting me and that I was seeing in the world. And those were principally those of race, and those of a poor country. Those were the two that I felt.

And then, of course, [gender] didn't come up directly in any of the groups I belonged to, until one day we were discussing the draft party program and a woman called Yvonne Benn (there were very few women at that stage of the WPA) got up, and what she was intending to say was something that I deeply believe now, which is about what happens to women as a result of the overwhelming responsibility we have for caring work. But she didn't know how to say it, and when you're dealing with those men you have to know how to set your mouth, because though they say they don't, they can cut [you] off very quickly. So she got up and made a kind of impassioned speech about the abolition of the family and I do not believe to this day that she had got any of that from Lenin or any such place; she was really trying to say something about what she felt about women's location in the world vis-à-vis men and within the family. Clive said something which I don't remember but which I didn't like. Rupert said something I didn't like and which I don't remember. And Walter said, "None of you will cause me to abdicate my responsibility to my wife and children"—a nonsequitur if I'd ever heard one. And all I remember

saying was, "And where is Pat now? At home washing your clothes so that you can chat this ignorance?" And I just completely lost it and I left. (That's what I meant when you asked me if I was intemperate.) *Then* if you asked me if I cared about gender my answer would have been no, until that moment when Walter said what he did, and the other two men said whatever it was they did, and I lost it and walked out. And then those two fools Walter and Rupert came behind me like two little QC boys, giggling on the road behind me. But they came to . . .

DS: Apologize.

A: To coax me back; which is different from an apology. "We didn't really [mean it]; don't go get vex"—that kind of thing. Several things stuck in my brain. One, I deeply resented how they had responded. Yvonne probably remembers the incident, but the two men who are alive and the rest of the men have probably totally forgotten it. But in that moment I also recognized that although we would have all claimed that there was great equality between us, it wasn't true, and that I had never felt it was true.

I think the principal thing at the level of ideas would be that the men tended to be politically more experienced and better read [than the women], and that's important to abstract debates. But then there were also men there who were working class who had not read whatever the intellectuals had read. So, the thing that I resented also applied to working-class *men,* [namely,] a tendency, quite unconsciously (I'm sure they did not know that they were doing it), to pose a debate in terms of similarities or differences of view that had existed in some other time and place that you knew nothing about. So the first thing was that they would pose an issue in terms that you couldn't enter. But the second was that even when you could enter or you got what it was about, you often felt that what they were doing was respecting only two possible views, each of them held and expressed by one of the intellectuals. Views fumbling to be heard from outside of those two, whether from the position of one of the women or one of the working class or younger, less experienced, I thought sometimes they did not even hear. It was not always like that. They weren't the most authoritarian men you could meet. A number of them could hardly be dismissed as "academic" intellectuals. And there was always Eusi. But it was too often like that.

I can't remember which year it was that I first said that women in the WPA were not equal, and this produced a kind of consternation. And people began to say, "But look at you, look at Karen, look at Bonita," and so on. And I said two things. "The first thing is

that every woman whose name you've called has no responsibility for children. So that's my first problem. Either we have no children, or the children are grown, or somebody else looks after the children. So the first requirement of being equal with you all is for us to not have responsibility for children. That's what enables us to be in politics twenty-two hours a day. Have children and you're out of it. And that would apply to none of you as men. The second thing is that the women whose names you're calling who are able to be equal, certainly in the amount of time we put in, I don't know about the rest of them, but I do not feel that the relationship is equal." But they never thought that that was true.

DS: What are the links between women inside the WPA and other women's organizations? Either organizations attached to the left outside of Guyana, like the Committee of Women for Progress (connected to the WPJ), or organizations inside of Guyana. There were two of these, weren't there, in the 1970s? The Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement, which I think was attached to the PNC.

A: And therefore the answer is no.

DS: Or the Council on Affairs and Status of Women in Guyana.

A: Also PNC. The answer is no. There is something about time that I am not managing to communicate. A lot of what I'm describing is between July 1979 and June 1980 when Walter was killed. If you look at the history of the WPA, you could do a history up to July '79, that's the whole pre-party thing, and I could answer in relation to that. You could then do July '79 to June '80, which I believe to be eleven months, and then you could do from then, until the WPA began to decline. In the pre-July '79 period, when we were a pressure group, the then WPA worked quite closely with the PPP. And therefore in that process it was also true that women in the WPA worked with women in the PPP and in their women's arm, the Women's Progressive Organization [WPO]. But that was the way that it came about. There was no sense in those days in which we women in the WPA organized ourselves consciously as women. We had no conception of autonomous organizing then.

DS: When you say, though, that there was a moment when women in the WPA constituted themselves as a women's arm, couldn't stand it, and then squashed it, what was the dilemma?

A: After the Grenada Revolution was destroyed, we had a series of sessions to redraft the party program in which we decided to name the WPA "Rodneyite." It was at one of those sessions that I told the meeting that the women had met and decided to establish what we called "WPA Women"—women meeting autonomously, but not—as in other left parties—as an arm or adjunct of the "real" party. Eusi supported but there was some uneasiness from other men. The genuflecting to male power was always there in the relationships of the women of the well-structured parties. It was there in the WPJ badly, badly, badly. And it was there from some people in the New Jewel Movement. In fact, it always seemed to me that one of the problems that Jackie Creft faced in her relations with men was irreverence; people would say how Jackie was undisciplined.[36] All probably true, how would I know? But she was a very irreverent person. And reverence was required in these relations. That's it, reverence was required.

DS: One of the things that moved you in the direction of the women's movement, you have said, is your encounter with the International Wages for Housework Campaign in 1982. Is there something about the political project of this campaign that makes it particularly salient to you?

A: Absolutely, but I didn't get it from the beginning. In 1982, when I was in London as WPA international secretary, the English Collective of Prostitutes, an autonomous group in the campaign, occupied a church to protest police illegality and racism and I threw myself into supporting the occupation; many of the prostitute women were Black, some from the Caribbean. But I didn't "get it" in any deeper way until 1995, when I said to a group of working-class Guyanese women that housework produced labor-power and reproduced labor-power every day—and *they* got it. Immediately. Because what I was talking about was their work. It reminded me of Walter saying that after years of trying to explain surplus value to students and having to repeat himself over and over, he explained it to some Guyanese bauxite workers who understood it without hesitation.

In the mid-1980s, I moved to work within the Caribbean feminist movement and organizationally, in CAFRA [the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action]. Then, sometime after the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995 in Beijing, I began to be uncomfortable with the whole project of "building gender equity" or "mainstreaming gender." I made my living largely by doing this work, but it began not to make sense. But I think it was my building alienation from left

36. Jacqueline Creft was a member of the revolutionary government of Grenada until her murder (along with eighteen others, including the prime minister, Maurice Bishop) at Fort Rupert, St. Georges, 19 October 1983.

politics that led me to work more closely with the campaign, to the point where I would say that I am now a member of the campaign.

DS: But what is it about *that* formulation of the problem of women's space that alerts you to the question of gender in this?

A: It alerts me to the fact that unwaged housework is the productive labor without which there would be nothing else: no other labor, no workers, no economy, no society. I had been reading Marx for years; and this same Marx, as used by the left parties, made women utterly and totally invisible. And Selma James (who loves Marx) said that for Marx it's not only about the wage, it's about the lack of a wage. It's about the housewife as the unwaged producer of the first commodity, labor power.[37] Walter, who in fact had studied in a study group with C. L. R. James when Selma was there, was the man in the WPA who had put in the line in the party program including housewives in working-class households as part of the working class or working people. He had to get that from Selma's work. But I don't know what it meant to him beyond that.[38] Anyway, the first thing that attracted me was that: that identification of unwaged caring work—or housework—as the work on which the whole of capital is built. The second thing that attracted me was the recognition in the campaign that sectors of people have different levels of power, including different sectors among women, and that when you simply throw people together in what you call your party or your group, the powerful always win. Therefore what you have to think through, organizationally, is how to build on autonomous organizing of the sectors. The point is for each sector, meeting autonomously, to look at its own relation to capital and its own needs and demands and bring that to the table. That was the other thing that fascinated me.

DS: When do you meet Selma James? Do you meet her then, in 1982?

A: I met Selma in '82 but I knew others in the campaign before. When I was teaching at SEEK, there were two women teaching there, one, a Barbadian who had migrated to America at twelve, Margaret Prescod, and the other, an African American woman,

37. Selma James is the international coordinator of the Global Women's Strike and founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign. Her publications include: (with Maria Dalla Costa) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1975); *Sex, Race and Class* (1975); *Ladies and the Mammies* (1983); *Strangers and Sisters* (1985); *The Global Kitchen* (1995); and (with S. Francis, N. Lopez, and P. Schellenberg) *Milk of Human Kindness* (2002). For more information visit the Web site at www.allwomencount.net.

38. See Walter Rodney's remarks on Selma James in *Walter Rodney Speaks*, 29.

Wilmette Brown. The three of us were part of a women's "consciousness-raising" group. Later, Margaret and Wilmette cofounded Black Women for Wages for Housework. I remember the day that Margaret and Wilmette came running down the road with this pamphlet by Selma in their hands. Now, none of us had ever heard of Selma, and I think what they had read was *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. They came running down the road with excitement. By 1982 I'd worked with the WPA for some time, we'd gone through Walter's death, and I'd grown closer, in some ways, to left-wing women in the region. And there is something I don't like. I mean, sex or gender is now the power relation that is imposing itself on my head, not where race had first been, but interconnecting with race and class.

What my attraction became as we went on was more than that. First of all, the campaign is a very on-the-ground attempt at being international. This is the only thing international I know about in which groups of women from all over the world—and I've worked so far with women from Uganda, women from India, women from indigenous communities in Peru, women in the United States—attempt to work out a global practice in relation to a capital that is increasingly globalized. It's the only place I know of where one can speak in a certain unembarrassed way about struggle to transform the world. These days you're supposed to be embarrassed if you think the struggle didn't end [with the collapse of the Soviet Union], and if you dare say Marx, because all those things are over. These days you're supposed to be stuck somewhere in the past, either the past of the world or your own past if you still think that you can change the world and not just make little changes or provide services. In that side of women I am the cautious one; I am the one who sometimes doesn't get it.

DS: The other thing that propels you in the direction of the women's movement in the early 1980s is your growing awareness of the absence of women's voices in the left movement in the Caribbean, and in particularly in relation to the New Jewel Movement. And what you become aware of is the problem of the *autonomy* of women's voices. You mentioned awhile ago the discomfort with the idea of a women's arm inside the WPA. Looking back, was that ill-at-ease feeling about being an arm of the party part of the problem of autonomy that you were growing towards?

A: Yes, yes. But I didn't know what it was. And in fact, the seven of us who came together to form Red Thread, came to that unease, I think, in very different ways. The others had not met the International Wages for Housework Campaign except for what I told them. They had not been going to Grenada and meeting WPJ and other Marx-

ist-Leninist parties; but it was a shared unease, and it turned out that what we were all looking for was, yes, autonomy.

Red Thread

David Scott

DS: How did the discussion to build the kind of organization that Red Thread is take place, and who were the principals involved in that discussion? Part of my question is (and I imagine it might have arisen for the seven of you), why not a more overtly *political* organization than Red Thread was or is?

A: You know that Red Thread in a sense came about by accident. Because even though we had rejected being the WPA arm, we did accept a decision of the WPA in which we participated, that we would work with women in relation to food shortages. And it was that experience that led directly to Red Thread. It was a simple matter. We went and organized a picket. The police picked up the women and carried them off to the lockup. None of these women had ever seen the inside of a lockup before.[39]

These are not WPA women. We felt extremely guilty. It had never occurred to any of us that the police would treat them in that way because that was their mode with us, therefore it would apply to anybody that we had organized with. So we ran around that day basically placating husbands, sons, and so on—a few mothers, but mainly the men—and getting the women out. It was when we went to see them subsequently that they said they didn't want this thing named politics. They wanted money and food. And Red Thread was an attempt to respond to that. It was women's self-help. We organized income generation, because that's what the women needed; we're talking about days when things were really bad. Because of the bannings, there were all kinds of shortages of foods and household goods that people considered essential.[40] We would do the income generation, but what we said to them was that we really couldn't live with doing only that. The income generation would be the base from which we would do other things. But then we had to work out the other things, since they were saying that anything that looked to them like politics they didn't want.

39. See Andaiye, "The Red Thread Story," in *Spitting in the Wind: Lessons in Empowerment from the Caribbean*, ed. Suzanne Francis Brown (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 51–98.
40. "Bannings" is a broad term for the ban on the importation of wheat, wheaten products, and other basic food items imposed by the PNC government in 1982. Ostensibly responding to a foreign exchange crisis, Burnham decreed that Guyanese must eat what they produce, grow more food, and eat rice flour as a replacement for wheaten four. The bans lasted until 1986 when Desmond Hoyte (after Burnham's death) removed them.

DS: How does that develop into the discussion among women in the WPA to found a separate organization?

A: Well, it evolved gradually. I was then the WPA international secretary, and I was actually in Canada, and we were doing some of this by mail. My job in Canada on behalf of the women was to try to find the money to start a women's income-generating project. Bonita's job here [in Guyana] was to make the contacts on the ground. I remember that she did that with WPA men who were organizers in the area where the project was to start. So when we started off, even though we'd already begun to talk about working on a project with women, we were still using our only location, which was WPA, in order to be able to facilitate it. That initial attempt, in any case, didn't come off the ground. By then I had come back and we began to meet, and the first argument I remember was about the fact that we were going to start with embroidery, which blew my mind. Fortunately, Bonita and the others had more sense than me on this: nothing was wrong with doing embroidery or other "women's work," they pointed out. What was wrong is the no value or low value placed on it. So we were having this series of meetings about practical stuff, practical stuff with some political implications. In that process we begin to talk about how we would structure this and how decisions would be taken, and whether we would be reporting to the party. And it had developed so much in each of us individually that we didn't want to be associated with the party, like the other women's groups, that this was the shortest discussion we had. You understand? The decision to be autonomous of WPA was not a debate. It evolved in the process of debates about other things.

DS: Who were the principal women involved in this discussion?

A: There were several of us: Bonita Harris, Karen de Souza (who was quite hostile to the whole thing), Vanda Radzik, Danuta Radzik, Diane Matthews, Jocelyn Dow, and me. Six of us were actual members of the WPA.

DS: This is 1985. What is the response of the male leaders of the WPA to this development?

A: It was a mixed response. I think that they (and Karen, who was the WPA field organizer) felt, first of all, that there was a resource question. This was not just people in the "leadership." There was this story that I have told of the party organizer in West Coast Berbice. We're by now starting Red Thread, and so we have cloth because we're going to

do embroidery, because embroidery is something the women can already do. It's a skill that can be developed. Bonita, Jocelyn, and Vanda felt this, though I didn't see it at the time. It's something that we want to validate rather than accept that women's work is not what women should be doing. But it also was practical, because women could do it individually, even when we had no electricity, which then, even more than now, was erratic. Anyway, this male party organizer tried to get women in his community to join the WPA by saying: "Join the WPA and get cloth." And when we asked him the meaning of that he said that we didn't understand politics. "The PNC is in power and they give jobs; the PPP does give scholarships to the Soviet Union; so how we expect him to be winning any party members if we don't give him something to offer. And since he joined the WPA, cloth is the first tangible thing that he able to offer." That was the unsophisticated version; but I definitely heard, among some of the leadership, the sophisticated version, which was, frankly (and I don't want to be unfair), that the WPA almost never had money. Not only were many of us living without jobs and income but the party *as party* never had money. One idea, therefore, was that if any of us created a project that could bring in resources, those resources should at least be partly shared. That was the sophisticated version of the cloth story. And then the other thing was a lot of trepidation about the fact that we were increasingly moving our time to this other work. There was no *male* in the WPA then who would have felt able to argue in principle against our motives. None. But they were very fearful, I thought, of what it would mean.

DS: The 1980s is a time of growth in Caribbean feminism, growth and perhaps new directions. These organizations are not *arms* of parties, and there are women's networks, and conceptions of women and politics, or women, knowledge, and politics that are not derivative of the party-political revolutionary movements of the 1970s. CAFRA may stand as one of the central such organizations.[41] As you are moving in the direction of thinking more squarely and centrally about gender, do you have a sense that you are tapping into a shifting atmosphere around the politics of gender?

A: I can see why I didn't understand the question immediately. This is going to be very difficult, because I have to try to put myself back into *then* from a *now* when I'm critical of all that.

41. CAFRA was formed in April 1985. See Rhoda Reddock, "Women's Organisations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean: The Response to Global Economic Crisis in the 1980s," *Feminist Review* 59 (summer 1998): 63–64. This was a special issue devoted to "Rethinking Caribbean Difference" guest-edited by Patricia Mohammed.

DS: Which I want to come to.

A: I think if I try to cut away the personal, which is where I felt frankly exhilarated to be among women and to have various things validated, ordinary things, the things that led to the phrase, "the personal is political," I think some of us did believe then not only that we were tapping into something global that was different but that the Caribbean would do its own version that would be really significant. Then I thought it was all of us; now I would say a few. We felt that because of where we were located—because of the nature of the Caribbean—but also partly because of the political experience of those who were forming CAFRA, Caribbean feminism could mean, in theory and in practice, the interrelationship between different kinds of oppression. We did not know the word "gender" when we started; I remember the first discussion about the word "gender." We had a debate over whether to go with the word "gender" or the word "women." At the time I don't remember that we looked at all the various power relations, but there were always four that were central—race, class, nation, and sex. How those interrelated in the lives of women was our starting point. So the politics was the politics of the Caribbean versus big capital. The politics was all of that. It was not about what it became. And yes, it did feel like we were creating something significant. Because I, for one, and I think others as well, had gone in that direction, precisely rejecting the fact that the left had, at its worst, like in Jamaica, not even wanted to deal with race, or at its best, as in the WPA, could deal with race and class but not sex. Now we were going to, and only that location made it possible to spearhead that interconnection.

DS: The story that you tell about the emergence of Red Thread does not involve as one of its chapters a story about the crisis of the WPA. But doesn't the assassination of Walter in 1980 precipitate a crisis of sorts in the WPA? That's the first part of the question. And isn't there a wider and widening crisis through the eighties of left parties in the Caribbean, especially in the wake of the collapse of the Grenada Revolution? What is the relationship between your increasing preoccupation with gender and the waning of the energies of that movement?

A: Plenty, but it doesn't start for me with Walter's death. For all of us, Walter's death was . . . I can't find any term to describe it except as a postponed crisis in both personal and political terms.

DS: What do you mean?

A: Remember that Walter had been the popular leader of the WPA, but that the internal structures of the WPA weren't created around a single leader. He was not *the* leader of the WPA. If he had been the leader of the WPA in the way that, say, Munroe was the leader of the WPJ, when he was assassinated one could imagine the [party] would collapse. The fact is, in other words, whatever structures we had did not in any sense revolve around him. However influential he was in them, they didn't revolve around him, so they could continue. That and I think a kind of fierce sense of loyalty, if you like, to him meant that what we did initially was press on. People talk about the decline of the WPA starting with Walter's death but that's not true. That's not true. The WPA proceeded well until about the middle of the eighties. And even beyond that it was able to manage before what I consider its real decline. But certainly between '80 and '85 it remained strong. I'm not saying it didn't lose supporters. I mean, people were afraid. There were people who migrated; there were people who ducked for cover. But, internally, a large core of us certainly stayed together. We continued to function, we continued active engagement. What I mean by "postponed crisis" is that it seems to me that some time later on one can see the effects of his death. People invented this notion that they could see it in what happened immediately after he was killed. But that's not the way it went.

It was a postponed crisis also at a personal level. Most of us were just incoherent with grief when he died. I don't know about any of the men, but I wasn't raised to understand that my life would [experience] that kind of loss. So that having to swallow it and press on meant that one day it came back.

DS: I don't understand.

A: I don't know who I imagined that I would be when I was growing up, but I never imagined that I would be somebody who would be lying in a house, reading a Mills and Boon novel, and that I would be summoned to go around the corner and watch the exploded body of a friend. But that's what happened. It's my house that Donald [Rodney] came to.

I heard the bomb; I heard it. It was a block away, two blocks away from my house. But Guyana was full of sounds in those days. You heard a sound; you thought it was a bomb; you thought it was a gun; you waited for a while; if there was follow up, yes it is, but what to do? If there's no follow up you press on with what you're doing. And so I did, until the insistent ring of the bell. It was Donald.

DS: He had run here from the car.

A: Yes, and he said, "Go for Walter." I know he said, "Go for Walter," I think he said, "There's been a terrible accident." And I thought, "Accident!"

DS: You mean you thought *car* accident.

A: Until I got to the corner, and the death squad was already there and a huge crowd, and the death squad was pushing people, and as they pushed I fell. And when I fell I realized that I was on the top of a car. I was on top of a car which was on the road. And as if in slow motion, my head said, "Top of car. Bomb. Walter." And I got up and the crowd was pushing and so on and I said, "It's a friend of mine, let me through." So you know what the Caribbean is like, they parted and let me through. And that was it. I didn't have any preparation for that. I don't know if there's preparation for that, but I certainly didn't have any preparation for that. And so in a sense, I didn't [do well] for the first couple of days. I was party editor and when they gave me the piece of paper the next day to write the press release announcing his assassination I couldn't make it past the first line, and Eusi wrote it. That quite wonderful press release. But within a matter of days, we were part of the organization of the funeral, all the ordinary details plus the details related to security, to dealing with a lot of people coming in. I'm saying that at the personal level, many of us had been personal friends of Walter's for donkey's years. Others had been friends and comrades for six years. So both the party pressing on and the personal pressing on, I'm calling postponed crisis. But we managed; we all managed. The party managed and we all individually managed. Until later.

I just wanted to clear that up in relation to the WPA. But it is true that what happened in Grenada, in particular, was seminal in moving me and several other women away from the politics of party, even though because of Walter, it would take me years to admit that. I have to admit that I stayed in the WPA past when I should have left. It was both because of the personal loyalty you feel to [someone like] Eusi, and also because for years you would feel if you left them [it's like] you're letting them down.

But Grenada! What I said in the Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture was that it stunned me that one of the prides of Grenada, this five-thousand-women strong national women's organization, had no power vis-à-vis the party once the crisis developed. I don't know how many members the NOW had by that stage; I gather they were all falling apart. But let's say that they had boiled down to 400. Let's say even 250. Whatever their number, they had absolutely no power. They were not a group of women with a set of ideas, [and] with a strength and a power of their own to bring to bear on the crisis. They were just this thing that could be called into being or not called into being by the

cadre party. That stunned me. It was the most extreme example I had seen, although the whole Grenada experience had been teaching me how wrong it was to have these tiny cadre parties controlling everything. Beyond that, Grenada disgraced the left. That's what it did. It made nonsense of one's whole political life for most of us. There are many men, many more men than women who I know that have the capacity to ride over that. Because men have a greater capacity for abstraction, which they think is a good thing, but it's a very bad thing actually—it disconnects you. All I remember women walking around talking about after the killings in that period was about people; about people. You would meet somebody and it was Jackie. Or Vince Noel. Or Maurice. Different people. But often, Jackie.

It was Karen, for example, saying that one of the reasons why she would have to rethink the whole of this left party politics is that she knew Owusu, and she liked Owusu.[42] That if she had not met him and liked him, she would have thought, "Oh, this must be just some special kind of monster." But that this person who was sent to pick her up at the airport could be part of that atrocity meant to her, and I'm quoting, that something in the nature of that politics could make you a monster. She wanted no part of it. That was most explicitly said by Karen, but it was a very female response. Not just a response that what happened was wrong and we have to see what is our [responsibility]; we did talk some about our responsibility, those of us who were around the Grenada Revolution, but, beyond that, what we talked about was that this politics cannot be right. Incidentally, not "Bernard Coard's politics"; *this* politics.[43] Because while everybody was really grieved for Maurice [Bishop]—especially those of us who were around Grenada a lot—we could not see the crisis as coming from only the one side. As one woman in the party said, "But I didn't go in the New Jewel Movement behind Bernard, I went behind Maurice. And the person who used to be behind me to get up and study at four o'clock and so on is Maurice. And the person who told me about party line and so [on] is Maurice." So he and all of us of "the left" had been part of the politics that ended in that atrocity. We didn't mean Marxist politics. We meant the politics of the organized political left. I believe that we betrayed the Grenadian people and the region—and not only the region. That's a wider story that's beginning to be told.

42. Owusu (formerly known as Liam James) was a lieutenant colonel in the Grenada armed forces, and a member of the Central Committee and politburo of the New Jewel Movement, with responsibility for security. He was a supporter of Bernard Coard and is now serving a sentence in Richmond Hill prison for his part in the overthrow and death of Maurice Bishop. I am grateful to Anthony Bogues for this information.
43. Bernard Coard was one of the leading figures in the New Jewel Movement, associated with its more Leninist wing. He is currently serving a prison sentence for his role in the overthrow and death of Maurice Bishop in 1983.

DS: I want to come back to part of my question there which has to do with the waning of left parties in the wake of Grenada 1983, and the connection between that and the rise of a sharpened sense, of the importance of a distinctive autonomous women's organization. Do you have a sense, looking back, that as you began to think about and to participate in and to define Red Thread, that there was a sharpened sense that politics, as you put it awhile ago, was moribund?

A: Politics as we had understood it till then, yes. Politics as it had to do with a certain way of organizing, a certain kind of thrust for party power, yes. But I didn't think that politics was moribund. I thought and think that the politics we need is based on the politics of women organizing autonomously. What is it you're asking that I'm not hearing?

DS: Correct me if I'm wrong, what I hear you saying, in effect, is that not only do you have an encounter with the International Wages for Housework Campaign which frames the question of gender in a new way for you and makes it visible, tangible, and productive for you, but that the emergence of the problematic of gender in and through Red Thread is taking place pari passu with an increasing sense of the problems within the kind of revolutionary politics represented by WPJ, New Jewel Movement, and perhaps, to some extent, the WPA.

A: Yes, least the WPA.

DS: Least the WPA; but nevertheless also the WPA. So does your work with Bonita Harris and Karen de Souza and so on in Red Thread effectively take you away from the WPA?

A: The reason I'm having trouble with the question is that I have to answer at two levels. At the practical level, the work with Red Thread did take me away from the WPA, first of all in relation to time. And then it takes you away in other ways as well, because you begin to be less engaged in the issues that would be the *party* issues. At the other level, my answer is this: maybe when I began to move more towards Red Thread and, at a regional level, CAFRA, it was because, post-Grenada, party work was no longer fueled by the belief that it was about transforming the society and the economy. But I was never moving from that belief to settle for something less. We began Red Thread to meet practical needs of working-class women, but always with the idea that we would do more

than that; in those days we would have called it "raising consciousness." Red Thread was this underground formation (the PNC did not approve of us, and, on one occasion at least, the police searched a group of women doing their embroidery) that was dealing with women's income generation in which we got pleasure out of changing women's views of their work and of the value of their work. You know? [We] got pleasure out of assisting women to be able to [earn] an income, and therefore to be able to have a different location in their own households. That's what Red Thread was like in those days for me. By mid-1985 I am searching out other women in the region and, when I find them, and quite soon am on the regional executive of CAFRA, what I think we are making is not "a politics" of identity but a politics of transformation, starting with women.

DS: One of the things I think you've said in more than one place is that in this period of the 1980s you have an awareness of the unproductiveness or the incorrectness of seeing power in a monolithic way; that within any set of hierarchies there are other hierarchies; that power has multiple forms and that it is important to make as many of the sites through which power is working visible. So that within the women's organization of the 1980s, there is a growing awareness of the dominance of *Afro-Caribbean* women in these movements. You've had this conversation regarding CAFRA. Is it also the case that one of the things that Red Thread opens up is a sense of the ways in which, on the terrain of women's work, there are differences across ethnicity and race?

A: Among the seven of us who started Red Thread none of us was Indo-Guyanese. One of the things I've always liked in both the WPA and, subsequently, in Red Thread is we have tended not to create too many myths. It would have been easy for us to say that we were mixed race, because Vanda and Danuta are a mixture of Indian and white and Black, [for example]. But no woman in any part of the top decision-making structures of the WPA, or later, Red Thread, was Indo-Guyanese, although WPA had one regional organizer who was an Indo-Guyanese woman and two out of four regional organizers in the early Red Thread were Indo-Guyanese women. Red Thread was not at the beginning, it never has been, a membership organization although some women wanted that, so they called themselves members. So let's say the "membership" of Red Thread at a certain point might have been as many as four hundred women. But that was because of the income generation. Among those four hundred, it would be roughly half-half: Indo and Afro. And that was deliberate. We began by going into two Indian villages and two African villages. It was very self-consciously done, because we were not going to organize anything that was only *one* race. And it was also our intention to try to—I

have to put it as vaguely as this—deal with race. I don't think we ever could, because we never really knew how to. And in fact, these many years later, a much smaller core group of us who work together every day as Red Thread (ten of us), with a much larger periphery, have had to discuss all over again how to deal—as women—with race difference as it interconnects with class difference. The ten of us are Karen de Souza, Nicola Marcus, Joycelyn Bacchus, Halima Khan, Cora Belle, Vanessa Ross, Margaret Inniss, Wintress Whyte, Chandra Persaud, and me. Some of the race issues emerged clearly as we were organizing. For the Indo-Guyanese women to come into Red Thread, we sometimes had to do battle, not only with husbands but with mothers-in-law. The braver women would tell us that the fear was that if they went with us—Black women—that "it's Black man they're going and look for." The stage at which the issue came to a head was when we ran out of money and were therefore deciding not to go any longer with income generation. There was this huge fallout of people, but the overwhelming fallout was from Indo-Guyanese women; because they had to have a practical reason for being there. What was the question?

DS: The question was about your claim that it is important to recognize power as proliferating, not monolithic, and that within hierarchies (the man/woman one, say) there are other hierarchies, ethnic, race, and so on, and that these worked in particular ways in the women's movement that were not sufficiently being recognized.

A: CAFRA certainly never acknowledged that there were power differences among women. In Red Thread, neither the hierarchy of class nor the hierarchy of race was really addressed beyond the recognition that it was there. But I don't think we knew how to address it. And of the two, we dealt slightly better with class. That was easier to put on the table than race. You also asked whether one of the things that Red Thread opened up is a sense of ways in which, on what you called the terrain of women's work, there are differences across ethnicity and race.

In fact, what it opens up is not only difference but similarity. The whole point of what we're saying as an international network is that across the differences, women—from Uganda to Peru to India and Guyana—do unwaged caring work, do twice as much work as men, according to the ILO [International Labour Organization], that the poorest women do the most work of all, that we earn the least, that we own the least, and that this is the shared ground from which we have to fight. Red Thread just did a time-use survey among Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, Amerindian, and Mixed women in Guyana. They do the same work—including the work of picking up the pieces

and holding families and communities together whether in the face of economic crisis or racial violence.

DS: Red Thread is emerging and developing in a Guyana, as well as in a geopolitical context, that is not particularly hospitable to such organizations—the decline of the left on the one side and the rapid globalization of capital on the other. Do you think that liberalization simultaneously created a space for women and doing women's work, political work, and undermined the political purchase of their organizational voice?

A: I would place more responsibility for what has gone wrong on *us* than that question suggests. In other words, I think we had choices that we've chosen not to take. I think that if I assume that some of us meant what we said in the beginning, which had to do with the interrelationship of oppressions and transformation, then it is very disturbing to see how that translated into all of us becoming either theoreticians of this view or consultants on it. The fact is that the women's movement in the Caribbean, especially post-Beijing,[44] got less and less political. What it allowed itself to do at one level collectively was to fall into the trap of the world in which you have to deal with donors. Over the last couple of years, if I said to friends of mine in CAFRA, "Is CAFRA working in whichever country?" "Yes, it's working," they say. And when I ask, "What are you doing?" the answer would be something like, "The Police Project." Meaning, a project to train police to be sensitive to violence against women. No one can show me how that protects women. What it does is to provide the police with the credibility of the feminist women.

We also got into this thing that I absolutely abhor, which is the UN trap. I'm sorry. If you're interacting with the real world politically, you don't just go on and on with something because you started in it. There was a value in going to the UN in terms of looking for space, in terms of creating larger international networks, in terms of trying to get some things globally that you could use to pressure the governments; so we could say there was a value to the amount of effort we put into that whole Beijing process. The campaign won what we wanted on valuing women's work at Beijing, because I was a Guyana delegate and CARICOM resource person, and we won—in spite of the Americans—but that's another story. But now I question why Caribbean feminists ever went, because most feminists didn't do anything with what we won from Beijing, except to

44. The Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing in September 1995.

burnish their credentials as gender experts. At the individual level, we're "gender consultants"—and you see, however annoyed the other gender consultants get when I say this, they can't claim that I'm exempting myself. The day it began to occur to me that something was seriously wrong with this was when I got an invitation to attend a meeting as a gender expert. And I said, "What is that? What could that be?" Are there meetings of race experts? Class experts? If there are, their purpose must be exactly the same. How come there are no working-class gender experts? For the same reason that in the struggle against poverty in the US in the 1970s we talked about "poverty pimps."

DS: I want to press you a little on this, Andaiye, and I want to ask whether there isn't an important paradox here: the left declines, globalized capital becomes more aggressive, and structural adjustment becomes the norm. This is the same moment when there is the emergence of new gender-centered women's movements. It is also the moment of the rapid rise of NGOs and the willingness of the funding agencies attached to metropolitan capital to throw money at "development" work, including "gender" development work. It's curiously paradoxical that it is in the wake of the decline of these *political* organizations—WPA and so on—that these *development* organizations are identifying *gender* as a target for project work. And simultaneously, as these women's organizations are separating themselves from the radical political parties of the 1970s, it is necessary to find the means of carrying out projects, gender-work of various sorts. And, of course, who must one turn to? Who does it appear *natural* to turn to (since it's hard to get funds from your own state) but the funders of NGOs? There is a paradoxical bind here.

A: Well, there is a paradoxical bind. The left had to decline, not because of US opposition, but because it was (and is) about managing and controlling people, not about revolutionizing human relations. It was (at best) only about the male worker. But feminism is the other side of the same coin. It is about the professional woman managing and controlling. The left denied sex; feminism denied class. Both denied race. The donors do not just throw money at gender projects. They have an interest in gender projects. Capital is based on extracting surplus value from women's unwaged and low-waged labor. They want us in "economic development" so we do two jobs instead of one, or three jobs instead of two– so we work harder. So if our politics are about "increasing women's participation in economic development" or mainstreaming women into economic plans designed by the IMF, we're sometimes doing their work of getting women to work harder under the pretext that we're helping them to be liberated. And these projects of "mainstreaming gender" also have the effect of turning all the middle-class skills away from

any working-class access to them: none of these agencies who fund gender consultants would fund a middle-class woman to organize with working-class women in defence of their needs and demands. That is the experience of Red Thread. I—and to some extent Karen—can get money from them to "gender mainstream" but not to organize with Red Thread. There's money for academic conferences—but we can't raise the money we've been trying to raise to organize a conference for women to deal with race.

DS: What would you say is your relation to younger feminists in the region?

A: You said younger "feminists"; but I don't call myself a feminist.

DS: What is your relation to contemporary Caribbean feminism? Let me ask the question very broadly.

A: Strained. I don't want it just to be strained; I want it to be clear. There is one young woman in Barbados who had organized a conference called, I think, "Rethinking" or "Reconfiguring Caribbean Feminism," and I wrote a very rude response. I didn't know that she had organized it. I am not as rude to young people as I am to older people.

DS: This is Tracy Robinson.[45]

A: This is Tracy. And when I found out it was Tracy, we started a correspondence which kind of broke off because of usual things. But I am interested in talking to her. My point is that what I would want is openness to discussion in my relationship to young feminists. Because I really have no interest in seeing them reproduce what was and is being done by my generation of feminists.

DS: And in your view, there is a real danger that you can point to of Caribbean feminists reproducing the mistakes of your generation.

A: From what I see of it. First of all, I don't see any evidence that any section of the

45. Tracy Robinson teaches in the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados. Along with Eudine Barriteau and Michelle Rowley, she was an organizer of the conference Caribbean Feminisms Workshop: Recentring Caribbean Feminism, 17–18 June, 2002. The conference was jointly organized by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies and the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill.

Caribbean feminist movement retains the commitment it claimed to something that is truly transformative in this region. I see people still talk about transformation on the personal level, and I don't object to that. But that was never supposed to be *all* it was. Feminist politics in the Caribbean is a politics which does not rise up as one when the United States destroys Dominica's banana industry. That's not a feminist problem or feminist business. Cuba is not feminist business. Venezuela is not feminist business, even though working-class women of color are leading the process in Venezuela. I've seen that firsthand. The racism of the whole doctrine of pre-emptive strike—with all the rogue states and the failed states being countries with people of color—is not feminist business. The lives of women at the bottom—working class, of color—are not feminist business. I don't want any part of a politics where that is not my business.

When I went to give the Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture some students in Gender Studies said explicitly that they had never heard before that feminism had to do with relations of oppression other than gender. So the training ground apparently is these structured courses we have at the university in which it seems to me what is being taught doesn't have the politics with which feminism in the region claimed to start.

DS: Tell me about your work around counting women's work, and what you hinted at a little bit earlier on, about the transformed directions of Red Thread. I'm also interested in trying to get a sense of why it is you think that *counting* women's work is a crucial site on which to rethink the women's movement in the Caribbean?

A: You can only change capital if you organize against all the work they make us do. Counting women's work means in the first place seeing where women's unwaged labor is in the organization of capital. Capital does what Selma [James] is talking about, which is that it begins with assuming the unwaged work of women on which it is premised, until women refuse to do it or to do it for free. Counting women's work as a practical thing means actually naming it, measuring it, and valuing it as a basis for making visible and measuring all our exploitation, and from which to make your demands. One of the things I enjoy is when you do time-use and women see that what they spend their lives doing is really the underpinning of the whole economy. You may not use language like "production of the first commodity," but you see it differently.

Counting women's work, which is no more and no less than Marx applied to begin with unwaged housewives, excites me for the same reason that Marx excited people in the first place: as a way of understanding the world so you can understand what the hierarchies in the world are and the particular directions and intentions and kinds of

exploitations, because that's what we want to confront and attack. So it is the excitement of now, which is the same but a little bigger than the excitement of years ago, when you first read Marx and you thought, "Oh, this is what I wanted to know." That's what it did. What it did was to take Marx and to find through Marx what capital rests on and what the importance of women's labor is in the production process. But as I said, this could be theory, but the fact is that in my experience and the experience of this group of us who work together, when you actually find ways of doing it with women it really is enabling women to look differently at what they do, who they are, and what therefore they are entitled to. At this stage of my life I'm not going to enter a room and make a lecture to women about capital. I'm trying for us to discover something together about why we're in the situation that we're in, and why an Afro-Guyanese woman's situation is not much different from that of the Indo-Guyanese woman down the road that she's been taught is her enemy. We're trying to do it through the very practical thing of counting women's work.

DS: Do you think that this is a perspective that contemporary Caribbean feminists are evading? Let me ask the question in a slightly different way. Do you think that Caribbean feminism is anti-Marxist, and that that is part of the problem?

A: Yes, yes. I don't know that all of Caribbean feminism is deliberately or consciously anti-Marxist; some is. But they avoid class, and therefore race too. I think that from the very beginning there was a kind of wariness about Marx among some women. Very few people knew Marx directly. What they knew was Marxist parties, and whatever Trevor Munroe or others like him said Marxism was. Now this was not helpful to Marx or to the world. So you're starting with a problem there. What later compounded that problem was the whole notion of Marx as passé, of the Soviet Union's collapse proving Marx as passé. You're now ripe for the picking. That's what I was getting angry at all these years and I didn't know it until about last year. You say you are starting with the intention of organizing against those who oppress you, and the very people you began by understanding you must oppose arrange to employ you and to have you produce for the world of their design. Gender became something for professionals to study or "mainstream." If I mainstream gender into the IMF or the World Trade Organization—or, for that matter, the CARICOM Secretariat—will I transform them?

DS: I want to ask the question from a slightly different angle because the way that you're responding is in terms of the NGO-ization problem. But there are other issues around

the question of contemporary feminism as a set of theoretical preoccupations. Do you think that there has been an elision of the problematic of *labor,* of the question of wage/wagelessness of labor, and its replacement by other concepts that you might find less helpful—like "identity" for example?

A: Yes. A good percentage of what feminist academics write, including those near and dear to me—like my niece Alissa Trotz—I actually have no idea what it means.[46] That is the literal truth. And when I tell them that I suspect that's because it means nothing, they would want to argue because what you said just now is exactly true. My whole attraction to the [campaign] is that I have never stopped believing that we have to start with labor. It is just that the old Marxist party formulation only had male labor or at least waged labor in mind. Clotil Walcott, who founded the National Union of Domestic Employees in Trinidad and Tobago, once reported that domestic workers couldn't get a trade union hall to meet in Trinidad. I believe fundamentally that seeing how women's unwaged labor underpins everything is the starting point of everything ranging from understanding capital to organizing against it. I really do believe that. And I believe that when you avoid that then you are blurring over and slurring over all kinds of relations of power, including the ones that benefit you as a professional woman. And that is why, in the end, you are left only with the preoccupation of how power operates between men and women. All the rest disappears.

Marking the Present

DS: I want to talk a little bit, finally, about contemporary Guyana. There must be, first of all, a sense in which there is a whole generation of Guyanese who no longer reside in Guyana. I mean the generation born in the fifties who one might have thought, reasonably, would have taken up from their predecessors, but who are in a very real tangible way, not here. Is that your sense and how does this affect the way in which you look toward thinking and rethinking contemporary Guyana?

A: We've recently seen students demonstrating and the presence of many young women in the WAVE demonstrations.[47] However limited their aims are, seeing them was reas-

46. D. Alissa Trotz is the author (with Linda Peake) of *Gender, Ethnicity, and Place: Women and Identities in Guyana* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
47. WAVE (Women Against Violence Everywhere) was initiated on 21 January 2003 when a group of women met in Georgetown to discuss the spate of violence and determine whether and how to take action. The first demonstration was held on Friday, 24 January 2003.

suring, because sometimes you get the impression that generations behind you have gone. And yet I'm not totally reassured, because when you talk to them you find out how many of them [of this generation] will go.

In bad moments (unlike Kwayana I'm acquainted with depression, certainly demoralization), I feel and have said that it's almost as though you're fighting for a country that is very insistent on killing itself. That's when I'm in my Martin-Carter-on-a-Saturday-afternoon mood: sometimes on a Saturday afternoon when he had two drinks in his head he would talk about "Ants, ants, a combat of ants, banana people"—which is what he often felt of Guyanese. He had a lot of bitterness about Guyana. A lot of pain. It's there in his poem "For Walter Rodney," which he started "Assassins of Conversation."

Look, mostly, I feel very good. I always feel very good when people are not taking it—are fighting back. So I felt great for the last couple of weeks, because of the women on the street, because of the students on the street. I think that it's a hopeful sign in the sense that if we can succeed in the students not staying fixed in the racial polarization and the women not staying fixed in it, things could be different. It's how race is tearing us apart that explains why every day when you get up, another person, aged somewhere between twenty and forty, that was part of a group you were working with yesterday, tells you, "By the way." And they say it so casually.

DS: "By the way," you mean, "I'm leaving."

A: Yes. Because they see nothing here that would stop them from going.

DS: So being here [in Guyana] is a kind of waiting.

A: For many, yes. On the other hand, the vast majority have nowhere to run. So while Guyana—like a lot of other countries, I know—can be very demoralizing, I've learned that sometimes you have to go looking for where the movement is. It's always there—even when it is least visible. There were incidents that happened in the worst moments of violence here—I wrote about a few of them to Selma James who answered that the job is to turn those human moments into ongoing political action. That's it. It looked like there was nothing there, but every day there were human moments—meaning, moments in which individual women, not directed by their race and party, acted as women across race.

DS: What do you think is the work that most needs doing. Where is the direction of urgent work as you see it?

A: Race. I mean, for me, there is no more urgent work in Guyana than crossing the divisions of race, all the divisions of race; but, of course, they express themselves in a particularly violent way between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese. I think that that's most urgently done—I really do—by women. I'm not interested in crossing the divisions of race meaning that you add the PPP and the PNC. In that case, one and one is likely to make minus two. I really would like something healthier than that, and less contrived than that. And why *women*? It wasn't any accident a few weeks ago that this group of women called WAVE emerged. It was that women really found it impossible to watch what was happening to children in Guyana in the face of this violence and still continue talking about your side and the legitimacy of your side's struggle. Not all women, but plenty.

DS: WAVE is a group of women coming from across race?

A: People try to dismiss them as middle-class women; and there are a lot of middle-class women there. There are also a lot of working-class women there who have to learn better how to assert their own needs in that middle-class environment. It is across race, across age, across class. I don't know what it will achieve. But it shows the truth that whenever women see the world from our location as *carers* we see it across race.

But, of course, it's not just WAVE. The organizing that I trust to last in Guyana is the kind of organizing that Red Thread is doing, with working-class women across race, increasingly as part of the Global Women's Strike [GWS], which is coordinated internationally by the Wages for Housework Campaign and locally by local women's organizations—in Uganda, Chhattisgarh India, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Argentina, Spain, the US, the UK and Ireland, as well as Guyana. Our central demand is that society invest in caring, not killing, and that military budgets be returned first of all to carers.

In 2002 in Linden, the GWS organized a march of about 150 people, mainly women, across race, where Nicola Marcus, an Afro-Guyanese woman in Red Thread who lives in Linden, said on behalf of us all that we'd come to Linden to reclaim Linden, from which Indo-Guyanese women were driven in the 1960s, for all women. This year in Georgetown, on March 8 we had a march of about five hundred, again mainly women, women of all races, against racist violence in Guyana and in Iraq.

DS: When you say that the crucial work seems to you to be in the area of race, you mention Afro-Guyanese, Indo-Guyanese. What about indigenous Guyanese?

A: I'm sorry. Red Thread works very hard to connect Indigenous, Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, and Mixed grassroots women. For example, Indigenous women participated in the marches I just mentioned, especially the one in Linden, where there are Amerindian communities nearby. But the minute you're talking about violence, you drop into the old narrowness. The division of those of us who are Indigenous from the rest of us is not a division that expresses itself in viciousness and violence among us (though it results in another kind of viciousness and violence, the absolute impoverishment of Amerindian people). It's a division that expresses itself more in those of us on the coast ignoring and trying to continue to marginalize Indigenous people, although that is diminishing because Amerindians are organizing. Crossing that division is as urgent as crossing the division between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese, but it never feels as urgent. That's a big mistake that many of us make, because the point about crossing race is not merely to cross race or even to end violence; it's to win.

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