Review, Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives

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[The Book Reviews section of this issue has benefited from the expert assistance of Landon Yarrington and the logistical support of the Department of Anthropology, College of Williams and Mary.]
the pluralism literature Abraham might have pursued more thoroughly the work of M.G. Smith, whose position she bowdlerizes beyond recognition. A consideration of his work on differential incorporation of groups within the societies in question might have yielded greater insight into the resulting political and social factionalism that has emerged.


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In Envisioning Caribbean Futures, Brian Meeks sets out to prove that another theoretical and methodological world is actually possible in Caribbean social science studies. Early in the introduction, he positions his manifesto as a direct riposte to Margaret Thatcher's assertion that "there is no alternative" (p. 2). He makes a bold plea for Caribbean social studies, which has been caught in a disciplinary time warp, to be more interdisciplinary. Bold, because with this call Meeks rightly points to "the failure on the part of many philosophically inclined thinkers to engage with the seemingly dirty details of political economy" (p. 3) as well as an "equally serious failure on the part of political economists to engage with contemporary theory and philosophy" (p. 3). Since social life as Meeks writes knows no disciplinary boundaries, he aims to "stimulate a conversation that looks beyond the horizon of policy confines, yet is not so far removed as to appear hopelessly utopian" (p. 3). To do so in three chapters and a brief conclusion, he engages the works of several contemporary scholars, focuses on Jamaica as a case study, and then proposes a substantive alternative.

In the first chapter, "Explorations in New Caribbean Thought," Meeks engages with what he calls "new avenues in Caribbean thought" from an array of interdisciplinary fields (feminist, development, philosophy, anthropology, and political science) that theorize the post-Cold-War moment. In his interrogation of the works of Eudine Barritteau, Davin Ramphal, Paget Henry, David Scott, and Hilbourne Watson, he argues for the continuous relevance
Meeks's prescriptive project is not without limits. It is noticeable that his selected set of interlocutors are Anglophone scholars. Thinkers from the wider circum-Caribbean were either amiss or not deeply engaged. Have any not made applicable contributions to "new Caribbean thought?" Another lacuna is the gender of his theory. Meeks rightly and forcefully argues that in the new modality of Caribbean thought, intellectuals are no longer privileged with the superiority of insight (p. 58). Throughout the book, he muses on the lyrics of singers and DJs (all male) as theoretical reflections. This elevation of the writers to the status of organic intellectuals is a necessary feat if Caribbean social studies is to embrace an interdisciplinary model that considers the ontological and epistemological agency as well as what Michel-Rolph Trouillot would call the historicity of its subjects. To that end, and cautious of recreating gender binaries, where are the female subalterns? If "people construct forms of resistance" out of "their own foundations of knowing and understanding" (p. 50), then whose Caribbean futures are we envisioning with singular gendered insights?

Still, I highly recommend this work to anyone with interest in Caribbean intellectual development and Jamaica's place at the forefront of movements in this region. With rigorous rethinking of macrolevel analysis that seriously engages issues of agency and subjectivity, Meeks makes it abundantly clear that henceforth Caribbean social studies needs to eschew compartmentalization and move towards synthesis. Crossing disciplinary boundaries, Meeks shows is no longer optional. Caribbean intellectuals, ought to take heed.


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Few among the millions of Africans snared in the Atlantic slave trade had the means or opportunity to record their autobiographies. Of those who did, Olaudah Equiano is the most famous, and others such as Venture Smith, James Albert Gronniasaw, Ottabah Cuguano, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo have