

Book Launch

Caribbean Reasonings – The Thought of New World: The Quest for Decolonisation

Edited by Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan

Comments by Annita Montoute

It is really an honour for me to be part of this distinguished panel commenting on this publication not only because of the great Caribbean thinkers who are featured in this book but also because of the timeliness of this publication at this juncture of Caribbean development. The latter will largely be the focus of my comments.

The common thread throughout this publication is that of interrogating issues relating to Caribbean development at both the level of theory and practice using lenses which take into account the peculiarities and uniqueness of the Caribbean Region. New World thinking/philosophy emerged out of a certain geo political context at both the regional and international levels but the principles are very relevant at this particular point in the history of Caribbean development.

When Lloyd Best was asked how the name New World came about in this remarkable interview – in the last chapter in the text, he said the name was not arbitrary “...in terms of North America being colonies of settlement, South America being colonies of conquest and the Caribbean being colonies of exploitation,...we said why don’t we call it

New World, a new world in America.” New World was to connote therefore the idea of creating a new Caribbean by breaking free from the structures/systems and paradigms that had facilitated that exploitation and forging a new development path.

The reason I have chosen to focus on this is because of the relevance of this now more than any other time in our history. The subtitle “the quest for decolonization” captures this continued relevance. At this time in our history, the Caribbean at large is very much colonised by powerful ideas from outside that are alive in universities, classroom and in our psyche. When I speak of the colonization of ideas, I speak of the neo liberal paradigm which permeated and dominated the workings of institutions globally, regionally and nationally, the minds of some of our trade negotiators and students in universities for well over three decades. The extent of this colonization of our psyche is so deep that even with the discrediting of this framework by recent events there is still widespread belief that the current development model and the accompanying processes are inevitable; that there is no stopping them - as if they are like breathing and that there is nothing or very little we can do about it.

And consequently many times in some circles things are accepted as given, as fact, as if they are not undergirded by a particular underlying philosophy. Ideology is therefore seen as an obscenity - a concept associated with revolutionaries, leftists and rebels. This trend has become evident in the nature of discussions we hold at various levels.

Meetings have become for the most part, a discussion of technical matters, and they are apolitical and a historical in orientation. So we question the substantive aspects of policy, especially trade policy without questioning the framework within which it was crafted and yet we hope for different results. There is not enough interrogation for deeper and underlying meanings.

What is remarkable about this project is that a group of persons cared about the Caribbean enough to spend their lives questioning existing paradigms, researching, writing in an attempt to resolve our developmental challenge and some still continue to do so. As I read the book, I felt the passion of the authors, I felt the deep commitment and dedication they had and still have to make a contribution and to be change agents. While this period was full of challenges, pioneers of the New World Group were surrounded by icons both globally and regionally who must have provided this inspiration. What this publication did for me was to reinforce and provide inspiration for questioning models that are imposed on us especially as this current approach to development policy takes a one – size – fits - all approach.

What it also did was to re ignite that flame that has been inside of me for a long time to do something or to be part of a process that seeks the genuine advancement of the Caribbean region. It does not matter what perspective you hold, reading through the chapters of this book, you will be inspired by the life and work of the founder, pioneers

of New World and the newer generation to make a contribution to the development of our Region.

And I think this is the true essence of what this book will do for the younger generation of academics and students. It should propel people into action and prepare a group of **persons** who will take up the baton from where others have left. And Best suggested it in the final moments of his interview. He said “these governments give money...millions away for foreign experts for all kinds of stupidity...how long will the population take that? I believe we are going to have an accident, something that nobody anticipated, nobody planned, unfortunately, I will not be there for it, but you are there and a lot of the younger generation is coming up.”

I found the discussion within the book rich in substantive as well as in methodological issues in the study of the social sciences. Girvan highlighted one of the criticisms of the plantation school by mainstream economists as not having “clearly specified causal relationships and of empirical or quantitative analysis in its ‘models.’ This highlights one of the debates in international relations and the social sciences generally. That is, the debate between the traditionalists versus the behaviouralist approaches towards the study of social phenomenon.

And finally, authors were also able to include in a very concrete way, concepts that students usually find so daunting – for example ontological and epistemological issues in

the study of the social sciences. If there are students in the audience struggling with these issues, a read of certain sections will bring some clarity.

Thank you!