

New World and its Critics¹

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This paper is part narrative, part analytical, part critical and part reflective. First, there is a personal account of the origins and early history of the New World Group from the standpoint of the author's own participation. Next comes an analysis of the content of New World thought and of its applications to various spheres of Caribbean life. I then examine critiques of New World thought made by contemporaries and discuss the reasons for its eventual loss of influence and the decline of the New World Group. In the final section I reflect on the legacy of New World thought and its relevance in the era of globalisation. The paper focuses on the 1960s-1970s but the broader context is that of the post-colonial experience in the English-speaking Caribbean as a whole.

I. Origins

I was a student on the Mona Campus of the University (then University College) of the West Indies between 1959 and 1962. I remember it as a time of great excitement, tremendous ferment and heated debates. Imagine what it was like to be in a Caribbean populated by the likes of Norman Manley, Eric Williams, Cheddi Jagan, Grantley Adams and C.L.R. James; Frank Worrell and Garry Sobers; Arthur Lewis; Vidia Naipual and Roger Mais; Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and the ghost of Marcus Garvey; moreover, in a world populated by the likes of Nehru, Nasser, Nkrumah and Nyerere; Tito, Soekarno and Mao Tse Tung.

A debate was raging over what form the West Indies Federation should take and what economic policies it should follow. The Jamaica Referendum was looming on the horizon. In Trinidad Williams was campaigning for the return of U.S. Naval Base at Chaguaramas to be the site of the Federal Capital, pitting the symbol of West Indian nationhood against the symbol of Anglo-American imperialism. James was campaigning for Worrell to become the first black captain of the West Indies Cricket Team—cricket decolonisation. In Guyana, ideological cleavage had sharpened and ethnic conflict was simmering. The Cold War cast a long shadow over the region. Lewis had just come to the University and the Faculty of Social Science was being established. The Rastafarians were raising hell in Jamaica and Fidel Castro was raising hell in Cuba. Repatriation and Revolution!

The burning issues of debate were West Indian integration and identity, imperialism, decolonisation, racism, socialism, democracy, mass party, economic development. There was a widespread sense that the emerging post-colonial order was in crisis. The question was, what course should national independence take?

Late in 1959 the University had organised a series of Open Lectures on the future of the West Indies. C.L.R. James had spoken and had lit the place afire. After each lecture staff and students would retire to the Common Rooms of the Halls of Residence to continue the discussion. This became the template for the group of young West Indian lecturers and politically aware students in the social sciences and arts, that later began weekly meetings on Lloyd Best's veranda at College Common. I attended these meetings from the start; I believe they began in late 1960 or early 1961. The group later adopted the name of the 'West Indian Society for the Study of Social Issues' (WISSSI).

The first thing I remember Lloyd Best saying was that "the current political leadership in the region is intellectually bankrupt, with the possible exception of Jagan". This was a totally outrageous thing to say at a time when Jamaican students believed that Norman Manley was God and Trinidadians felt the same about Eric Williams. It was a provocative statement, challenging you to think about regional politics and economics in a different way. I recalled that the dominant themes in discussions were the prevalence of crisis; the need for decolonisation in the economy, society and political culture; and the need for popular participation in the post-colonial reconstruction of West Indian society. Along these lines papers were

prepared by students in the group² on the economics, sociology and politics of colonialism and of independence.

Lloyd Best gave a lecture on this subject just before his departure from Mona in October 1961, which established him as the *enfant terrible* of West Indian academics³. By the time he arrived in British Guiana the following year, inter-ethnic violence was raging. He was there as a U.N. Economic Adviser to Jagan's Administration. But he soon decided that Jagan, too, was intellectually bankrupt--a victim of Cold War 'ideologising'⁴. This was the background to the formation of the New World Group in Georgetown in 1962 and the publication of the first issue of the journal *New World*. The New World Group subsequently spread to Trinidad, Jamaica, Montreal and New York.

In 1962-1965 I was a graduate student at the London School of Economics and my thesis on foreign investment in Jamaica was directly influenced by discussions in the WISSSI and by the teaching of Alister McIntyre who, as a young faculty member, was one its members. As I was finishing up in London, Lloyd invited me to join the team of economists working on studies of regional economic integration to contribute a case study of the bauxite industry. At the same time McIntyre recruited me to come and lecture in UWI St Augustine, to which he had moved. So it was natural that when I eventually returned to Mona to teach in 1966⁵ I would gravitate to the New World Group which was by then active there. I served as Chairman of the Mona Group from 1966 to 1968. My work on bauxite, multinational corporations and dependency was strongly influenced by New World and the plantation school. In its own modest way it made a contribution to the

intellectual movement. I continued to be a regular contributor to *New World Quarterly* until it ceased publication in 1972.

II. Seven theses in New World thought

I will now summarise my understanding of what New World thought was about. This is my interpretation—others, both within the movement and outside it, will have their own. New World never had a manifesto; it was not an organisation in which members formally subscribed to a set of codified beliefs, principles and practices. It was an intellectual movement with varying tendencies; and its thinking evolved over time. My summary will focus on questions of philosophy, cosmology and epistemology; political economy, and social theory⁶. In distilling the ideas, I will refer mainly to two kinds of sources: the publications of the Group, in particular *New World Quarterly*; and intellectual spin-offs from New World, particularly regional economic integration, the plantation school, dependency and multinational corporations. I summarise the ideas in the form of seven theses.

First was the necessity for *independent thought*⁷. It held that the root of the Caribbean's problems lay in the colonial cast of mind, to epistemic dependency, to flawed conceptualisations based on 'imported' formulations. This was true for the economics, the politics, the society and the culture--all elements of an interconnected whole.

It followed that the first step in addressing the Caribbean *problematique* would be to conceptualise our own reality from within. It would mean observing the economy, the society, and the politics without reliance on preconceived models derived from the experience of others. It would mean close study of our own historical experience and locating our reality in the context of that history. It would mean drawing on the insights of writers, artists and other cultural workers. And then and only on that basis, developing concepts and theories that are appropriate to us.

Second, there was a theory of change that gave the central role to *ideas*. Ideas were asserted as the foundational step in effecting social transformation; and indigenous ideas were seen as the only sure way to escape from the colonial condition. According to Best "...social change in the Caribbean has to and can only begin in the minds of Caribbean men....thought is the action for us" (Best 1971a: 22, 23). In similar vein Beckford insisted that the transformation of plantation society begins with the psychological liberation of the intellectual classes from their colonised minds (Beckford 1972: 6). Related to this too was McIntyre's notion of 'functional' dependence – the dependence that arises not from the constraints of size or structure but from the policies that West Indian governments pursue (McIntyre 1971:166).

Third was the conceptualisation of the Caribbean as *a plantation system* (Best 1971a; Beckford 1972, 1978). I believe that this was New World's distinctive contribution to Caribbean social theory. It drew from the work of historians, sociologists and cultural anthropologists, especially from Wagley's notion of 'plantation America' (Wagley 1957). What New World

did was to turn the plantation into a basic paradigm for Caribbean society-- a framework by which to interpret the past and the present; the economics, the politics, the society and the culture. New World's Pan-Caribbeanism, therefore, stemmed from a cosmology in which all the islands and the adjacent mainland were the frame of reference of regional identity.

The fourth thesis related to was *economic dependence* and the fifth to *plantation economy*⁸. The economies were characterised as structurally dependent, meaning that governments had limited ability to influence economic activity by using the standard tools of monetary and fiscal policy. Dependence was attributed to the dominance over the key sectors of the economy by plantations and multinational corporations. The multinational corporations of the 20th century were held to be similar to the Joint Stock Trading Companies in the era of Mercantilism – they controlled initiative, organisation, capital, technology and marketing for Caribbean economies.

From this followed the theme of 'continuity with change'; the terms 'Old Mercantilism' and 'New Mercantilism'; the concept of 'Plantation Economy' and its three versions or 'models': 'Pure', during slavery; 'Modified', in the Post-Emancipation period; and 'Further Modified' in the modern period. The plantation economy was held to be the underlying factor in economic dependence, boom-bust cycles, adjustment without transformation, persistent poverty and social inequality (Best 1968; Best and Levitt 1968, Levitt and Best 1975).

The sixth thesis derived, for the Caribbean, a *theory of plantation society* from its base in the economy. The contemporary social structure and race

and class relations were held to be products of the legacy of the plantation system—that is, what had been instituted by the slave plantations and modified over time by indentureship, by the rise of the peasantry, by urbanisation, migration, and by the rise of new export staples⁹. These modifications were believed not to alter its fundamental character.

Here we should note that there were at least two versions of the theory of plantation society with regard to the treatment of race and class and the applicability of Marxist class analysis. Best consistently maintained that the Marxist notion of class is derived from the special case of 19th century industrial Europe and has limited relevance to contemporary Caribbean (1971a). In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, he has argued that ‘tribal’ identities based on ethnicity and/or religious affiliation are the primary foci of group solidarity. Beckford critiqued the classical Marxist analysis for ignoring the race question in the Caribbean; but in his later work he analysed plantation society as an integral part of the international capitalist system and proposed “...a synthesis of how race and class make plantation society a sort of ‘special case’ in the history of social formations”¹⁰ (Beckford 2000b, fn. 4)¹¹. His analysis of race in plantation society is evidently influenced by Marxist methodology

When I say the ‘plantation system’ I am not talking about agriculture and the planting of food, I am talking about the planting of labour as the critical element...the labour regime is based on race...this labour is not homogenous in the classical sense...and therefore not deriving classes in the classical system of Marxist analysis. What I am trying to

suggest is that race is instituted in both the mode of production and the mode of exchange (Beckford 1978: 24)

Beckford argued consistently that the cultural legacy of plantation racism that is the major factor frustrating the potential of Caribbean people. Thus there is a sense in which, ultimately, race trumped class in his perspective.

The seventh thesis relates to Best's theory of 'Doctor Politics'. This holds that the practice of politics and governance in the Caribbean is a derivative of the culture of the plantation and of Crown Colony Government¹², resulting in the excessive centralisation of personal authority in the office of Prime Minister. Best contrasted this with the civilised discourse and true participation in decision-making that he regarded as the essence of democratic politics.

To summarise: at the core of New World thinking was the need for epistemic sovereignty¹³, a belief in the power of ideas to effect change, and a view of the Caribbean condition as legacy of the pervasive effects of the plantation system.

III. *The rise and fall of New World*

III.1 Overview

New World thinking passed through several stages in its relations with the Caribbean intelligentsia. Its early days can be characterised as a period of *insurgency*. At this time—roughly in the early 1960s--it operated on the intellectual fringe, critiquing current orthodoxies, waging a kind of intellectual guerrilla warfare through its publications and outreach activity. The next stage I characterise as that of *co-existence*. At this time New World thinking achieved some degree of academic respectability and was accepted as one of several possible interpretations of Caribbean reality. From the mid-1960s, young West Indian UWI faculty began to publish regularly in *New World Quarterly* and the journal was widely read in intellectual circles. By the end of the decade New World thinking had established a position of near *dominance* in the Caribbean social sciences, with a noticeable impact on the public consciousness and the political climate of the region. In 1971, Trevor Munroe was to write:

For almost a decade, the New World and its associates were the most influential force amongst the progressive intellectuals primarily inside but also inside the University of the West Indies. In Kingston, Port-of-Spain and Georgetown the ideas of the group, embodied primarily in a quarterly journal, occasional pamphlets and public forums, had a deep influence on the thinking of students, university lecturers, high school teachers, journalists, publishers, artists, lawyers and others who wanted to develop a better understanding of West Indian society in order to contribute to its ‘progressive’ transformation (1990: 204).

Other ideological currents feeding the radicalisation of the late 1960s/early 1970s were Rastafarianism and Black Power; socialism, and Third World

economic nationalism. New World's contribution was to provide a rapidly growing body of Caribbean-grounded theoretical and empirical material, readily available in published form, on which radical scholars and political activists could draw. Similarly, its impact on the social sciences at UWI was widely acknowledged by contemporary scholars¹⁴. In the words of Carl Stone, it had '...filled a fundamental vacuum in analysis of the relationship between the dominating imperialist interest and those employed by that interest (1978: 4-5)¹⁵. New World's mission of epistemic decolonisation also appealed to a generation of young scholars infused with nationalist and regionalist ideologies and a sense of their generational mission to take over from foreign white academics.

Paralleling this stage, however, was one of intense *critique and contestation* of New World thought (the subject of Section IV of this paper). Around the same time, the New World Group itself experienced internal convulsions. Paradoxically, it self-destructed while at the very height of its influence. The Trinidad Group imploded in 1968; the Jamaican Group died quietly in 1969-1970; bereft of their points of reference, the Groups in the Diaspora ceased functioning. *New World Quarterly* ceased publication in 1972. Although the intellectual influence continued through the 1970s, these developments signalled the onset of the final stage – that of *dethronement and demise*.

What accounts for the decline of New World, after such a promising start and impressive scholarly achievements? To this question, several answers may be offered. Here, one should make the distinction between what

happened to the New World *Group* and what happened to New World *thought*.

III.2 The New World Group

The New World Group died principally as a result of internal disagreements over the relative emphasis to be given to direct political activity vis-à-vis intellectual work. In Trinidad, Lloyd Best led away a faction of the Millette-led New World Group to form *Tapia*; leadership rivalry was evidently also a factor in this episode¹⁶. Both Millete and Best founded popular newspapers, *Moko* and *Tapia* respectively, and both went on to found political parties that contested national elections. In Jamaica, after the Rodney Riot George Beckford gave up the Editorship of *New World Quarterly* and I, the Chairmanship of the Jamaica New World Group, to join the *Abeng* collective, which published a radical black nationalist weekly newspaper. In the 1970s we were both involved in support of Michael Manley's Democratic Socialist experiment in Jamaica.

The debate over 'thought' vs. 'action' was source of permanent tension within New World. Best's celebrated 1967 paper, 'Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom', was written partially as an answer to the demands of the younger members of his generation for greater political activism on the part of New World. Its widely quoted dictum, 'Thought is the action for us', only temporarily resolved the simmering disagreement. In the years when the movement was struggling to gain acceptance of its ideas, the tension could be accommodated. But at the moment of its greatest popularity and appeal the pressures for, and temptations of, direct political action

proved impossible to resist. And therein lay its undoing as a movement that was both intellectual in character and Pan-Caribbean in scope.

To begin with, the loss of several of its principal figures robbed the Group and its journal of much of the intellectual vitality underlying its initial appeal. In the second place, once New World scholars turned to political involvement, they could hardly escape the logic of national politics. The collapse of the West Indian Federation and the procession to national independence of the individual territories had unleashed a dynamic of insular nationalism which increasingly constricted the space allowed for regional politics¹⁷. In the Rodney Riot in Jamaica in 1968 and the Black Power Revolt in Trinidad in 1970, governments of the two principal UWI campus territories signalled to Caribbean non-nationals their non-acceptance of involvement in national politics. Similar developments took place in Barbados.

Furthermore, the expansion of employment of professionals in national institutions and of separate campuses of the University of the West Indies led to the emergence of new educated elites with a vested interest in insular statehood. As these dynamics gained momentum, national development took divergent paths; and the climate became less conducive to the sustaining of regional political consciousness and organisation. Regional politics became passé.

III.3 New World Thought

The course of New World thought took a somewhat different trajectory. As it gained academic legitimacy it became increasingly part of the mainstream in the social sciences, its models and texts being incorporated into the curricula and its many of its personalities assuming positions of administrative leadership in the UWI. Inevitably, this had the effect of undermining the movement and the journal. Staff seminars in the social sciences replaced New World Group meetings as a discussion forum on burning problems of Caribbean development. I.S.E.R. monographs and the I.S.E.R. journal *Social and Economic Studies* became an outlet for the publication of the new thinking. The downside of this was the progressive loss of the disciplinary cross-fertilisation that had characterised New World's early activity, as the social sciences drew away from the humanities¹⁸ and the disciplinary departments became self-contained academic enclaves.

New World thought—principally in the form of the plantation school and dependency--continued to exert a significant influence in the social sciences through the 1970s. However 'New Worldism', in its original incarnation as an aspiring system of *indigenous* thought, proved incapable of sustaining its intellectual dynamism and influence. By the late 1970s, it was being displaced by orthodox Marxism on the Left and by resurgent neo-liberalism on the Right. I attribute the terminal decline of New World thought to the weight of unresolved critiques that were made of its theory and methodology, to which I now turn.

IV. The critics and the critiques

IV.1 Overview

I group the critiques of New World thought into four thematic areas:-

- (i) philosophy and epistemology,
- (ii) theory of change and political praxis,
- (iii) economic methodology and social theory, and
- (iv) the policy dimension.

They came from two main sources: the Marxist left and the non-Marxist mainstream in the social sciences. Here I insert two caveats. First, the Marxist left in this context refers mainly to the Trevor Munroe-led Workers' Party of Jamaica (WPJ), which espoused an orthodox brand of Soviet Marxism¹⁹. The second caveat is that over time both the critics and New World thinkers themselves shifted their positions in response to the debate and to wider developments in the region and globally²⁰. One should, therefore, be careful not to box particular individuals into given positions, but rather locate positions in a specific temporal context and trace the evolution of thinking over time.

IV.2 Philosophy and epistemology

Many scholars objected to what they perceived to be New World's wholesale rejection of 'imported' knowledge. The Marxist critique on this subject was made in a seminal paper by Trevor Munroe in 1971 that

characterised New World thinking as a form of ‘Bourgeois Idealism’ (1971) This critique held that Marxism could not be rejected as an alien ideology since Caribbean society is capitalist, and hence that the Marxist method of historical materialism is as valid in the Caribbean as anywhere else, needing only to be applied to the concrete conditions of the region. Munroe’s paper became the basic reference document for Caribbean Marxists on New World thinking and marked “a closure to intellectual inquiry on this matter for the Jamaican left” (R. Lewis 2003: 92). Thereafter the tendency was for many younger scholars to fall under the influence of orthodox Marxist thinking.

From the mainstream, several scholars had difficulty with the New World position on ‘independent thought’. The most serious charge came from George Cumper, then Professor and Head of the Department of Economics at Mona. Cumper charged that New World economists had rejected one particular kind of Western economics while ignoring the existence of other schools of thought, that they had overstated their case for political purposes, and that their real agenda was to take political power, impose intellectual closure to the outside world and establish a totalitarian political order (Cumper 1974)²¹.

More broadly representative of the emerging view of the academic community was Stone’s comment that the “attempt at nationalising social science concepts (may have) reached an excessive point” (1978: 5). The occasion for this observation was a 1975 seminar on the Caribbean social sciences organised by the I.S.E.R and attended by the region’s leading scholars (Box 1). A notable feature of this event was the vigorous debate that took place over the relative merits of ‘New Worldism’ vis-à-vis

Marxism in the analysis of Caribbean society According to the Conference report, the consensus reached was that:

...while there are indeed ideographic or unique features in the Caribbean situation, these features do not in themselves justify the need for either a distinct Caribbean methodology or an autochthonous Caribbean theory. (Lindsay 1978: vii)

The seminar marked a turning point in the status of New World thinking and signalled the onset of its waning influence. But the issue raised in the above passage was never adequately addressed. Did New World in fact argue for both an 'autochthonous Caribbean theory' and a 'distinct Caribbean methodology', or does advocacy of the first necessarily imply proposal of the second? On the whole, neither New World scholars nor their critics drew an explicit distinction between theory and methodology. Such a distinction might have been useful in identifying the points of divergence and of coincidence in their respective positions and in advancing the debate.

New World scholars could not have subscribed to a position of *absolute* knowledge independence, for their texts show ample acknowledgement of their use of non-Caribbean scholarship. Their rejectionist stance was directed against what was considered to be *inappropriate* imported theory. However, the absence of an extended debate on the underlying methodological and epistemological issues left the matter unresolved and prejudiced the further development of the task of appropriate theory-building. The discussion became polarised around the contending claims of

‘New Worldism’ and Marxism, rather than proceeding in terms of an exploration of what constitutes appropriate theory and useful method.

Box 1. Participants at the I.S.E.R. Seminar on Problems of the Applied Social Sciences in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Turtle Towers Seminar) June 1975

George Beckford, Compton Bourne, Erna Brodber, Barry Chevannes, Bernard Coard, Susan Craig, Alfred Francis, Eddie Greene, Marshall Hall, Don Harris, Edwin Jones, Elsie LeFranc, Vaughan Lewis, Louis Lindsay, Leslie Manigat, Joycelin Massiah, G.E. Mills, Maurice Odle, Carl Parris, Peter Phillips, Selwyn Ryan, Carl Stone, Dwight Venner, Rosina Wiltshire, Michael Witter and David Wong.

Source: Conference Report, Lindsay (1978)

IV.3 Theory of change and political praxis

New World was accused of political naivety in its argument that ‘independent thought’ could be the key factor in effecting political and social change. The critics argued that intellectual activity could not be divorced from its social basis and would need to be combined with leadership and political organisation. The critique came from both Marxist and non-Marxist positions (Munroe 1971, Benn 2004: 122). The eventual involvement of New World scholars in political activism appeared to validate this critique. Yet, as argued previously, it was a major reason for the disappearance of the New World Group. Paradoxically, this development confirmed both the critique of the thesis and the original thesis itself.

During the 1970s and the 1980s significant political reversals were experienced both by former New World leaders and by the Marxists. Best's Tapia and Millette's UNIP were unsuccessful in electoral politics; the Michael Manley-led PNP, that had been supported by George Beckford and by the present writer, was heavily defeated in the 1980 election in Jamaica; while the implosion of the PRG in Grenada discredited the Caribbean Marxist left. One consequence of these developments was a process of introspection and re-assessment of positions on the part of many of the protagonists in the debate. In 1990 Best was to declare:

The central epistemological question in all times and all places is: how do people learn? ... How do they apprehend reality? ... The related political question is: how do you achieve mobilization? ... (the) answer is quite simply that we do not know the answer to either of these questions. The only lesson you can learn from history is that there is no lesson you can learn from history (1996: 8-9).²²

There is far less certainty here about the decisive role of ideas as a catalyst for change than is the case in 'Thought and Freedom' 23 years earlier. The Caribbean Marxist left, for its part, came to adopt a position on 'Thought and Freedom' that was diametrically opposed to that taken by Munroe in 1971. In the words of one of the movement's leading scholars (on the occasion of a Lloyd Best testimonial conference in 2002)

Best walks tall in the political graveyard of the Caribbean left, whose death knell was the fall of the Grenada revolution... (he) challenges us... to an epistemic probing about how and what we understand about

the contemporary Caribbean... (he) challenges received wisdom of both the left and the right, exposing the limitations of perception mimicked on models and ideas developed in Moscow, Berlin, London, Paris and Washington. ...

In Munroe's (critique of Best) lay some of the epistemic problems of the radical movements, and the dogmatism that characterized the exchange of ideas and helped shape political organization and practice. These issues had significant consequences for the lives of many people throughout the region, and this was brought to a tragic end in Grenada in 1983 (R. Lewis 2003: 90).

What is common to both the above statements is the absence of *certainty*. A similar observation would apply to the present writer's comments on nationalisation. Hence, the issues raised by both New World and its critics on the goals of change in the Caribbean and the methods of bringing it about are as current as they ever were.

IV.4 Economic methodology and social theory

A recurring criticism of the plantation school by mainstream economists was the absence of clearly specified causal relationships and of empirical or quantitative analysis in its 'models'²³. According to Levitt, detailed empirical work on the plantation economy models was carried out but not

published. She opined that “much misunderstanding might have been avoided had this work been available to critics” (1998:11)²⁴. But here, too, as in initial debate with the Marxists, there were unresolved issues of methodology. New World scholars argued, in effect, that there is a legitimate role for conceptual discourse supported by ‘stylised facts’ as a stage prior to formal theory-building and empirical testing. To arrive at their conceptualisations they employed a method that has been characterised as ‘historical/structural/institutional’ (Girvan 1973: 12) or as ‘historically-based empiricism’ (Benn 2004; 124). Hence Beckford, in presenting his seminal work *Persistent Poverty*, declared:

The general approach is exploratory. More questions are raised than answered... I do not mind being charged with over-generalisation and under-documentation. This is an “ideas” book. What we need most are studies pregnant with ideas, not studies full of sterile detail (1972: vi-viii).

Similarly, Best responded to the critics by explaining that

The models of plantation economy were put forward as an aid to discerning the Caribbean predicament as a legacy of history, as a simple tool for grasping complexity and as a partial formulation meant to focus on the whole (1988: 35).

Best was also quite unapologetic in going beyond the social sciences to generate insights into the Caribbean condition. In one of his later statements he drew on the world of the poetic and literary imagination²⁵; speaking

about giving play to the ‘curious imagination’ and about ‘light, sound, and landscape’, about invoking the context: historic, geographic, environmental, social, economic, cultural, above all about ‘locating ourselves at the centre of the universe’ (Best 1966: 5-6).

What was lacking in the discourse, as I have previously argued, is explicit engagement on questions of philosophy, epistemology and methodology—what is reality, what is truth, and how are they to be arrived at? As a consequence, the exchanges tended to assume the character of the proverbial ‘dialogue of the deaf’. The resulting hiatus is to be regarded as an unfinished business of Caribbean thought, which awaits the attention of a fresh generation of scholars.

Regarding social theory, the kinds of questions raised included: does the plantation paradigm provide a social theory of Caribbean society as well as economic? Besides being a specific mode of economic organisation, is the plantation a satisfactory means of characterising an economy, a society, a polity and a culture? If so, does this hold equally true in the 20th century as it did in the 18th? Does the plantation school over-emphasise continuity and understate change? Due to limitations of space we cannot address these questions in this paper²⁶. I must turn next to the critiques made of the policy dimension of New World thinking.

IV.5 Policies

New World political economy advocated regional economic integration, land reform and localisation of ownership as the antidote to small size, foreign domination and dependency. Much of this was uncontroversial; the controversies arose out of the policies of nationalisation and economic self-reliance advocated by people like myself (Girvan 1971b), George Beckford (1972: ch. 8) and C.Y. Thomas (1974) and their association with statist policies followed by governments in Jamaica and Guyana in the 1970s. The economic decline and political degeneration of these ‘radical’ projects in the Caribbean condemned New World political economy to a form of ‘guilt by intellectual association’. Notable critics were Carl Stone (1980), who pointed to Southeast Asia, and Courtney Blackman²⁷, who pointed to Barbados, as evidence that orthodox export-oriented economic strategies were more successful than state-directed delinking from the international capitalist system.

The fact that New World writers themselves came to adopt a critical position on these radical experiments would have served to validate these criticisms in the eyes of the critics. Beckford denounced the vacillation of the Michael Manley administration in Jamaica (Beckford and Witter 1982); C.Y. Thomas, drawing on the Guyanese experience, assailed the rise of the ‘authoritarian state’ (1984). The present writer, a strong advocate of nationalisation of mineral industries in 1971, was critical of the nationalisation experiences of the 1970s:

the lessons of the ‘radical options’ show that the expansion of state activity is not merely a matter of political choice or will. The shortage of management and technical manpower imposes severe constraints in

the short and medium term... This implies careful consideration of timing and sequencing in the expansion of state activity.

Second, in the context of West Indian political culture, state activities have shown almost universal tendency to become *politicised* – used by the governing part or group as an instrument of patronage, or even worse, as a means of consolidating its hold on power

A third, and related, tendency is for the management of and employees of state activities to adopt a bureaucratic attitude towards the society at large... as a consequence, there is strong undercurrent of distrust and often resentment on the part of the public towards state enterprises and state activity in general..(Girvan 1988: 269-270)

In 1990 Best was to declare that

...since 1976 I have been the most vehement critic of the New World and Marxist policies... the more faithfully (these) strategies... have been followed, the more disastrous have been the consequences for the common people”²⁸ (Best 1996:4).

It is a moot point whether the policies followed by the Burnham and Manley Administrations in the 1970s were those that were actually advocated, or intended, by the New World Group. What mattered is the perception that they were: the status of the ideas became linked to the status of regimes that were perceived to be putting them into practice.

The international intellectual and political climate was also changing. Dependency thinking, with which New World was associated, was critiqued on theoretical grounds and for failing to admit the possibility of capitalist industrialisation in the periphery²⁹. By the 1980s ‘Development Economics’—which was based on the premise that developing countries required an economics *sui generis*--was being displaced by neo-liberalism, which claimed universal validity across all countries. Finally, the tragic implosion of the Grenadian Revolution in 1983 completed the discrediting of the radical project in the Caribbean.

To summarise: the demise of New World can be attributed to the accumulation of unresolved political and epistemological issues that led eventually to the break-up of the Group and to the loss of dynamism and of influence of the intellectual movement. Ideologically, New World was outflanked on the left by orthodox Marxism and later, on the right by neo-liberalism. Global developments also created a climate that was, by the end of the 1970s, far less receptive to New World’s message of national economic self-reliance than it had been a decade earlier.

V. Rediscovery and re-evaluation, or, where do we go from here?

From the 1980s New World began to be treated as a significant chapter in the intellectual and political history of the region. The evidence is to be seen in a series of conferences and reviews of the leading texts, the leading ideas and the leading personalities of the movement³⁰. Several articles, books and

edited collections on the contribution of New World, ‘plantation’, and ‘dependency’ have been published³¹. Various models have been proposed to evaluate the contribution. Bernal, Figueroa and Witter (1984) treat it as part of the ‘critical tradition’. Benn characterises it as an ‘ideology of economic decolonisation’³². In broader historical terms, New World thinking can be viewed as part of a process of the ‘creolisation of thought’, following the model proposed by Gordon Lewis (G. Lewis 1983: 26-27).

My preferred model is the one proposed by Sankatsing (1998), who locates New World or as a form of resistance within the periphery to Eurocentric thinking, ‘the globalisation of the local experience in the Occident’ that began with 500 years ago. Sankatsing credits New World with ‘remarkable feats in a search for indigenisation of the social sciences in the region, reluctant to uncritically accept dominant paradigms and theories’. I am at one with him when he says that the dissolution of New World, put ‘an abrupt end to the scrutiny of the genesis of our societies’, leading to negative developments in the Caribbean social sciences including ‘unwillingness to look for comprehensive explanations of our own reality’, ‘moving away from theory’, ‘blind empiricism’, and ‘even scientific journalism’ (Sankatsing 1998).

Sankatsing’s assessment challenges us to revisit the approach of New World and to reflect on its relevance to the world of today. A world where the Cold War is no more and there is a single super-power with no rivals. A world in which the dominant ideas are those of globalisation, market fundamentalism, market triumphalism, post-modernism and neo-liberalism; while Marxism and other forms of anti-systemic thought have been ghettoised. A world

where national development is regarded as an obsolete goal, self-reliance as fantasy, and socialism as lunacy. A world where, however, scholarship has been engendered and progressive politics is the politics of feminist empowerment, civil society mobilisation and environmental activism.

The position that I hold is that the Caribbean-centred cosmology and the critical methodology that lay at the heart of the New World project are as necessary in this world as they have ever been in the past. In the 1960s, the choices we were being offered were western capitalism and soviet communism. Today we are offered the choice of joining capitalist globalisation or being condemned to marginalisation. We are offered one model for our societies: market-led integration into the global economy; on terms defined by capital and by the governments of the rich and powerful countries. We are told that we must cede our economic sovereignty, political sovereignty and intellectual sovereignty. We are told that must cede our right to think for ourselves. And this is unacceptable.

In the 1970s the Third World was agitating for a New International Economic Order – the NIEO. By the 1990s we had a different kind of NIEO – a New *Imperial* Economic Order. It is represented by the WTO, the Washington-based International Financial Institutions, the transnational corporations, and the impersonal forces of global capital markets. Together with this is a New Imperial Political Order, not unlike that established by the Great Powers in the 19th century. NIEO and NIPO have a joint central committee; it is called the G8.

Consider the result of the meeting held at Gleneagles in June 2005. The G8 leaders declared that their countries will write off the debts owed to them by the poorest countries in the world, *provided* that these countries practice good governance and clean up corruption. One cannot question the need for good governance and clean government in our countries. My question is: by what authority do the leaders of the G8 sit in judgment upon our countries, setting up eligibility criteria and certification procedures, in the practice of good governance and honest administration? What is their track record in telling their truth to their own populations, for example about the reasons for going to war, their track record in respecting international law, their track record in the observance of open and transparent procedures for the award of contracts, their track record on respect for human rights? What does the history of the last 50, 150 or 450 years tell us about their record on democracy, human rights, or the practice of the most elementary principles of humanity? What are their qualifications for tutoring and examining the countries of the South in those subjects, besides the possession of military and economic power? It is nothing but a piece of impertinence and imperial arrogance.

These countries are telling the rest of the world that we have no choice but to open up our markets to their goods and services and their corporations and to surrender the sovereign rights of governments to regulate our economies, to protect the livelihoods of local farmers and local business, to regulate foreign corporations, to control the flow of short term capital which has destabilised countries as big as Brazil and Russia, all in the name of giving free play to market forces and levelling the playing field. The playing field is level when a few hundred giant corporations control a large slice of the

world economy and when a few hundred billionaires have more wealth than billions of people living in the poorest countries. That level playing field is the New Imperial Economic Order and the New Imperial Political Order.

Packaged with this is a New Imperial Intellectual Order. Its purveyors are the northern universities, the visiting experts, the aid agencies, the World Bank and the IMF. They define the agenda. They tell us what our problems are and what the solutions are. They tell us what to think about ourselves. The World Bank has the biggest concentration of ‘development professionals’ in the entire world, some ten thousand of them, which is probably more than in the rest of the world put together.

Let me give you just one example. In May 2005 the World Bank published a report on the future of the Caribbean in the year 2020 whose title was *Time to Choose* (World Bank 2005). What does it say about our condition when a Washington-based organisation is challenging us to choose? The report is 260 pages long and covers every aspect of Caribbean economic policy; in almost every area of Caribbean life it purports to give both diagnosis and prescription. That is an example of the New Imperial Intellectual Order.

Caribbean scholars should be deconstructing and critiquing this document. We should be uncovering the hidden agenda: what it says and what it does not say, and why. We should be monitoring how far and how fast the language of this document enters the official discourse of officials and academics. The document talks about the need for governments to negotiate an ‘orderly dismantling of preferences’. Do not the United States and the European Union give huge subsidies to their own farmers, \$30,000 per

farmer per year? (Thomas 2005: 11). Is this not a form of preferences? It talks about the need for transparency in government procurement: this is very necessary, and what does the World Bank have to teach us about that? A recent book tells how in Indonesia the World Bank pumped in \$25 billion in loans and grants after the 1965 coup paved the way for a massacre of 500,000 people – in recognition of the country's exemplary human rights record, no doubt – and tolerated the theft of between \$5 and \$7 billion of this by the President's cronies because he was anticommunist (Mallaby 2004: 186). They have a very good experience in fighting corruption in Indonesia that they can share with us.

It is we in the Caribbean who must put issues of governance and corruption on the agenda – and we are doing so– not because an international organisation tells us that its bad for growth. It is we who must work out the most effective means of addressing it, not relying on others to provide the solutions that embody their own cultural assumptions, their own interest and their own agenda. Are we free and independent or aren't we?

My point is that the New World mission of intellectual decolonisation is more relevant than ever because intellectual colonisation is alive and well and living in Mona and St Augustine and Kingston and Port of Spain. The methods of intellectual colonisation are the conditionalities of the international lending agencies and donor countries, their financial surveillance, their technical reports on our education system and our health system and our agricultural policy and public sector reform. The methods are the daily bombardment from the global media, it is scholarships and fellowships and travel grants that do us the favour of assimilating their world

view; and it is consultancies given to scholars where they define the terms and we do the work.

We need to take a close and candid look at the effect of consultancies on the sustaining of critical and of independent thought. What have been the effects on the academy of the economic difficulties of the 1980s-1990s and the commercialisation of knowledge? I fear that it turned most of us in the social sciences at the UWI into hustlers for foreign consultancies. I could never oppose consultancy – it is often a necessity of survival and I engage in it myself. But as social scientists we also have to stand back and see the bigger picture of which we are a part. The fact that you are working for a plantation doesn't make it any less of a plantation!

In Asia and Africa there is now a debate going among scholars on consultancies as 'colonised research' (UNRISD 2004: 10-11). One African scholar has argued that there the new division of labour in research mirrors the old colonial division of labour in economy³³. The issues, the questions and the data categories are set by the agencies of the North that sponsor the research. They sub-contract the job of data collection to African institutions and researchers. The information is semi-processed and exported to the North, where the finishing takes place –the interpretation, conclusions and policy advice. That's the 'value added' in the production of knowledge. Then it is returned to the country or origin and consumed. The Global South is paying for its own intellectual recolonisation!

Is it any different in the Caribbean? Are we setting the agenda? Are we questioning the concepts that are handed to us and adapting them to fit out

history and culture and cosmologies and inventing others when none of them fit? Have we lost the boldness and the audacity to think for ourselves and invent models of our own? We cannot afford to lose that capacity and I daresay we have not lost it. The question is, do we have the will to exercise it?

So that fact that the world has changed since the 1960s doesn't mean that it hasn't also remained the same. We have a different world from the world of New World but it is in many respects the old world that New World opposed. The fact that New World made mistakes and had contradictions certainly doesn't make what is now on offer inherently superior.

Economic globalisation doesn't have to mean a globalisation of the mind that detaches one from the specificity of local history and time and place and experience. It doesn't change the fact that Columbus lied when he said that he had discovered the West Indies, because, as the Calypsonian Shadow pointed out, he had only discovered some Indians who had discovered him³⁴. Columbus was the purveyor of his own truth; we have to discover and purvey ours. It doesn't mean that Bob Marley wasn't right in his call to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, for only we ourselves can free our minds³⁵. Bob was singing a 'Song of Freedom'; New World was a Song of Freedom and long may we continue to sing it.

[This revision completed 24 July 2007]

¹ Paper presented at the Conference on “The Thought of New World: The Quest for Intellectual Decolonisation” held by the Centre of Caribbean Thought, Mona, U.W.I., June 16-18, 2005. Revised for publication.

² Walter Rodney, Orlando Patterson, Richard Fletcher and myself.

³ Among other things, Best enraged followers of Norman Manley by declaring that he could not his people to Independence “wearing a waistcoat”. To my knowledge, Best’s 1961 lecture was never published, but many of the ideas are contained in his later published writings.

⁴ The term is taken from one of his papers, Best 1965.

⁵ I lectured at St Augustine in February-July 1966 and took up an appointment at Mona as lecturer in Economics in August 1966.

⁶ Not covered by this account is ‘New World thinking’ in literature and the humanities, which formed a significant portion of the publications of the Group.

⁷ On this, see New World Associates 1971a: 241; Best 1965, 1971a; Beckford 1972: vi.

⁸ On this, see New World Associates 1971; Best, 1971a; Best and Levitt 1968; Levitt and Best 1975; Beckford 1972, Beckford (ed.) 1975; Girvan 1970; Girvan (ed.) 1973; Girvan and Jefferson (eds.) 1971.

⁹ George Beckford was the most prolific and consistent writer on this subject. For a succinct statement of his early position see Beckford 2001.

¹⁰ In the same passage referred to, Beckford critiqued his earlier analysis of this question as having “several weaknesses... specifically, its handling of the class question was overshadowed by the emphasis on race...” (2000d)

¹¹ I am indebted to Kari Polanyi Levitt’s excellent introduction to the Beckford Papers (Levitt 2000: xlix – l) for its account of Beckford’s treatment of the race question.

¹² See the discussion by Ryan 2003.

¹³ The term is suggested by Bogue 2003

¹⁴ See Benn 1974, 2004; Bernal, Figueroa and Witter 1983; Greene 1983; Harris 1978; Stone 1978.

¹⁵ Stone characterised New World/plantation as the second stage in the development of the Caribbean Social Sciences, the first being one dominated by expatriate researchers and their perspectives.

¹⁶ On this see Millette 2003; Ryan 2003; Meeks 2003

¹⁷ This point was made by Lloyd Best in delivering the C.L.R. James Memorial Lecture in 2004. No written or published text is available.

¹⁸ Notably, the journal *Savacou* commenced publication around the same time that *New World Quarterly* ceased publication.

¹⁹ The clarification is important, in that In fact some New World thinkers like Beckford and Girvan, and Caribbean dependency theorists like C.Y. Thomas; adopted what I call a type of ‘Third World Marxism’ influenced by the Dar Es Salaam socialist school and the work of scholars including Walter Rodney (1972), Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Samir Amin (1974) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1979).

²⁰ This is evident from a reading of the evolution of the thinking of Beckford (e.g. 1972; 1978), Girvan (e.g. 1971a; 1988), Best (e.g. 1971a; 1996); as well as that of the Marxist critics of New World discussed in section IV..3 below.

²¹ Strictly speaking, the charge was made against the ‘dependency school’ rather than New World as such, and Cumper’s critique was written in response to a Conference paper by the present writer, subsequently revised and published as Girvan (1973).

²² The statement was made in 1990, at a conference held in tribute to George Beckford.

²³ See for example C.Y. Thomas 1968; Steve DeCastro 1968; Cumper 1974: 477, Brown and Brewster 1974; and the critiques of Sudama, Farrell and Pantin referred to by Best 1998; 32-33.

²⁴ Levitt further explained, in a conversation with this writer in February 2005, that the plantation economy models were meant to be used as a planning tool to aid government policy for economic transformation.

²⁵ In particular, the writers Kamau Braithwaite and Wilson Harris

²⁶ These are discussed in my paper on Caribbean Dependency Thought (Girvan 2006, forthcoming)

²⁷ Cited by Best 1998: 34.

²⁸ To avoid confusion, it should be noted that Best in this comment distinguished Thomas's position from that of the New World Group, whereas the present review treats both as dependency thought and distinguishes them from orthodox Marxism.

²⁹ On this, see Warren 1973; and Palma 1978.

³⁰ Examples are the symposium at U.W.I. Mona in honour of George Beckford, 1990; establishment of the George Beckford Chair in Caribbean Economy at the Department of Economics, U.W.I. Mona and of the Annual George Beckford Memorial Lecture in the early 1990s; Conference of the Association of Caribbean Economists (ACE) in Memory of George Beckford 1991; establishment of ACE George Beckford Award for contribution to Caribbean Economy, 1991; Publication of the George Beckford Papers (Beckford 2000a); Conference on 'Plantation Economy Revisited' to mark the 25th Anniversary of the completion of Plantation Economy studies, Department of Economics, U.W.I St Augustine, 1993; Kari Levitt Festschrift, Montreal, 1997; Conference in tribute to Lloyd Best, U.W.I St Augustine, 2002; and the Centre for Caribbean Thought Conference on the Thought of New World, June 2005

³¹ Notably Bernal, Figueroa and Witter 1984; Witter and Lindsay 1996; Pantin (ed.) 1992; Beckford 2000a; Pantin and Mahabir (eds.) 1998; Ryan (ed.) 2003; Sankatsing 1989; Blomstrom and Hettne 1984, ch. 5; Benn 1987; Benn 2004, ch. 5; Mendell (ed.) 2005.

³² The term is suggested by Benn's (2004) treatment of New World in ch. 5

³³ Contribution by Adebayo Olukoshi to Panel Discussion at the UNRSID Conference (UNRSID 2004: 11)

³⁴ This a paraphrase of a line from the calypso *Columbus Lied*, composed and sung by Winston Bailey ("The Shadow")

³⁵ The reference is to Bob Marley's "Redemption Song".