

September 29, 2021

## **TRANSFORMING MASCULINITIES AND UNPAID CARE WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN**

### **The burden of unpaid care work on Caribbean women in the time of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already existing gender inequalities. With the national lockdown measures, there was growing public concern for the social relations in the household. Gender-based violence, particularly, the issues of intimate partner violence and child sexual abuse, have received an unprecedented level of public attention throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. Governments pledged resources in the social sector to improve the responsiveness of rape crisis hotlines, gender sensitive policing units and children authorities. This is due in large part to demands of women's rights and feminist activists. For it has been clear that in spite of the urgent need to advance gender transformation and the rights of women and girls, high-level national recovery teams have fundamentally excluded women since 2020 (Sanatan 2020).

When we exclude women from high-level decision-making bodies, what "recovery" can we achieve? How do issues of gender and development shape the recovery agenda? Are social relations at the level of the household the subject of policy planning and resource allocation?

Policy planners and decision-makers are tasked with exploring the construction of masculinities - ideals and practices - in order to effectively intervene in domestic life for more equal relations between women and men. The OECD's *Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women's Empowerment* (2021) identify five "norms of restrictive masculinities" that persist in households: (i) men do not do unpaid care work, (ii) male are the authorities in decision-making, (iii) men control household assets, (iv) men are guardians of women in the household and (v) men practice domination of sexual and reproductive choices. Therefore, it is not surprising that globally women take on 75% of care and unpaid care and domestic work (OECD 2021).

In Caribbean popular culture, there are many articulations of Caribbean masculinity in relation to the hyper-masculine "don," a homosocial "bredren" and the dominant "man" in intimate and sexual relationships. While these discourses popularise ideas of hypermasculinity and male sexual prowess, far less is done to explore domains of sonhood, fatherhood and male intimacy among women and men. Bunji Garlin's 2017 song, "Work Out" attempts to discuss fatherhood in relation to loyalty to one's partner and father's social responsibility to their children. He effectively says that a "real man" takes up social responsibilities. The song relies on the trope of the "real man" who serves in the male-defined position of provider. What Bunji Garlin has articulated in soca provides insight into the development field for transforming masculinities, one that is interested in

expanding the definition of traditional (or received manhood) while still reticent to challenge the “real man” script.

Faith-based and cultural beliefs about male headship and even superiority in the household have the effect of absolving men from equal involvement and labour in the household. Household labour has gender associations and tasks are valued unequally. Civil society based interventions on fatherhood and care have shown that attitudinal shifts are possible regarding gender-equitable practices by men.

As an activist, I take the liberty to put forward an observation on some developments in the field of transforming masculinities. Too often, male-targeted programmes address the unequal sexual division of labour and women’s unpaid care work as depoliticised communication and behaviour change interventions. Rather than addressing these strategies alongside gender beliefs about masculine roles, the norms surrounding male headship and the illusion of the male breadwinner and provider, the programmes frame dominant and patriarchal manhood as something to repair, refine and revise with minor changes. No change will happen until we challenge the beliefs about the “real man” and the naturalisation of men’s dominance in the household.

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