

PEGGY ANTROBUS

VISIONARY, ENABLER, FACILITATOR

One of the earliest lessons we learnt in our exposure to Women's Studies is the decline of the midwife. Although in some parts of the world they continue to have pride of place yet in my own country, midwives were slowly losing their hold on that most sacred of professions - mediating and facilitating the birth of a new life. In the past midwives were respected because of the importance of their work. Their knowledge of medicine, herbs and understanding of the workings of the body and the wisdom of their advice. As with all of Caribbean peoples, this knowledge probably did and still comprises a combination of modern western knowledge *and* indigenous traditional knowledge.

It is not often then that we talk today about the midwife, but the figure of the midwife is an apt metaphor to describe the *one* important aspect of Peggy Antrobus's contribution to the Caribbean Women's Movement and the Caribbean Vision for Change. Peggy has been a midwife in that for close to three decades, she has been associated with, often playing the role of facilitator and enabler to, almost every institution related to women's and gender issues in the Anglophone Caribbean. As first Director of the Jamaica Women's Bureau, a position created through the work and struggle of Jamaican women activists like Lucille Mathurin Mair and Phoebe Chang, Peggy led the Jamaica delegation to the 1975 International Women's Year Conference. In 1974, Jamaica became one of the first countries in the world to establish what we now know as national machineries for women's affairs and Peggy was there in those formative years. As first director, a tradition was established for autonomy and action which has continued to the present.

Between 1977 and 1978, Peggy as secretary of the Caribbean Coordinating Committee for Women's Affairs, presided over the implementation of the recommendations of the 1977 CCC/CARIWA/UWI sub-regional conference on the Integration of Women into the Development Process. This led to the establishment of WAND - The Women and Development Unit of the Extra-Mural Department¹ of the University of the West Indies, the Women's Desk in the CARICOM Secretariat and the Women's Desk at UN/ECLAC.- The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹Now School of Continuing Studies

As tutor-coordinator of WAND, between 1978 and 1995, WAND, became a central force around which activities related to women and gender in the region coalesced. It was Peggy who in 1981, invited Rhoda Reddock to Barbados to meet with her and invited her to prepare a position paper on the Introduction of a Programme of Women and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. That paper was presented to the regional meeting in March 1982 which led to the establishment of Women Studies Groups on each of the UWI's campuses coordinated by a regional steering committee led by Joycelyn Massiah. The work of these groups supported by funding from The Netherlands Government and the Ford Foundation led to the establishment of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies in September 2003.

After years of discussion and planning for the establishment of a regional feminist network, it was Peggy Antrobus who brought together the founding members to begin concrete planning to launch the organisation - CAFRA - The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, on the day after the End of Decade Caribbean Celebration in April 1995. That organisation, became a focal point for feminist activism in the entire region going beyond the traditional boundaries of the Anglophone region to include the other linguistic and cultural regions of the Caribbean.

As a visionary, Peggy's would often see what was necessary and seek immediately to put it into place. - There were many who would be drawn into her net- willingly or unwillingly and be inspired by her indomitable enthusiasm. Who could forget the day she got the idea to develop a network of networks. Once again it was Peggy Antrobus who came up with the idea of establishing CPDC - The Caribbean Policy Development Centre as a mechanism to facilitate collaboration among Caribbean networks and federations and strengthen their influence on policy in the region.

Extending beyond the Caribbean in 1994, Peggy was also a founding member of DAWN - Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and served as its General Coordinator from 1990 -1996. Every one of these organisations which Peggy helped give life still exists. After giving birth, like a true midwife, she would remain as long as necessary to ensure that the newborn was safe and healthy before moving on to the next case. This time period could range from seven to the seventeen years she spent as tutor-coordinator WAND.

A true Caribbean Woman, Peggy Antrobus was born in Grenada, educated in St. Vincent and now lives in Barbados. But the impact of her life and work has been felt and acknowledged regionally and internationally. She has served on many boards and advisory, selection and steering committees

of organisations such as The International Women's Tribune Center, the Inter-American Dialogue, Washington, The Global Fund for Women, and the Center for Concern, Washington D.C. she has also received numerous awards including the Paul G Hoffman Award from the Society for International Development (SID) in 1982, the CARICOM Triennial Award for Women, 1990; The Distinguished Service Award from the University of the West Indies Guild of Graduates, New York Branch, 1990; The "Women who Dared" Award from the Black Women's Health Project, 1993; the UNIFEM Anniversary Award for Extraordinary commitment to the Worlds Women", 1995; the Dante B, Pascall Award from the Inter-American Foundation, 1996; the UWI 50th Anniversary Award, for contribution to the work of the University, 1998.

In 2000, she was honoured by the United Nations system through its UNDP and UNIFEM Eastern Caribbean Offices at a conference dedicated to evaluating her work and intellectual contribution. An interdisciplinary scholar, Peggy completed her first degree in Economics, then did a professional certificate in Social Work and was awarded the Doctor of Education Degree in 1998. She has written numerous papers and is a member of the Association of Caribbean Economists and a regular participant at regional Social Work Conferences. She has been keynote speaker at numerous meetings and conferences and has numerous published articles and unpublished presentations.

The Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, as indeed the Women's movement and Gender Studies community in the Caribbean and the world is grateful for the contribution of Peggy Antrobus. We are honoured to have been associated with her life and work over the past decades and look forward to a continued association in the years to come.

Rhoda Reddock

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