



Historical Culture of Gender and Hetero/Sexual Violence in Calypso in Trinidad: Treat 'Em Rough

By Maude Dikobe

Abstract

Gender based violence is pervasive staple of Trinidad's calypso music, presented and encouraged in some male calypsonians' lyrics for a long time. A new breed of female calypso singers are now turning the tide, using the lyrics to speak out against gender violence in the country. This paper explores a female point of view on gender-related violence such as rape, incest, sexual harassment, and shaming. Calypso lyrics sung by men will be read against calypsos sung by women (particularly Singing Sonia and Singing Sandra), many of which are eloquent responses to the verbal and physical abuses to which women are subjected in Trinidad.

Key words

gender, violence, music, calypso

*This song is dedicated to all the children who are victims of incest.
-- "Jenny's Dilemma"... Singing Sonia*

*You got to love me or leave me
Or live with Miss Dorothy
This time is too hard
For me to mind a man that is bad
--"Love Me or Leave Me," Lady Iere*

Calypso and gender

Calypso is an icon of Trinidadian identity and culture. Yet, this often ignores how it simultaneously obscures and perpetuates the acceptance of sexual violence. According to Caribbean Feminist Research Agenda (CAFRA), one of the leading feminist think tanks in the Caribbean, sexual violence affects all women in Trinidad her extensive work on sexual

violence in the Caribbean, perceives violence as "the ultimate and most fundamental form of control over a person, the mechanism which is used to keep women from 'getting outta hand' in Trinidad" (Mohammed 1991, 33).

Other Caribbean feminists share her view that the root

cause of sexual violence lies in issues of control and power (Mohammed 1991, Hodge 1974, Boyce-Davies 1990). Mohammed and novelist-activist Merle Hodge are among the most influential Caribbean voices on domestic and sexual violence in Trinidad. Hodge was correct in noting that in Trinidad the denigration of women has become part of the national ethos (Coombs 1974).



Calypso's overwhelming endorsement of violence against women cannot be overstated. Stereotypical representation in calypso of women as sexually forward, cheats, unhygienic, and so on, helps to control them. One has only to recall "Dorothy" a sexual archetype about whom countless calypsos have been written:² Dorothy personifies many of the worst stereotypes about women in Trinidad: She is "a stuck-up slut whose only positive aspect is her seductive availability." Given her immodesty and deceitfulness, she deserves to be "controlled." The lyrics below, from Roaring Lion's *My Darling Dorothy* (c. 1944) are emblematic of countless examples that can serve to summarise the character of women as portrayed in male lyrics:

*Good Lord since I marry Dorothy she had me going crazy
(x2)
When is good I can't stand the pressure
She want me to commit murder
She has a sailor man
She has a Chinee man
Then she left a Chinee man
To come with a police man
Then she left the yankee man
And go pick up the steel band man....*
-- "My Darling Dorothy," Roaring Lion

While various forces in society mediate calypso lyrics, it is important to understand how lyrics contribute to sexual violence. Calypsos often reflect social reality; the attitudes towards women they express serve as evidence of dominant gender ideology at different historical points. The violent nature of so many calypso lyrics helps one to understand scenarios where the imagined violence in calypso lyrics would be translated into real physical torment of women – an experience that (as Caribbean feminist Patricia Mohammed notes) is often trivialised in phrases such as "massaging their bodies with 'lil licks" (Mohammed 1991, 38).

The question of whether violent art causes or reflects real violence in society is still being widely debated. Many Trinidadian women believe that misogynistic calypso lyrics do nurture certain attitudes, especially widespread violence against them: "We believe that the many ills, such as wife battering, rape and assault, incest and other effects in our society today, can be attributed to the lack of respect to our women."³

As calypsonian Bianca Hull quipped, "The situation with women in this country is disturbing me. I lost a friend to murder. I want men to calm down."⁶ She went on to immortalise her friend's experience in her calypso "Woman Is" (1998). It is no coincidence that violence against women was the theme addressed by most female calypsonians for the 1998 Carnival season.

A perfect example of how traditional calypso lyrics can obscure the painful nature of sexual abuse is Sparrow's song "Mabel." Here Sparrow presents a situation in which the singer himself abuses a minor – 13-year-old Mabel⁷ – but he narrates it without the slightest irony or self-awareness. In his calypso, Mabel is a seductive teenager who will not listen to

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²Calypsos on Dorothy include "Don't Hide Behind the Door, Dorothy" (Growler), "Don't Tickle Me, Dorothy" (Beginner), "Dorothy Went to Bathe" (Lion), "Leave Me Alone, Dorothy" (Destroyer), "My Troubles With Dorothy" (Executer), and perhaps the most cleverly political "Dorothy" song, "Wait, Dorothy, Wait" (Black Stalin).

³ See article by Veronica Landreth-Smith, Trinidad Express February 11, 1998:35 "Calypsonians Under Fire: Women Knock Dirty Lyrics" in which a South Trinidadian women's group strongly criticised calypsonians for lyrics that denigrated women.

⁶ Trinidad Express February 7, 1998:2. At the time Claudia Johnson was based at the Karavan tent in Arouca.

⁷Keith Smith (Editor-At Large) "For Dirty Men Only" Trinidad Express March 25, 1998:9. The lyrics quoted are taken from his article.

her grandmother and entices the older male calypsonian – the exact opposite of what is really taking place. When virginal Mabel gets pregnant, it is her fault, not Sparrow's:

*Thirteen-year-old Mabel
She looking for trouble
Every night she going out for a walk
And she poor grandmother can't talk
And if yuh tell she no
She start to frown
Ready to cuss yuh upside down...*

*Don't worry your head over me
Study for yourself and not for me
Because ah young and strong
I ain't 'fraid a man in town
Don't worry yuh head over me*

*Granny was furious
But Sparrow was curious
While grandmother talking
This time Sparrow attacking
At length and at last ah bust the tape
Good Lord she could not escape
Shortly after she got a sign
She say the child is mine
--"Mabel," Mighty Sparrow*

Between 1930 and 1950, mainly men were writing, performing, recording, and reporting about calypso. A quick glance at lyrics sung by male calypsonians during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s reveals real world verbal and physical abuses.

Atila the Hun's "Treat 'Em Rough" (circa 1935) is a particularly distressing example of misogynistic lyrics:

*Every now and then knock them down
They'll love you long and they'll love you strong
Black up dey eye, bruise up de knee
And then they love you eternally..
You must be robust, you must be tough
I mean, don't pull no punches but treat 'em rough.
--"Treat 'Em Rough," Atila the Hun*

"Treat 'Em Rough" is a horrible example often cited in works on domestic violence. From a didactic point of view, "playful" calypsos like this are nothing short of a manual for torture: "Treat 'em rough, cuff them

down, black dey eye," and so on⁶. Bearing in mind that calypso is iconic of the nation state, for criticism of the nation state see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Community*. For feminist critiques of the nation state, see Biddy Martin, "What's Home Got To Do with It" in Alexander and Mohanty (1997) among others. Calypsos written and performed by men provide a prime example of the social construction of gender and other subtle mechanisms of power used to control women. Further, they shed some light on the fragility of the female subject identity within the nation state.⁷



Actors from theatrical production *Khuluma Afrika!* portray domestic violence scene, such violence is a reality for far too many women around the world.
Credit: Tonya Graham

The old model of violent patriarchal ideology also calls for shaming women who elect partners of the same sex – for instance, Roaring Lion's "Cheek to Cheek" (1947):

*There's a romantic game that the girls playing
Socially known as cheek to cheek dancing (2x)
They date up each other for martini
Challenging that men are secondary
The way they hug up in broad daylight
Gives you an incentive what goes on at night
--"Cheek to Cheek," Roaring Lion*

Notes

⁶Most cultures have their own version of "Treat 'Em Rough." Whether it is a folk song from Botswana or a rap hit in the U.S., lyrics repeat that unless a man exerts his power by treating his woman rough he risks being viewed as effeminate.

⁷For criticism of the nation state see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Community*. For feminist critiques of the nation state, see Biddy Martin, "What's Home Got To Do with It" in Alexander and Mohanty (1997) among others.

These lyrics are still pertinent today. Faced with women's social and economic independence, men still feel compelled to control them.

Hulsie Bhaggan: Verbal and Psychological Abuse

In 1994, a young, unmarried, female, Indo-Trinidadian United National Congress (UNC) Party politician named Hulsie Bhaggan made newspaper headlines, and found herself featured in a number of nasty calypsos – as well as a few admiring ones. Bhaggan's story is profoundly important, since it shows not only women's mistreatment in Trinidad – and how calypso inflicts that mistreatment – but it also shows that women calypsonians are starting to change that unfortunate historical tradition.

The "Hulsie song cycle," shows examples of virtually every mechanism used to subordinate and control Trini women. These include accusation of lesbianism, fear of incest, women portrayed as helpless prizes, Indian men and African men using women's bodies to get back at each other, Indian fear of African sexual prowess, and, most important, the sexual punishment meted out to women who step out of their place.

The Bhaggan story includes at least four or five great calypsos, some by men, some by women. The vehement reaction against her mirrors a number of tense issues for Trinidadians. Taken as a single narrative, these songs capture the complex nature of the sexual struggle in Trinidad and Tobago far more accurately than classic calypsos like Radio's "Man Smart" or Atila's "Treat 'Em Rough."

In 1994, Hulsie Bhaggan made several controversial remarks about black men coming to her home district of Caroni (with a primarily Indian population)⁸, and raping young Indian women. Shortly thereafter, she protested the lack of flood relief funds for her constituents by sitting down in the middle of the Butler Highway, the major north-south highway in Trinidad. She blocked traffic for several hours, and refused to move until police took her forcibly to jail.⁹

Naturally, Bhaggan was the subject of quite a

few calypsos that year and the next. In and of itself, that is not surprising; any politician being sent to jail would inspire scores of calypsos. What is interesting is that almost all of the calypsos written on Bhaggan were violent attacks on her gender, sexuality, and the sexually transgressive nature of her actions. Most of the male calypsonians declared that the "real" reason she was acting in contradiction to traditional female roles was that she was sexually frustrated (i.e., she needed a man, she needed to get married, and she needed to have babies).

One calypso even suggested rape in jail as appropriate punishment for her behavior. Here we see violence against women and gender at its clearest. Her real sin was that neither the East Indian males in her party, nor the Afro-Trinidadian males who attacked her publicly in their lyrics, could control her.

The first "Hulsie calypso," which satirised her initial accusations about African men raping Indian women, was MacGruff's "Bacchanal In Central" (1994), also known as "Hold Your Dhoti¹⁰ and Run." It took a clever, humorous view of the situation:

*Since Hulsie start this controversy
Ah 'fraid to check my girlfriend in Caroni
So I tell my partner come go with me
So we shake up and put on dhoti
But we bounce up with group of vigilantes
To prove your identity they say
Drop your dhoti so that we see
Whether you is African or Indian
I tell my partner now is the time to run
Run partner now
If you want to live longer
Hold your dhoti and run!*

--"Bacchanal in Central," McGruff

When McGruff and his partner seek shelter in a nearby home, they discover a number of Indian men,

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⁸A common joke among Afro-Trinidadians is to refer to Caroni as "Fort Apache," after John Ford's famous western movie in which the heroes are surrounded by "all those f----- Indians."

⁹See Rohlehr's article in *Trinidad Literary Review* (1999). To comprehend the seriousness of Hulsie's protest, one must understand that the Butler Highway is the only highway that connects different parts of the island

¹⁰ Dhoti is a pair of baggy Indian pants..

including prominent conservative politician "Sat Maharaj in a mini dhoti."¹¹ In the song, McGruff contends that Indian men committed the rapes and alleged that black men did it.

The underlying issue here is not just the supposed rape of the young Indian virgins, but that the supposed rape by Afro-Trinidadians! This scenario reflects long-standing racial stereotypes that each group still harbours about the other: Access to Indian women by African men threatens racial purity.

Ironically, most male Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians threatened Bhaggan by what Merle Hodge described as "brandishing their penises" at her¹². In fact, the male response (at least from Brother Marvin and Cro Cro, both of whom sang about her) was practically a black penis symphony. The use of the penis as a disciplinary tool is clearly present in both examples.

Cro Cro's "Respect the Law" (1994) is a typically vicious (and typically clever) song that ultimately declares that Hulsie deserves rape in jail:

*Ah tell you careful with Hulsie Bhaggan
The things she go do for recognition
You can't go and block the public highway
Just cause you want to have things your way
I pay my license and you can't tell me ah can't pass
If I was coming I would surely have licked down your...
[Cro Cro leaves off the rhyming word, "ass."]
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro*

Cro Cro's chorus responds to his questions as if they are a *vox populi*, which is rather misleading as they are really reading scripted replies:

*Cro Cro: Do you think this woman should run the country?
Chorus: No! No! No!
Cro Cro: Do you think she set a good example for we?
Chorus: No! No! No!
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro*

Cro Cro continues

*If we really want a woman leader for true
Definitely Hulsie it would not be you.
The police should have gi' you a good cut-tail Whipping.
And get the rest from a big, strong fella in jail
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro*

In his "Miss ," Brother Marvin, blames Bhaggan's misbehavior on sexual deprivation and her secret desire for an African lover. He tells Hulsie that she needs discipline, maybe flogging, and recommends that she take a vacation, go to Africa [to] ease her tension (presumably sexually). He also says she should get married and stop giving so much trouble; he even offers to marry her himself. His recourse to the "big black dick" as solution to her problems is firmly rooted in the calypsonian's reverence for his sexual potency both real and imaginary:

*You should get married and stop giving so much trouble
If you can't find somebody to care for you
I am sure Morgan Job¹⁴ available...
I'm a handsome Trinbagonia
Ah love Indian woman!
Imagine me and Hulsie, we shack up in Caroni
All she want is two dougla¹⁵ to keep she cool as cucumber
With two dougla pullin' she dress still
She wouldn't spend she body in jail
Come on Miss Bhaggan, leh we add more dougla in this
island*

--"Miss Bhaggan," Brother Marvin

Both Cro Cro and Brother Marvin's lyrics include verbal and psychological abuse associated with shaming of women. They blame Bhaggan's bad behavior on needing a man, or lacking one who satisfies her sexually. Women who are too assertive and/or aggressive are often said to need a man to tame their energy. The phallus becomes an instrument of disciplinary power, to tame the rebel force within independent women.

The Personal Is Political: Woman To Woman

Female opinions of Hulsie Bhaggan differed markedly from those seen in the lyrics of male calypsonians. Women's responses, like that of Merle Hodge in a letter to the editor, begged that Hulsie be left alone. "When male politicians are criticised by calypsonians," wrote Hodge, "they are attacked as politicians. Ms. Bhaggan is being attacked as a

Notes

¹¹For a full discussion of calypso and ethnicity see Yelvington (1993).

¹²Trinidad Express Feb 2, 1994:9

¹⁴A conservative (and controversial) black radio personality who infuriated a lot of calypsonians, and appeared as a butt of many calypso jokes. Pairing him with Hulsie would have been insulting to her. *available...*

woman, in particular a single woman. How dare she! Some of our most creative calypsonians seem to turn into little boys brandishing their penises at Hulsie.¹⁶ Hodge noted that during the cycle of Hulsie-bashing calypsos, Chalkdust was the only male calypsonian who continued in the picong style with good-natured humor in his criticism of Bhaggan, and did not threaten her with his phallus.

One Hindu women's organisation replied in Phagwa song to Cro Cro:

*Hulsie serving this land harder than a man
Hulsie stand up for all ah we
Stand up for Cro Cro
Doh mind Cro Cro singing racial calypso*

Interestingly enough, the debate was divided along strictly ethnic lines. Even feminists of other-ethnicity remained silent. Some commentators felt that the reason Afro-Trinidadian feminists failed to join forces to criticise Cro Cro and his fellow Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians was because Hulsie was an East Indian woman. However, in another Hulsie song, "Woman to Woman" (1994), sung by Afro-Trinidadian calypsonian Bianca Hull, the singer addresses Bhaggan respectfully as a sister feminist and insists that she should represent all women not just Indian women.

*As woman talking to woman
Ah sad you defended some, and not all woman...
You could be young or old, plain or pretty
Black or white, the thief don't show mercy
So you could only make a fuss
About woman in Chaguanas
Hulsie, who standing up for us?
Women getting kick and cuss from
From Toco to Icacus
So you see, that's why I feel you should fight for we.*

*Whether African, Chinese or Caucasian
Indian, Syrian, alla we is same woman
In Arima women fighting just like in Point and in Chaguanas
Maharaj, Ghani and Parashram, and Panday¹⁷ don't understand
But Hulsie, the women say "Fight for we."
--"Woman to Woman," Bianca Hull*

These lyrics call for a sisterhood that transcends racial and class lines, one that hopefully brings women from Caroni (predominantly Indian) together with women from working class neighborhoods in Port of Spain such as Basdie. Hull feels that women from all the major ethnic groups should bridge racial divides, unite, and fight for the rights of all women.

Themes and Variations: Homegrown Violence

Recently, increasing numbers of male calypsonians have been striving to salvage the image of women in calypso and satirise (or even criticise) misogynistic lyrics. For instance, in his brilliant "Homegrown Violence" (1998), Brother Resistance's voice-over commentary on Atilla's "Treat 'Em Rough" (referred to earlier in this chapter) critiques Atilla's misogynist lyric in a progressive manner.

Atilla:
*I have discovered a new philosophy
How to live with women happily
Every now and then turn them down
They'll love you long and they'll love you strong
You must be robust, you must be tough
Don't throw no punches but treat them rough*

Resistance:
*Violence against women is a tragedy
Approved by the norms of society
-- "Homegrown Violence," Brother Resistance*

Resistance's voice-over calypso highlights society's complicity in these home-grown crimes. Resistance adds police car sirens to the sound mix, along with the police officer's comment (after he has presumably arrived at the scene of the crime) that he cannot interfere in domestic matters.

Even before Resistance composed his post-modern commentary, a handful of other male calypsonians such as Mighty Duke have presented women and women's issues in a positive manner.

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¹⁵A mixed-race Afro-Indian.

¹⁶Trinidad Express, February 2, 1994:9

¹⁷Four male politicians in Hulsie's UNC party

For instance, in "Rocket In Yuh Pocket" Duke insists that if the woman says no, the man should leave her alone and contain his horniness:

*Women shouldn't fear to walk any street
Any time they choose
Without you appear like a bull in heat
When yuh drink yuh booze
Let she dress how she feel to dress
I confess you may get a thrill
But doh put she under duress
And force she against she will
Women should be protected
And not subjected to abuse
To be so molested or disrespected
There is no excuse
Let her be who she wants to be
That's a woman's prerogative
You can't force yourself down on she
Let her give what she choose to give
Ah say Mr. Crockett:
--"Rocket In Yuh Pocket," Mighty Duke*

Throughout the calypso, Duke begs Mr. Crockett to keep his "rocket" in his pocket and stop disrespecting women.

However, a few positive calypsos do not mean that we no longer come across calypsos that present women as promiscuous or deserving victims of rape because they wore the wrong clothes. Even progressive calypsonians like Stalin are not above recycling the sexist stereotype of Dorothy, Trinidad's archetypal loose woman, when he needs to use her in a song like "Wait, Dorothy, Wait" (1985). Calypso after calypso continues to objectify women.

Love Me or Leave Me: Feminine Accents In Calypso

It would be wrong to treat the misogynistic lyrics sung by male calypsonians as if they were unmediated. The overtly feminist lyrics of two calypsonians, Singing Sonia and Singing Sandra, building on lyrics of earlier female calypsonians, such as Lady Iere's "Love Me or Leave Me," and Singing Francine's "Run Away" thwart conventional representations of women in calypso as they focus on women's interests and concerns – woman as subjects, not objects.

*If she bring she friends to visit the house
You insulting she you calling them louse
If she talk to Greg you say she with he
Like she is a slot puppy
Morning noonand night you blowing she mind
You binging she old, old before she time
Seven years you living in misery
Woman runaway, woman, runaway, woman run away
from he
--"Runaway," Singing Francine*

The existence of such articulate feminist commentaries forces the audience to reexamine some stereotypes traditionally associated with women in calypso, as they finally hear the story from the woman's point of view. Where do these songs stand in relation to traditional calypsos? They stand firmly grounded in women's lived experiences, and force the listeners to scrutinise everyday events in feminist terms.

For instance, when Singing Francine wrote a calypso about women in abusive relationships, her simple, authoritative advice was far different from Atilla's male-bonding urge toward violence. Francine told her listeners to resist such violence by any means necessary, and take defensive action. Her song title says it all: "Run Away" (1979).

Loud debates in parliament on the need to end sexual violence often complement female calypsonians' social commentaries.¹⁸ The small but determined feminist movement in Trinidad should have increased awareness of the need to address these social problems; this, in turn, led to more feminist themes in calypso (Mohammed, 1991, Reddock, 1998, Massiah, 1988).



The increasing presence of women on the calypso music scene, the impact of the kinds of topics they cover, and the unique ways in which they cover them, all force us to acknowledge the fact that the personal concerns they bring to the table are profoundly political. This is ironic, considering that traditionally the only way a woman's calypso might be credited as political would be if it had a patriotic thrust, i.e., if it were a "nation building" calypso.

Equalising Acts: Death to Raperman

Among contemporary female calypsonians, no one has been more consistent in her focus on sexual violence than Singing Sandra (Sandra Des Vignes). Her ongoing interest is visible in the titles of her songs: "Raperman" (1984), "Sexy Employers" (or "Die With My Dignity") (1987), and "Equaliser" (1994). In "Equaliser" (written by Christopher Grant) Sandra makes no attempt to hide her anger at, and hatred for, the brutal purveyors of sexual violence. On the contrary, she describes herself as the "Equaliser," the only one capable of punishing the perpetrators. Impatient with rhetoric, she demands a real commitment on the part of the legal system in Trinidad to ensure equal rights for both women and men:

*We tired beg, we tired plead
Still man wouldn't hear.
Everyday they making we bleed,
Stick break in de ear.
And the authorities; is nothing dey doing,
The law needs reviewing.
Is time to get tough,
I know exactly what to do
Send them to me,
Enough is enough.
--"Equaliser," Singing Sandra*

Sandra had sung on rape before, notably in her 1984 calypso "Raperman" – but this time she appeared on stage with a pair of rusty garden shears, ready to punish sex offenders by chopping off their testicles. Delivered with powerful conviction and an almost-terrifying fury, her merciless song some male calypsonians strongly criticised her as being unnecessarily graphic and violent. However, woman's columnist

Donna Pierre described it as "[T]he voice of abused and battered women everywhere, sending a strong message to both the men who inflict such pain, and the powers that be who cannot yet decide upon a penalty appropriate for such crimes."¹⁹ Like "Die With My Dignity" (1987), this calypso has come to be considered one of Sandra's trademark songs.

Feminist singers like these give advice to women on how to *deal with* sexual violence: Whether it is Francine telling battered women to run away, Singing Sonia drawing our attention to shameful sexual abuses in the home, or Singing Sandra threatening to castrate rapists, these songs spoke directly woman to woman. Although most female calypsonians resist the "feminist" label, that doesn't stop them from addressing female issues in their calypso.

In "Die With My Dignity" (also known as "Sexy Employers") Singing Sandra might be talking about every woman applying for a job when she observes:

*You looking out to find something to do
You meet a boss man who promise to help you
But when the man lay down the condition
Is nothing else but humiliation
They want to see your whole anatomy
They want to see whey yuh doctor never see
They want you to do whey yuh husband never do...
To get a job these days as a woman!
Brother they go keep their money
I go keep my honey
And die with my dignity
--"Die With My Dignity," Singing Sandra*

Moreover, in a calypso entitled "Professional Advice" (1992) Singing Sonia (and her songwriter, Shadow) capture the situation in which female calypsonians struggle to gain recognition and respect in the highly competitive and manipulative world of calypso:

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¹⁸By 1975 "The National Commission on the Status of Women was formed."¹⁹(Mohammed 1991) Reddock (1985)

¹⁹Trinidad Guardian January 25, 1998:24

*They are some sharks looking for bait
 They want to bite then kill you still
 Don't let them use you like a tool
 Or you will become a fool
 Stand up for all your rights
 And fight them with all your might.*

--"Professional Advice," Singing Sonia

Overall, many female calypsonians' lyrics urge their listeners to recognise the sexism still operating in Trinidad society, and its attendant sexual violence. By persistently foregrounding female experience, both Sonia, Sandra, and their sisters usher in gender dissent that is not even on the radar for most male calypsonians. They counsel women to express themselves with dignity, and foster awareness of their rights. Female calypsonians continue to "do their thing" as per Calypso Rose's song title – joined by women from all walks of life as they demand that their voices not only be heard, but be respected.

While there is no single response to the challenges presented by gender violence (not even Sandra's "Equaliser") broadening our understanding of sexual violence can help foster a culture that has zero tolerance for such barbaric acts.

Thanks to the female calypsonians, women in Trinidad are being heard at last – through calypso lyrics, parliamentary speeches, focus groups, rallies, television commentary, talk-show call-ins, the presence of female programme hosts and steel-band critics on the radio, and much more. The fact that some of the songs about sexual violence performed by these women are, in fact, collaborations between the singers and the men who write for them, demonstrates that sexual violence is not only a woman's problem, but a national problem as well. To borrow the words of two African diasporic sisters, Singing Sandra and Aretha Franklin, as women fight gender discrimination they demand R.E.S.P.E.C.T

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