

## **THE INNER-DYNAMICS of the CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM: IMPLICATIONS for CARIBBEAN SOCIOLOGY**

### **OVERVIEW**

Every discourse has a context. Every discourse has a motive. The Sociology that developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century France was a response to the social crisis that was experienced there at that time. The Sociology that developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century France had a context. The man who is considered to be the founding father of Sociology, Auguste Comte was convinced that a science of society was possible and would be capable of reconstructing French society. The major problematic of France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the need to reconstruct French society. Thus, the motive of 19<sup>th</sup> century European Sociology was to develop principles that would guide the reconstruction of France. It is extremely important to recognize that Auguste Comte was motivated by the need to make a contribution to the development of his society.

As sociologists of the Caribbean, we cannot overlook this critical component of sociological discourse. Sociologists of the Caribbean must focus on making a contribution to the upliftment of the people of the Caribbean. In order to do this, we must identify the major problematic of the region i.e. the context upon which a genuine sociology of the Caribbean is built.

*Caribbean Sociologists* can make a positive contribution to the development of the region. However, in order to this, they must adopt a highly critical perspective. We cannot continue to engage in what Holmes and Crossley (2004) refer to as the “uncritical, intercultural transfer of knowledge and models of development”.

While sociological models of the Caribbean (plural, creole, plantation society theses) focus on the outer-structural features of the Caribbean reality, it is important to appreciate that Caribbean society is reflected in a powerful way in the consciousness of Caribbean people. The peculiarity and complexity of the reality that is the Caribbean lies in the fact that making sense of the Caribbean is not simply about unravelling the denouement of social structure; moreso, it is about a peculiar and complex experience. The Caribbean experience is about human beings struggling to find a sense of place. This comes out powerfully in the work of Derek Walcott. In the poem “A Far Cry From Africa”, Walcott writes:

“I who am poisoned with the blood of both, where shall I turn divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed the drunken officer of British rule, how choose I between this Africa  
and the English tongue I love? I betray them both or give back what they give? How can  
I face such slaughter and be cool? How can I turn from Africa and live?”

Derek Walcott's work must be seen as a response to his experience of the Caribbean and as such must be regarded as sociological. Sociology is a response to social conditions. It does not have to be a science. It has to be true.

We need to examine the Caribbean reality through pure lenses. The Caribbean region is an invaded space – a space invaded by capitalism. The notion invaded suggests that there is a fundamental difference between a genuine capitalist state and one that has been invaded. The Caribbean is yet to enjoy the benefits of capitalism as derived by real capitalist states such as the United States of America and Great Britain. It is safe to contend that the Caribbean is not a real capitalist space. The Caribbean is an end product of capitalism. Mark Figueroa (2007) argued that the enigma of the Caribbean lies in the fact that the region has always been associated with capitalism. How then can we describe that space that has always been associated with capitalism?

Related to the notion of invaded space is the notion of distorted space. A distorted social space refers to that which is characterised by multiple distortions and contradictions. The idea of distorted space has significant implications for the human beings that inhabit that space. Do we expect that the human beings of a distorted social space to have a healthy consciousness?

Caribbean society was born out of oppression. Slavery was an oppressive institution and therefore had a destructive effect on the human being. Slavery did not serve to humanise. Slavery dehumanised. We must come to terms with this fact – slavery had a dehumanising effect on Caribbean people. The question is: what have we done to rehumanise Caribbean people?

Our issue in the Caribbean is to reconstruct the human being whose social and psychological orientation has been built on the legacy of an oppressive and dehumanizing system. The notions plural society, plantation society and creole society underscore the preoccupation of Caribbean social scientists with the structure of society. What we need to be concerned about is not simply the structure of Caribbean society but rather the state of the human being in the Caribbean. We should have developed perspectives on how to reconstruct the human being in the Caribbean. In so doing we would have been true to our context. In so doing, we would have contributed immensely to the progress of the region.

It was Professor Hilary Beckles (2004) who said that the situation in the Caribbean is grave. He went on to say that we have not had economic growth in the region for twenty years. He therefore asked a very serious question: "What are we to make of our history?"

I ask, what is the nature of the Caribbean development problem?

## **THE INNER-DYNAMICS OF THE CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM**

The development problem of the Caribbean extends beyond the parameters of Economics. It emerges from a peculiar set of historico-psychological conditions. Non-economic factors therefore represent major components of the Caribbean development equation.

Don Marshall's (1998) examination of the West-Indian development experience illustrates the critical role of non-economic factors. Marshall argues that the key economic players –the planters, the merchants and the royalists had no real stake in the transformation of the region. It was not in the interest of these key players to transform the local economy. Rather, it was in the expansion of the commercial sphere of the colonial economy that the planter-merchant elite could reproduce and entrench itself. The behaviour of the planter-merchant elite in West-Indian society is no doubt peculiar. It portrays the planter-merchant elite as a class motivated not solely by the need for capital accumulation but rather by the need to preserve its position of dominance.

**Sir William Arthur Lewis also recognized the important position occupied by non-economic factors in the Caribbean.**

**In poor countries, some production and exchange are governed not by desires for income maximization but by other non-economic considerations. Thus, in some countries living near the subsistence level, production and exchange are governed by ritual laws based on kinship and on authority status.**

**In addition, Sir Arthur's Development Economics - underscores the complexity of the development problem of the Caribbean.**

**The economics that is relevant to their problems is not the economics of marginal utility, but the economics of laws, institutions, tenures, nationality, race, religion, ideology...**

**Despite Lewis' deviation from orthodox economic principles in his analyses, Lloyd Best argued that Lewis has only taken us half of the way. Best spoke of the critical issue of selfhood and self-knowledge and their relation to the economy. Best argued that Derek Walcott has taken us along the path of the other half.**

**The crisis of self-hood is a powerful theme of Omeros:**

She was selling herself like the island, without any pain  
and the village did not seem to care that it was dying in its  
change, the way it whored away a simple life that would soon  
disappear while its children writhed on the sidewalks..

In these lines Derek Walcott alludes to what I refer to as the 'poverty of consciousness'. It is this poverty of consciousness that leads to self-destructive behavior. And it is this poverty of consciousness that lies at the root of the Caribbean development problem. It seems quite evident that a sort of dialectical process has taken firm root in the Caribbean as we seem to act in opposition to ourselves. Michael Witter begs the following question: Is it possible that people can act against their own objective interests?"

This paper contends that people of distorted social spaces do act in opposition to themselves. We now examine the link between capitalism and a poverty of consciousness. I refer to a study I conducted in 1998. The title – Dependency in a Banana Producing community in rural St. Lucia: A micro-level Sociological Investigation. The main aim of the study was to unmask the meanings that banana farmers attached to banana farming.

## **CAPITALISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Shift from Sugar to Bananas in St.Lucia**

Caribbean societies are very unfortunate in the sense that they do not 'own their spaces'. While capitalism developed naturally in Europe, capitalism invaded our space at a time when we were not ready for it. Invasions such as these do not facilitate the natural progression of the consciousness of a people.

The introduction of the banana industry into the St. Lucian economy in the early 1950's represented a significant historical moment. It was the first successful cash crop since slavery. Once again, the space that we refer to as the Caribbean was invaded by capitalist interests. It was the post-second world war period when Britain had lost its hegemony of the world. Consequently, it became more expensive for Britain to import fruit from America. Britain then encouraged its colonies to produce bananas for the British market.

At the time of the introduction of the banana industry, St. Lucia had a vibrant peasantry whose efforts resulted in a relatively diversified agricultural sector. Casimir and Acosta (1980) note:

mono-production was not as acute in St.Lucia as in the other West-Indian islands. The country enjoyed a comfortable position as far as the production of food was concerned.

The radical shift from sugar to bananas that occurred in the late 1950's was possible through the existence of a vibrant peasantry. Elsie Le Franc (1980) noted St. Lucia's uniqueness in that it was the only Caribbean island to have switched completely from one monocrop to another. In 1951, sugar represented 47% of the total value of St.Lucia's exports, ten years later however, sugar represented a meager 1.3% of total exports.

Plantation development in St.Lucia was relatively poor due to the instability created by the fourteen wars between France and Britain for its possession. As a result, land was available for the ex-slaves to squat upon rather than work for low wages. The planters were therefore forced to adopt the metayage system that allowed them to reap the benefits of labour without paying wages. Through the metayage system, peasants worked a plot of land, paying rent in the form of produce. This opportunity allowed the peasant class to develop a sort of independent spirit from the early stages of emancipation.

Apart from being suitable to the poor economic situation of the planter class, the system of metayage was also suited to the orientation of the rural population. Peter Adrien (1990) notes the strong sentimental attachment to the land and the practice of communal ownership. By the late 1950's peasant production had replaced plantation production in St. Lucia. It was therefore the rise of the peasant class that enabled the radical shift from sugar to bananas in St. Lucia.

At that crucial point in St.Lucia's history when a vibrant peasantry had overthrown the planter class, a banana industry invaded the possibility of the emergence of an autonomous peasant class that could have evolved into a true capitalist class. The invasion of the banana industry disturbed the movement towards the establishment of a diversified agricultural sector in St.lucia.

### **Consciousness and the Banana Experience**

It was discovered that the banana farmers under study attached a very special sort of significance to money. For them, money was not simply about the ability to satisfy material needs and wants. Rather, money performed a vital function within the

context of the 'denuded self'. The latter was confirmed by the fact that these banana farmers relied on external stimulants such as alcohol and marijuana. In fact, alcohol was the best selling commodity of the community.

The research also revealed that the banana farmers under study saw themselves as neglected by society, they did not feel part of the society. They said to me that the general feeling in the society was that Castries, the capital was St. Lucia. They felt alienated particularly with regard to the language. The formal language in St. Lucia was English while the language of the peasant was creole.

The idea that farmers would do anything for money was extremely pervasive and is linked to the idea of the 'denuded self'. This craving for money seemed to be associated with isolation and neglect, as money helped to bridge the gap between the conditions of their existence and those to which they aspired. There was also a kind of nakedness about the banana farmer that needed to be clothed as banana farming was perceived to be a low-status activity. As a low status activity, banana farming was regarded not for its own worth but rather for the money that was associated with it.

It was therefore not difficult to predict that the collapse of the banana industry would lead to the direct movement of the young farmers in particular into the illegal drug business. In addition, a significant proportion migrated to neighbouring Martinique where they felt at home as far as language was concerned.

It was concluded that while the farmers were earning a steady income and while we celebrated the importance of the banana industry to the economy using proclamations such as "the banana industry is the bedrock/mainstay of the society", banana farming created among the farmers a false sense of selfhood, one based on money/materialism. Their notion of self was based on their ability to possess material things; their notion of self revolved around money. It cannot be said that this is linked in any direct way to an upliftment of consciousness.

It is unfortunate that the development discourse of the Caribbean does not adequately deal with the component of consciousness. Development has to do with the evolution of consciousness in the positive direction. When genuine development takes place in a society, it results in the upliftment of the consciousness of the people of that society.

As stated earlier, the Caribbean region is characterized by a poverty of consciousness. What form then should Caribbean sociology take? The work of the sociologist of the Caribbean must be linked to the major problematic of the Caribbean. Caribbean sociology must be fundamentally different from other sociology. Caribbean sociology must be about raising the consciousness of Caribbean people.

## **SOCIO-POETRY**

As a Sociologist of the Caribbean, I have identified a context and a motive for Caribbean sociology. The context is what I refer to as a poverty of consciousness. The motive therefore is to raise the consciousness of Caribbean people. My response so far has been the development of a new field – what I refer to as Socio-Poetry.

Socio-Poetry is much more than poetry that is stimulated by sociological issues – the issues of poverty, crime, domestic violence, HIV/ AIDS, dysfunctional social institutions, unemployment and so on. Socio-Poetry is also about re-defining the boundaries of research and knowledge-making arguing for the greater use of imagination in capturing the complex and peculiar contours of the Caribbean. Socio-Poetry emerges from the conviction that the complexity and peculiarity of Caribbean society cannot be captured in its entirety by scientific methodology. Socio-Poetry offers a critical perspective.

With regard to a critical perspective, in looking at “Research Development Initiatives in St. Lucia”, Holmes and Crossley (2004) argue that the development agenda in small states such as those of the Caribbean lacks the critical dimension.

Holmes and Crossley therefore make a case for forms of knowledge such as music, dance and art that are in harmony with the socio-cultural reality i.e. knowledge that is sensitive to the meanings, values and processes underlying events and actions.

In addition, Dr. Bhoendrat Tawarie laments the lack of attention paid to critical thinking in the Caribbean. Speaking of the extent to which critical thinking is being practiced at the University of the West-Indies, Dr. Tawarie contends:

....I suspect it's not as widespread as it needs to be and perhaps we are not as persistent at it as we should be given the current environment.

Dr. Tawarie also argues that by writing about our own situation in the region, we will develop perspectives and insights about ourselves to share with others in the rest of the world.

Socio-Poetry is a step in that direction. Socio-Poetry is an alternative form of knowledge that represents the blend of sociological analysis and imaginative insight. Socio-Poetry is about writing about the Caribbean in an interesting way in order to reach a wider audience.

To date, I have published two works of Socio-Poetry. My first work was called ‘SEEDS’ – that was a response to the crisis of identity of the Caribbean. ‘SEEDS’, was meant for adolescents and it was also aimed at portraying the role of the arts in human development. The Harvest is about consciousness-raising. It is about writing about the

Caribbean in interesting ways so as to stimulate dialogue, debate and further critical analysis .

Please allow me to expose you to a socio-poetic portrait of the Caribbean from “The Harvest”:

## **LICKS**

Five women

at the street corner

licking ice-cream,

strawberry flavour.

Five licking women

clutching cones in the sun.

Tongues racing against

the disappearing hills.

Licks for banana,

licks for cane-sugar.

And then the hands,

the hands that

served tongues,

fall below the

waists defeated,

leaving five licking

women in anger,

searching for sweetness



on cracked lips.

Tongues never win.

They're trapped by teeth

that delight in

tasteless carriers of cream.

Licks for banana,

licks for cane-sugar.

Five licking women stranded

at the street corner.

They've lost the way

to the river, the sun burns.

More ice-cream on a

strawberry streetcorner.

Licks for banana,

licks for cane-sugar.

The poem 'LICK S', examines the situation of the Caribbean in the global economy. It highlights the way in which we reinforce our status of dependency by being the tongues of the world, ready to 'lick' foreign produced goods at the expense of our own development. Essentially, the poem speaks to the notion that we are both the 'lickers' of the world as well as those who get 'licks'.

Dependency is a fundamental fact of life in the Caribbean and we cannot wait till students get to the university level to expose them to it. Therefore, while, we may not be able to teach the work of Lloyd Best and that of Andre Gunder Frank to Secondary school students we can expose them to LICKS paying great attention to its theme. In so doing, we would be raising the consciousness of our secondary level students on the dependency status of the Caribbean. It is extremely important to expose students of

that age group to these themes as they are integral to who we are and as many of these students will not move on to university.

Through socio-poetry, a sociologist of the Caribbean is not merely focusing on teaching at the University level but is developing ways of taking her analyses of Caribbean society to the lower levels of the education system. The motive is to raise the consciousness of Caribbean people.

A sociology of the Caribbean must be a practical project, one with a specific, practical purpose; one that is linked directly to the major problematic of the Caribbean.

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