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centre to the film. The deployment of personal testimonies to show the dependency and vulnerability of banana plantation workers is effective. However, the film is let down by poor editing that gives too much time to frivolity and inconsequence, and as a result its serious purpose is somewhat undermined.

Time to Break Down the Cages

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***Sweet Sugar Rage*. Co-directors Honor Ford-Smith and Harclyde Walcott, cinematographers John Swaby and Franklyn St. Juste. Produced by Sistren Theatre Collective, 1985. 45 minutes, colour.**

*"Time to break down the Cages
We want better wages"*

S*weet Sugar Rage* documents a particular moment in the Women's Movement in Jamaica. Its primary project is to demonstrate and to teach that solidarity among working class women and middle class women will bring about change in the lives of women throughout Jamaica and will shape a better nation. The video ends with this message.

As an example of the pioneering use of video in the struggle for better wages and working conditions for women in the region, this production is of significance. It does not see itself obviously as an exercise in aesthetic innovation nor is it concerned to go beyond mapping the required terrain and promoting its message. That message is however well conveyed.

As an historical document this 1985 work is a useful record of an initiative by the Sistren Theatre Collective. It chronicles the actual processes used by the Sistren Collective in their strenuous attempt to uplift women and does so through the mechanism of intercutting between landscapes, work in the cane fields, videoed interviews and drama workshops in session, captions and through the use of a voice over narrator. Through this use of montage the film shapes a generalised image of the conditions of low pay, burdensome hard work, isolation and powerlessness of women within a patriarchal system, in this instance exemplified by

the Sugar Cane Belt and its systems of management. But it leaps beyond this to a demonstration of the strength of women.

Images, interviews, analysis and dramatisations alternate on screen so that both viewer and those involved in the workshops are made to empathise with the female cane workers whose histories are the subject of analysis and who are seen to be victims of particular political and economic structures in Jamaica. The word "seen" is important since what video making does is to make visible the actual concrete reality of these experiences. But through the process of editing the Sistren Collective inserts its particular philosophy of change. Both reality and vision become entwined. This is the value of film.

There is no doubt about the pedagogical impetus of the documentary. We are told from the onset through text, that the "Sistren Collective is an independent popular theatre company developed from the initiative of working class women. Sistren works in advancing awareness on questions affecting women, particularly Caribbean women. Sistren's work derives from research in the field and from drama-in-education workshops." Later, the narrator informs the viewer that the Sistren Theatre Collective was started in 1977 by working class women in Kingston to highlight the problems of women and to search for solutions.

The format is simple but well organised. It begins by invoking through the camera the interior domestic space of a woman wearing a blue T-shirt with the motif of the Sistren Collective, as she goes about the litany of her daily routine. The camera tracks this woman in a small house obviously without running water, as she feeds her children, does household tasks, sweeps the yard, sends the children off to school and is then picked up by a yellow car which will take her and others to the first drama work shop about the plight of women workers employed in the sugar belt in 1982 (the date is mentioned towards the end of the documentary. We are told that the Sugar industry has the longest history of being unionised in Jamaica and that sugar estates are owned by large companies and use the best land. The camera tracks the roads as the women are driven to the workshop and this journey keyed to the song acts as a metaphor for the kind of movement through action that the collective seeks to engender.

The use of theme songs keyed to action and purpose is one of the most effective techniques in the film. The documentary begins by asserting through song that for women, "every time we wake up is the same condition. This could never be our destiny" and "we going to sweep on." This song arranged by Michael Ibo Cooper sets the keynote of the documentary, which is that sweeping changes need to be made, and that women coming together will sweep away inequality and sweep in change. This is therefore not a cry about victimage, but about determination,

assertion and willed action. It is the message that the entire film seeks to project.

The interviews that shape the film act as a way of generating information and guiding discussion and begin by probing the personal lives of hardship women from the sugar belt endure. These lives will become the focal point of that process of generalisation whereby solidarity and organisation may be achieved through shared knowledge.

Questions about what constitutes an ordinary day in the life of a woman employed in the Sugar belt, and who shares the responsibility for looking after children and doing housework contextualise the film within the global experience of women. The sheer inequity of a system that forces a woman to get up at four or five o'clock in the morning to do all her household work and look after her children then spend eight hours walking in the cane fields, throwing cane and fertiliser through water logged places without support or help from her male partner is used as a universalizing idea to rally the support of all women who share similar experiences.

The workshop sessions that follow use mime and traditional songs about women as well as elements of Jamaican performance arts to shape the narrative. The importance of filming these performances and filming working class women struggling to survive and triumph is important within the context of Caribbean film history. In *Sweet Sugar Rage* the view is from the inside and unlike earlier documentaries that imaged the Caribbean as a place for consumption, and as an object of the gaze in ways too diverse to mention here, the camera seeks here to give a truthful representation of the actual lived existence of the Caribbean woman in one of her many faces. It attempts to show what it truly means to be a working class Jamaican woman working in the cane fields in the nineteen eighties.

Strength even in suffering is, nonetheless, always asserted in this video. The film cuts from spectator to stage to discussion to workers in the cane field, thus setting up a system of dynamic interconnections that act together to suggest the bonds that exist and that need to be forged between all women. As the dramatised action progresses the camera cuts to a woman breastfeeding her baby in the audience and then cuts to a woman carrying cane on her head and tracks other women throwing fertiliser as the song narrates a story of hands twisted by work. It cuts to an interview with a female worker Miss Olive, who tells of the ways in which that fertiliser cuts into and invades the female body. The interviews explain why women do this work: "working here, I am sure of money." Women like Miss Clarice come to work "to drop cane" in all kinds of conditions and "walk the road" for economic survival. One of the interesting manoeuvres of the camera here is to highlight that skin

colour does not provide protection in such situations. Miss Clarice is high brown, while Miss Olive is a young black woman. All suffer within the same political and economic structures of Jamaica at this period. This fact is emphasised by the portrait of the middle class light skinned woman towards the end of the documentary. Her visual image goes beyond her words. While she emphasizes that the plight of the women cane workers is still current, the camera is setting up a different discourse, which is that, her voice from a position of education and privilege is necessary to break down the barriers of class and colour.

The documentary focuses ultimately on one particular case history, that of Miss Iris who is at the time a retired supervisor after working for twenty-five years in the cane belt. Her story generates both discussion and argument and becomes the subject of the dramatisations through which solutions to women's powerlessness are offered. Miss Iris is introduced as one of the faces on which the camera focuses in its various cameo depictions. She had been employed to do the "work that men leave." And as she says, she "made up her mind to do it." The camera moves from Miss Iris to track women bending down doing the most menial jobs in the cane field. It then goes back to the interview with Miss Olive who describes what happened when she complained of burns and swelling caused by fertilisers. The camera cuts to women throwing fertiliser.

The camera then moves to a head interview with a male project manager who explains with apparent reasonableness "If a particular type of work does not suit your mind then you have problems. If a particular way of life or vocation does not suit your physical capacity then you have to change it. What happens in the estate is that nobody forces anyone to do any type of work, which you don't either want to do, or are not capable of doing. If Jack doesn't do it, Harry will. If Harry doesn't do it, you get a machine." Cut to a machine. Question to Miss Olive by unseen interviewer from Sistren: "Can you drive a tractor?" No. This leads to the further question, Are the unions interested in women's rights? Cut to group discussion about the injustice of a situation where women lack power at the bargaining table and must depend on men to bargain for them. The group then mime the event. The mime of this negotiating process (using Miss Iris as subject) depends heavily on caricature of the male, but brings home the point that men do not see women as having the right to speak for themselves.

In this use of contrapuntal montage the director and editor are seeking to use a system of montage through which an idea/image of exploitation is projected. But the use of juxtaposition of images also generates a transformation of social consciousness by forcing the mind to see in a new light. Both the patriarchal mindset of the system and the reality of

suffering caused by exploitation are spatialised and become immanent and in this way the system of editing elicits a maximum psychological response. This is a traditional method employed in early documentaries of social consciousness, in particular in early Soviet cinema.

This occurs within a frame that has set up the story of Miss Iris as an example of woman's perennial exploitation and pain. After she became ill, Miss Iris's fellow workers demanded that she be given a different job and she was made a supervisor. However, she was paid nine dollars a day as opposed to the eighteen dollars a day paid to men. The case is used to exemplify the inequality of women within a legal system that legislates that women should be paid the same wages as men for the same work. But it is also more significant in its elucidation of the fact that women in Miss Iris's time and in 1982 felt unable to fight for their rights.

The video and the workshop discussions as well as the dramatisations focus on the way Miss Iris's case was handled and then seek through re-enactments to find alternatives to ensure women's rights at wage negotiations. Her problem becomes the grist for the demand that women organise themselves and recognise their own strengths within communities and across communities. It also becomes a decisive moment in the call to solidarity between working class and middle class women. The final camera focus is on a young woman asserting that "Working class women want middle class women" to "come down" and join with them" and if necessary to "go out bare foot and fight" for a better Jamaica.

The documentary marks an important stage in the movement to this solidarity in the struggle for better conditions and for woman's empowerment within the Caribbean. It should be made accessible as a way of recording such moments and of historicising the various stages of the Women's movement.