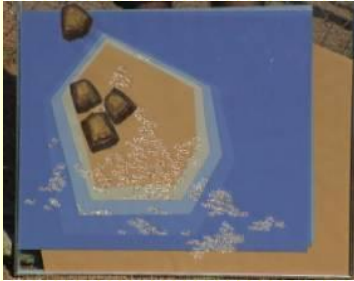


# THE CARIBBEAN: ARCHIPELAGO OF TRAILER SOCIETIES

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Our part of the world has been the outcome of the remarkable circumstance that, during half a millennium, the fate of our societies has not been shaped by our own evolution, development and internal dynamism, in response to the challenges posed by nature, environment and habitat, or in fulfilment of our own wants, aspirations and social targets. Caribbean societies emerged as the scar of oppression, and were shaped from outside as an epiphenomenon of foreign conquest and exploitation and an artefact of colonialism. So, the basic principle of continuity and internal dynamism, underlying all processes of evolution and development in nature and history, has been absent in the genesis of our societies, which was marked by structural discontinuity instead of self-realisation. But our region was only part of a larger global enterprise.

The history of the last five hundred years of humanity can be summarised accurately in one phrase as the globalisation of the local experience in the Occident that turned all other human settings into trailer societies, towed not towards their own destiny but towards the destiny and teleology of Western civilisation. The global mission of the West was not to impart, but to collect, and peripheralisation was the strategic vehicle. Colonialism, therefore, was not a regrettable accident, it was a requirement.

Episodes and achievements in the West were, thus, taken out of historical specificity, out of chronology and out of geography, in order to be transferred to other latitudes and implanted in other societies as universal, context-free yardsticks for the future of all destinies. Eurocentrism, the underlying discourse, was derived from the premise that out of the experience of the West all universals for humanity were bound to be born, since what was good for the West is best for the rest.

Three continents, including ours, have been turned into trailer societies, without a heartbeat of their own, without the engine and steer wheel to shape their own history, and were, thus, systematically subjugated to the commands of the internal dynamism of the West, to the imperatives of its self-realisation, and to the exclusive logic of its own globalisation.

Globalisation is not a recent phenomenon, as is being preached these times by Academy and politics, but it started with the first journey of Columbus. It never changed its essential characteristics of pursuing the peripheralisation of the rest to the Occident. Colonialism,

imperialism, neo-colonialism and so-called modern globalisation are only the time bound manifestations of peripheralisation. What we have, in the present era of globalisation, is only the culmination of a longstanding asymmetric relationship based on five discursive abolitions that formed the cornerstones of the project of peripheralisation.

In the first place, the *abolition of context* was required by the universality claim of Western civilisation to offer context-free devices, regarded insensitive to the specificities of environment, habitat, geography, culture and history of other latitudes. In trailer societies, not the model is adapted to fit reality, but, reality is modified to accommodate the model. So, Western yardsticks become the constant, and context is downgraded into a variable. Cynically, a model was imposed to others, the success of which historically demanded their own slavery and exploitation.

The *abolition of evolution* was based on the tenet that Western civilisation, as the spear point of human evolution, constituted an achievement all others were destined to reach some day, either by own efforts or by imitation of the West. It was, therefore, in their own interest to give up ongoing indigenous projects and to discontinue their own genesis, in order to accommodate imitation, mimicry and transfer of Western yardsticks and models as the prime agents of development and progress.

In the third place, the *abolition of internal social dynamism* interrupted or prevented the indigenous command over the engine of development and creation. Internal social dynamism measures the degree to which the development and evolution of a social unit are the product of the operation of endogenous social forces, as the manifestation of the own logic and inner clock. "No sugar but coffee", was the message to turn numerous sugar cane fields in the Caribbean into coffee plantations, not because we decided to dislike sugar or strikers had burned down the cane, but because of imperial command. That is one example of a lack of internal social dynamism. However, internal social dynamism, as the capacity of self-realisation, has absolutely nothing to do with the nativist and nationalist narrow-mindedness that tried to expel all things of external origin. In social processes, "external" can never be mechanically opposed to "internal", because the moment an external element is incorporated into the national context, it has already become an internal factor. It is a law of evolution that life always sprouts from interaction of the internal and the external.

The *abolition of culture* was based on the tenet that the only beneficial course open for the future of all destinies was to docilely overwrite own cultural achievements and institutions with modern Western devices, banning indigenous cultural expressions to the margins of social life. The yardstick to measure civilisation is the degree of abandonment of own cultural assets in a process of modernisation that imitates and embraces Western achievements. The civilising mission was the incorporation of other evolutions into Western genealogy. So, aborigines from Europe domesticated other aborigines of the planet to their own imaging and liking, and cultures around the globe were civilised into extinction.

Finally, the *abolition of history* was based on the axiomatic tenet that universal history was the equivalent of the genealogy of the West. Experiences not directly connected with the project of the West were contemptuously deemed void of historical meaning. Senior stupidities could be heard as "people without history" or "the end of history". To their advocates we rejoin that people without history were born in the future. The common origin of humanity endows all people on earth with exactly the same length of history.

These five historical abolitions suppressed our most essential internal life processes and shaped our present condition of trailer society, by truncating our evolution, interrupting our

history, alienating us from our environment, overwriting our culture, and undermining the creative force of our internal social dynamism.

But in nature, as well as in history, there is a cosmic desire to survive, grow, flourish and bear fruit, and to defeat death by reproduction. Parallel to the process of peripheralisation, therefore, an own indigenous project was also put in place, against the currents and the tides, but responding to a will and to aspirations of one's own. Historically, therefore, two processes, peripheralisation commanded from outside as the dominant one and an indigenous project commanded by the inner clock, were simultaneously in operation in the social, cultural, political and economic field. The moment in Caribbean history was, therefore, bound to come that people implanted in the region for the exclusive purpose of alien economic gain would start to discuss their own survival, the reproduction of their society, and the route of their own destiny, because there was no way back, not to Africa, Asia or Europe, not to Amerindians or maroons in the forests. There is never a way back for a people, since nostalgia always takes the opposite road to history, evolution, progress and self-realisation.

Deep mid century concerns initiated a critical debate on the life chances of the Caribbean. Colonialism was historically outdated, after centuries of atrocities and two world wars that morally demolished the superiority of Western civilisation. Still, even the remote alternative where to head to was absent. The very term "decolonisation" - to get rid of colonialism - was the negation of a detested state rather than the affirmation of a realisable project. Under those conditions, the meagre life chances of weakly-integrated, multi- ethnic colonised societies heavily triggered Caribbean thought and social analysis.

In small Caribbean societies, where personal face-to-face relations assume particular significance in social and political life, every major vibration of society was seismographically registered in Caribbean social science.

Arthur Lewis' economic strategy based on industrialisation, as the response to imbalances in what was mechanically conceived as a dual economy, was under full discussion throughout the region, rooted tenets on our economic history were challenged by Eric Williams. Rudolf van Lier's image of plural society used in a socio-historic study on Suriname was taken as characteristic for the Caribbean, and would soon find further theoretical elaborations in the work of M.G. Smith. By then, for more than a decade, C.L.R. James' Marxist-oriented analysis on the birth pangs of Haiti had introduced a different, rival world view borrowed from European history that would cause vehement discussions in academy and politics for the decades to come in the Caribbean. With this work of the first generation of Caribbean social scientists the main issues were set that would reign half a century of social thought and research in the region.

Two decades later, in the late sixties, a most influential intellectual movement, the New World Group, would be orchestrated by a second generation of Caribbean scholars, some of which we are happy to have with us here this evening. They were the first to point to our condition of externally propelled economies with their dynamism not located inside but in the distant metropolis. It was their work that inspired our search, and conduced to the holistic concept of internal social dynamism and to the redefinition as "trailer societies" of weak, meaningless or false concepts like "Third World", "postcolonial societies", "underdeveloped world" and "developing countries".

Plural society, Creole society, plantation economy, dependency, transition to socialism, the most prominent conceptualisations of the late sixties and seventies have been the most

remarkable feats in a search for indigenisation of the social sciences in the region, reluctant to uncritically accept dominant paradigms and theories.

The dissolution of the New World Group, in the early seventies, put an abrupt end to the scrutiny of the genesis of our societies, which led to social sciences that took pride in distancing themselves from what was contemptuously called "grand theories", confessing thereby their incapacity and unwillingness to look for comprehensive explanations of our own reality. The growing tendency to move away from theory and fall prey to blind empiricism led to conjunctural social sciences and even to scientific journalism, which flourished in the last decades. Social scientists became so busy in monitoring fast changing facts that they lost sight of the underlying forces in the genesis of facts. Analysts of society became, thus, systematic spectators and victims of the caprices of social evolution, as neurotically up-to-date people who follow what is going on, but do not know what is happening.

In reaction to fruitless nativist approaches blaming others, some took pride in self-chastisement by blaming themselves for all evils, and nobody is being blamed now, but unchangeable and ungraspable realms as interdependence and globalisation. Analysts of society, thus, got trapped in tricky terms with more capacity to confuse than to reveal. Interdependence in a world order with dominators and dominated in the economic, financial, information and technological field, is hardly different from the historical interdependence of masters and slaves. Globalisation standing for two diametrically opposed concepts can be a blessing or a curse. Globalisation through increased channels for communication, exchange and interaction around the world can serve humanity, which after all is one single race. What is dominant in globalisation, however, is modern peripheralisation that attires old domination in a new neoliberal dress. How to imagine fair competition in open markets, if what is obsolete and dumped in Germany is still precious technology desperately begged for by Zaire? Traditional capitalism opened markets by colonialism, modern capitalism opens markets by neoliberalism.

Social scientists in the Caribbean, equipped with tools provided by another genealogy, had a hard time to come at grips with their own reality. There was, however, in all those years, a permanent smouldering consensus in the Caribbean that Western social sciences offered too rudimentary or even invalid instruments to unravel the own reality. The stumbling block was that social thought and social science in the Caribbean did not stem from autochthonous factors, but from a process of imitation, domestication and indigenisation of transplants from abroad. Lacking deep rooted ancient traditions based on vivid philosophy and intellectual life, the Caribbean found itself weakly endowed with resistance mechanisms to countervail the imitative insertion of foreign developed thought systems.

Social sciences have not been discovered, they have been created in the Occident at the heath of dynamic socio-historical processes, in response to specific challenges posed by the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, rise of capitalism and French Revolution, which would indelibly mark the nature of current social sciences.

Sociology, created in desperate search to bring order in the midst of chaotic developments, was born not as a scientific discipline, but as a device for the salvation of France, which crystallised later into the study of the modern nation state. Non-westernised people were left to the care of anthropology, born out of colonialism, while political science, dominated by the realist paradigm favouring the strongest, could only perpetuate asymmetric relationships with its "pragmatic" posture. Economics was the direct response to the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism. The market, as the tabernacle of capitalism, became the critical spot, and the discipline was not concerned about needs, not even about starvation of millions, but focused

exclusively on the demand of those who appeared at the marketplace with purchasing power. Economics became progressively concerned with the optimisation of the system, until our modern neoliberal era, in which economics is not a scientific discipline but the doctrine of expansionist capitalism.

Current social science disciplines, therefore, are not universal devices, but customised procedures to accompany and steer the social evolution of Europe and the project of its global expansion. What was created in response to conditions and requirements of the Occident was transferred to our region in their final shape. Tradition was adopted, not science. Had social science been developed in response to our own reality, disciplines would certainly have not been the same. In any case, anthropology would not exist as separate from sociology, since we are not that exotic to ourselves.

The fragmentation of social science into autonomous disciplines introduced insoluble epistemological problems. Complex social reality demands the temporary isolation of social phenomena in the form of specialisations, but it is a scientific crime to disassemble for purposes of study, and then forget to reassemble before making final statements. A child playing with Lego toys will understand that. That is exactly what social sciences have been doing for two centuries now, each one claiming a slice of social reality as of their exclusive competence, unable even to understand each other's language. On historical and epistemological grounds, therefore, social science disciplines should be rejected and banned from all scientific premises, even though we are aware that practical reasons and vested interests might delay that process. One serious implication is that not only current social science disciplines, but the promising corrections of the multi, inter and transdisciplinary, and hybridisation approaches should be rejected as well, since they too take existing disciplines as the axiomatic precondition and premise.

Trying to square a vicious circle, the logic of the whole edifice of current social sciences had to be abandoned, and we elaborated the context-based extradisciplinary approach. The basic premise of this social reality and development oriented method is that social phenomena and processes are mutually interrelated and united, and can be isolated only temporarily for purposes of study, but with the compelling obligation to reassemble before drawing final conclusions. If that is not done by medical specialisations, the patient will get in coma, just like our societies have been for quite some time now. The extradisciplinary approach, thus, puts an end to the inverted logic of current social sciences that cannot but conceive social reality as structured along the lines of Academy. The instrument is, thus, turned into the tyrant, by demanding social problems and issues to previously adjust to the anatomy of Academy, instead of taking social reality itself as the starting point of the scientific undertaking.

But the imperative reason to reject Western social sciences is their complicity as active agents in transferring and supporting Western devices required for our transformation into trailer societies. In Europe, modern states came out of nations, but the opposite occurred in the Caribbean that was saddled by colonialism with a state without a nation. So the whole social science concept of "nation state" is useless in the Caribbean, whose only survival option was to invent state-nations. The existing administrative skeleton of power, territorial domination and control had to be stuffed with a newly created nation-like structure assembled with the quilt of motley implants.

Decolonisation, too, fell in this trap of creating a replica of the modern nation state of Europe. Decolonisation was not an indigenous project of our peoples and cultures. Even if it was

motivated by a deep rooted desire to get rid of tyranny, it was realised as the project of the Western-educated minds of our societies - including ourselves - to establish the modern nation state, considered until the recent appearance of a global-state-like structure as the universal model to structure all destinies. Atomistic individualism was imposed on communities based on collective belonging, resulting in detribalisation, decollectivisation, and disruption of culture, tradition, and critical social institutions. Capitalism, that could not use a tribe knocking at the door for jobs but only people one at the time, and its sibling, Western democracy, that was allergic against social responses and stripped them into one-man-one-vote systems, were imposed as key institutions in social settings that were structured around collective life and social decision making. Unable to handle this contradiction, governments, destined to administer collective assets, could easily derail into management and distribution centres of wealth and resources biased by benefiting specific collectivities of party members, relatives and some other blessed people. Where so much is at stake, elections can easily become dangerous and violent contests, in a curious political culture in which the mandate given to govern is expanded into the right of allocation of all resources of the state. Corruption, then, is not an excess or aberration of democracy, it is the premium of democracy.

This sad contradiction between state and nation became the biggest drama of decolonisation and bore the seed for postcolonial traumas and even civil wars. The state means uncontested monopoly and centrality of power in one single spot. In order to submit all to the governance and jurisdiction, the modern state requires the destruction of any effective rival power of loyalty structures based on tradition and culture. But that would eliminate the very premises of the nation based on genealogy, tradition and indigenous culture.

At bottom and in the last resort, culture is the response to nature and the institutionalisation of the strive for physical and social survival as a collectivity. Raids on traditional culture, therefore, always invite violent reaction.

A solution had to be found, therefore, by decolonisation. Traditional power was co-opted and culture was castrated into folklore, into invariant sterile national symbols, required by the state to homogenise and forge identity and unity and, thus, to decree the nation within the parameters of the state. Folklorisation was the response of the modern state in trailer societies to suppress the contradiction between traditional culture and modernisation. Colonialism was peripheralisation by coercion, decolonisation was peripheralisation by induced consent, in order to transform banal trailer societies into modern trailer societies. But, again, internal social dynamism could be suppressed but not erased, for in the end modern trailer society would generate the forces of its own negation.

The complicity of Western social sciences in this process can be historically corroborated. Sociology was the discipline in charge of accompanying and justifying the process of Westernisation and overwriting other cultures on a global scale, and of systematically providing solutions for maladjustment to modernisation. Economics accompanied the expansion of Western capitalism over the globe, which it labelled with deceitful terms as international capitalism, transnational capitalism and interdependency, so that nobody can be held responsible anymore for economic evils, since all states are likewise the regrettable victims of some transnational monster. Capitalism, it should be reminded, was only indigenous in the Occident, where it was generated out of historical processes. International capitalism is simply globalised Western capitalism, not the outcome of industrial revolutions in Ghana or Indonesia, or of rationalisation processes in Brazil, or class struggle in Nigeria. Capitalism has

no heart, but it does have homelands, definitely not to be looked for in Latin America or Africa, but rather in Europe and its reincarnation in North America.

Western social sciences have retreated into embarrassing silence, now that all projected roads are blocked for trailer societies, full of disconcerted people claustrophobically looking up to steep terrifying slopes, to whom contemporary social sciences have no message to deliver and no new project to announce.

Caribbean social science was unable to escape this blind alley of Western social sciences. However, during a fifty years' battle for indigenisation it never hesitated in contesting their tenets, because internal social dynamism can be devitalised but never extinguished. The limbo dance was born on slave ships, where space was small and chains were short. Under the harshest and most dehumanising of lived experience, the joy of limbo was created by people on their way to slavery. This example is critical to understand that people can be oppressed to the extreme of enslavement, but culture and development will always find their way. Not the caricature of development dominant since the fifties, that is measured by the degree of successful imitation of Western experience and modernisation. That travesty of development, fully compatible with our condition of trailer society, which legitimised peripheralisation and historical injustice, has been amply falsified by centuries of persistent instability, socio-economic and political crises, critical poverty and famine on three continents. The bankruptcy of development theories and paradigms, which were dished up on a regular base on a different tray, should stand as a convincing proof.

The only spot where I have found development in a correct meaning is in photography, for you can never develop outside the potentialities. You can provide a mango seed with water and fertilisers, so it will grow into a strong mango tree, but it will never become an apple tree. Achievements of others can often be used with profit, but development itself can never be transferred paternalistically, as has been common practice of "development aid". The only form of aid that should be accepted is assistance that makes itself superfluous. All other forms serve peripheralisation. Development should be defined as the degree to which the inner force and own potentialities are mobilised, in interactive response to nature, habitat, environment and history, for the realisation of a project of one's own. Not imitation or transfer but internal social dynamism is the yardstick. Development is intrinsically sustainable, otherwise it is not development. Therefore, "sustainable development" is a sheer pleonasm.

Our task, as the third generation of Caribbean social scientists, is to take actions to enhance and restore command over our own destiny, by joint effort of social thought, social analysis, and social action, as appropriately represented in the program of this conference. Since we gathered here for serious business, let me finish by pointing to some of these actions to be considered in our reflections.

Development is an impossibility, unless energies hidden in the internal social dynamism are released for the realisation of a project of one's own that mobilises the endowment of human and natural resources. Only then can own potentialities be mobilised and advantage taken of those devices and achievements from elsewhere that can be fruitfully seasoned for own use. The alternatives are, therefore, straightforward. Either we put a stop to our present condition of trailer society or we perpetuate our sterile position of subordination far into the next millennium. The fundamental task to embark on is, therefore, to bring an end to trailer society, which will require a new, action-based development theory or paradigm rooted in internal social dynamism. We should be forewarned, however, that the unambiguous clarity of the option before us dramatically contrasts with the immense complexity of the task to bring an

end to an evil of five centuries. Still the effort is imperative, since no road is open to us for development or progress, unless we get out of the coma, restore the natural energy, inherent in all growth processes in the universe, by enhancing command over our own destiny, bringing evolution and creation back in. We should be further forewarned, that in a progressively interrelated world, no autarkic, self-supporting, or independent strategy can be of any avail, what turns co-operative and interactive initiatives into imperatives. The critical point is, however, to transcend the stasis of trailer society. Alignments in larger economic and political blocks should, therefore, critically question peripheralisation, instead of being dominated by the self-defeating action - in a generalised fear and nervousness to get isolated - of continuing and securing links to globalising processes that will only abort our chances for development.

Precious time and energies are still being wasted, at the largest mendicants conference on earth, periodically held in Lomé, degrading the best of our intellectual assets into professional beggars and transactors, instead of mobilising all our creative resources and energies to trigger our own dynamism and development. Only when understood as a tactical action in a strategic plan to get rid of trailer societies, will those pilgrimages for temporary relief of pain be of any use. In that we can learn from history, for the forces of the own internal dynamism, even if not dominant, were always in full operation in trailer societies and could never be silenced in their commitment to mould a destiny of our own.

The rejection of the edifice of current social science disciplines and of the mind set and logic they imposed on us will open up space for extradisciplinary research, informed by the critical issues of social reality, rather than structured by the anatomy of Academy. Context-based research focusing on our priority problems, defined by our own criteria and project for the future, will generate new concepts and images, and allow the required reinterpretation of biased concepts, in order to overcome the stasis of Academy with new paradigms of peripheralisation and structural discontinuity, based on the critical variable of internal social dynamism.

Jean-Paul Sartre made the following honest confession from the Occident: "Our victims know us by their scars and their chains, and it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable." Indeed, no one can better assess our own conditions than we ourselves. The target should be set, therefore, that within a decade or so, the world centre of excellence to study Caribbean reality is located in the Caribbean itself and staffed by our own critical thinkers. No sophisticated laboratories will be needed for that. People from distant universities, habitually involved in telepathically discussing our fate from remote locations, can then come to us in modesty to learn, for the first time, the truth about our region and our reality.

The present should never be opposed to history, because the contemporary is a special case of history. There is a link between our genesis, our present and our future. However, since history did not program the future, space is open for action to take our destiny in our own hands. The proceeds are high, for our very survival is at stake. Critical conditions of our time require us to responsibly take that challenge in a creative future-oriented project, rather than aimlessly hesitating among the horrors of our genesis. Ruins are not to be mourned on, but to be built upon.

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