

FOREWORD

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies: A Sacred Inheritance

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I AM PLEASED TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO write the foreword to this fascinating book which charts the history and evolution of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies from its beginnings as a loose grouping of women interested in uniting around issues of women and development, through its existence as the Women and Development Studies Unit and the Centre for Gender and Development Studies to becoming the IGDS. This necessary book, which should become required reading for all UWI/IGDS administrators, staff and students as well as non-governmental and civil society organizations working on gender, catalogues the promises, pitfalls and triumphs of the “gender journey”, not only at the UWI, but, more broadly, in Caribbean society. In the process, the authors, who embarked on this project solely as a labour of love without any financial remuneration, sing praise songs to some of the men and women, including external stakeholders, who were either involved in the journey or facilitated it in some way. More importantly, they catalogue their own role in making the IGDS what it is today – lest we forget.

This writing project, only modestly supported financially by the IGDS, the campus’ Research and Publications Fund and the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), is intended to ensure that the authors’ roles in the birth, formation and growth of the now mature IGDS are documented; that the present crop of staff in the IGDS do not forget what the “foremothers” had to go

through to create the institute; and that, in a way, we realize our responsibility to carry on what could be termed a sacred inheritance. The passion and energy with which they embarked on their project and their obvious commitment to continued identification with it are admirable.

The three authors represent three distinct stages in the process of development of the IGDS. Joycelin Massiah initiated and coordinated the first regional research project, Women in the Caribbean Project, which, on its completion, gave rise to the Women and Development Studies Groups and the regional steering committee, which she chaired for several years; Elsa Leo-Rhynie was the first professor and regional coordinator of Women and Development Studies and was instrumental in establishing the CGDS; and Barbara Bailey led the process of transforming the centre into an institute.

Throughout the five sections and twelve chapters of the book, the authors remind us of the impetus for their interventions, the historical and sociopolitical context within which the pioneers and the staff laboured to create, maintain and upgrade “a unique interdisciplinary academic programme within a generally traditional discipline-based university” and to do so regionally, within a region whose components are geographically separated by hundreds of miles of sea. In the authors’ words: “Having understood, lived and embraced the experience of regional cooperation during their student days, it was only natural for them to design and maintain a programme which has remained regional to its core. Together, they have lived through the thirty-odd years of evolution of a simple idea into a vibrant, some would say revolutionary, addition to the academic knowledge and offerings of the regional UWI.”

The book demonstrates the truth in Marianne Marchand’s observation that

the area of gender and development has been a site of many debates and critical contributions to the field of development studies. It has also been characterized as bridging practice, policy and theory, addressing the concerns of practitioners in the field, policy makers and academics. Yet trying to find a balance has not always been easy – often leading to debates among the various groups and resulting in different perspectives within the field.¹

But it is clear that the debates within the field did not result in permanent rupture at the IGDS; on the contrary, despite the occasional ideological divide, those who were and are still on that gender journey have been able to blend academia and activism to develop into scholar-activists who bridged practice, policy and academia, as in Marchand’s formulation. Brick by brick, they and

others built a solid body of data to provide the content of the academic programme, just as they had to do with the institutional structure that would act as the scaffolding for such content.

Enclosed within these pages, in one place, is a veritable repository of indigenous knowledge and feminist scholarship, and present and future generations of scholars and scholar-activists will benefit from this roadmap: a Sankofa-style² looking back, taking stock of the present, plotting the agenda for the future and, in the process, decoding the mysteries of the present by going back to the roots of that tree of gender.

The role of historical forces and international human rights actions in showing the need for serious attention to women's and gender issues, both inside the academy and out, has not escaped the notice of the authors; all three of them would have benefited from Lucille Mathurin Mair's monumental work of scholarship on slavery and the post-slavery period³ and from accounts of women's struggle for rights and respect from 1865 to 1962 and beyond, and they would have been animated by these historical forces and knowledge. They, and other women, seized the opportunities created in the Caribbean to act on the possibilities to infuse the ideologies of self-determination, women's rights as human rights, and social justice – all ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s – into their scholar activism and organizing.

In examining the initiation, development, diffusion and institutionalization of a project of women/gender studies at the UWI, they rely heavily on personal experience, practical involvement and recollections – personal and those of others who were with them on this gender journey. But as we all know, after a certain stage of life, memory and recollection are unreliable as the only sources of books, and so, as true academics, they make ample use of published and unpublished sources – archival and those within the IGDS (incomplete as IGDS documentation is, as I have come to realize myself).

As I read this labour of love, I could not help but develop a new appreciation of what it must have taken the pioneers to persevere on this difficult, but obviously rewarding, journey. In fact, I can relate to many of the challenges that have been exposed in this book as the authors sought to outline the journey from its beginning to where their formal association ended in July 2010, when Barbara Bailey demitted office as university director and passed the baton to me. There are troubling aspects to this account, however: it reinforces the fact that, because top UWI administrators are mostly male, unless these powerful men are, or have been, on our side, gains made by the IGDS will continue to be

tenuous. So, structural and institutional changes are needed to obviate such a necessity. This is what a gender policy can achieve.

Today, the regional IGDS continues to face some of the same challenges that the pioneers faced: space constraints; inadequate staff complement; lack of understanding and sympathy – even a hostility towards what we do; lack of understanding of the structure and independent nature of the IGDS after twenty years; and precarious funding. Indeed, the autonomy of the institute (like that of the previous centre) has been frequently challenged.

Indeed, the similarities between the environment of the 1980s, in which the foremothers struggled, and the current one are stark. Patriarchal ideologies and practices continue to try to invisibilize women and disempower young men, not only in the larger society, but within the walls of UWI. Our men and women – young and old – continue to embrace backward, gender-discriminatory ideologies and practices, with negative consequences for all. Despite the efforts to increase its visibility, the place of the university director of the IGDS is hardly understood outside of the IGDS; and administrators do not appear to be in any hurry to understand it. In addition, many IGDS students, especially the males, continue to complain that they are often asked why they have chosen such an option and are even ridiculed by those who regard gender studies as a soft and irrelevant option.

Questions asked decades ago continue to be asked, including: what has the shift from women's to gender issues really achieved? How can this difference and meaning be conveyed to society and to the university community in particular? Has institutionalization caused an abandonment of the on-campus activism and concern for campus women? What impact has the presence of the IGDS made on gender equity and equality at the UWI?

Carolyn Cooper is less than impressed, noting, according to our authors: "After three decades, women at UWI are no closer to gender equity than we were before we established the women's studies working groups in the 1980s." She has a point. To compound things, institutionalization may have increased our attention to teaching and project garnering and servicing; but it has also changed the relationships among the campus units, with each exercising a level of autonomy that has practically rendered the Regional Coordinating Unit impotent.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, it is clear that the gender and development paradigm is now universally promoted in the Caribbean, as it is globally, as the means of integrating gender equality concerns in national, regional

and international projects, programmes and policies. The IGDS, like its predecessor CGDS, has led the vanguard in this regard and has also, through its gender and development academic programmes, produced a small but significant cadre of persons throughout the region with the requisite skills to engage in this critical work.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these brave women, who surveyed the patriarchal inheritance and its continuing role in women's subordination and insisted not only that societal change should take place but that UWI should lead the transformation – inside itself and, ultimately, outside. The way they organized this book is a testament to the tradition of women uniting around projects, a tradition that must be preserved. But let us not fool ourselves. While the journey must continue, there are, no doubt, more twists and turns ahead. Change is also inevitable.

As all units seek to address some of the recommendations of the recent quality assurance review and align our activities and programmes with the UWI's overarching 2012–17 strategic plan, we will please some and disappoint others. The institute must take note of the gaps that are still to be filled and the challenges and threats that lie ahead, among them institutional uncertainties and continued sexism, patriarchy and unequal power relations that still affect the way it negotiates its place in the university. As the IGDS continues to take stock and complete the inventory, let us also be conscious that we are in a dynamic field that will be ever changing; and sometimes, it will be necessary to change the structure and programme preferred by some. The quality assurance review, the strategic operational review and the curriculum review that is due in the Regional Coordinating Unit this year will no doubt give us an opportunity to revamp old courses and programmes, and to introduce more relevant ones, as new blood will have new interests, and societal needs will make new demands of us. That is the nature of this and other journeys. But equally, change does not mean a departure from core values.

And to those who say that gender and development is dead, we say that it is not. On the contrary, as Marchand argues, “it is the site of innovative and critical thinking about development issues in a transformed and globalized world”.⁴ Where we need to focus now is on becoming more relevant to the campus and the rest of Caribbean society and on redoubling our efforts to reduce gender inequality on multiple fronts. While there have been some positive gains for gender equity in the years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, we can relate to the factors that several scholars have identified as

contributing to the “overall failure of gender mainstreaming”.⁵ According to Aruna Rao, these include “the challenging policy environment within which gender mainstreaming processes operate, inadequate resources allocated to this work, institutional features that have blocked change, and the way in which gender mainstreaming processes have been implemented”.⁶

She continues: “While advocates of gender mainstreaming envisioned both institutional and social transformation, in practice, bureaucracies have not proven to be effective agents of social transformation.”⁷ Rao argues, “Moving forward should involve strengthening the capacity of states and development bureaucracies to deliver on their own operational mandates and developing realistic strategies and workable alliances in light of the constrained institutional environment.”⁸

Yes, overcoming these challenges to greater gender equity requires a stronger and diverse but unified voice for change; greater accountability; and increased, targeted resources. But I am confident that the IGDS will find that unified voice for change. The IGDS will stay independent; it will respect foundational culture; it will continue to increase our visibility; and it will continue to show our relevance inside and outside of the UWI.

Notes

1. Marianne Marchand, “The Future of Gender and Development after 9/11: Insights from Postcolonial Feminism and Transnationalism”, *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (2009): 921–35.
2. The Sankofa bird, in Ghanaian philosophy, looks back to gain inspiration for planning the future.
3. Lucille Mathurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655–1842* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press/Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2006).
4. Marchand, “The Future of Gender and Development after 9/11”, 921, 931.
5. See, for example, Marchand’s own perspective on this issue of gender mainstreaming, *ibid.*, 925. See also Jane L Parpart, “Exploring the Transformative Potential of Gender Mainstreaming in International Development Institutions”, *Journal of International Development* 26 (2014): 382–94; Jane L. Parpart, “Gender Mainstreaming in an Insecure and Unequal World”, *Academic Council on the*

United Nations System Informational Memorandum, no. 77 (Winter 2009); and Jane L. Parpart, “Fine Words, Failed Policies: Gender Mainstreaming in an Insecure and Unequal World”, in *Development in an Insecure and Gendered World*, ed. Jacqui Leckie, 51–70 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

6. Aruna Rao, “Setting the Context: Approaches to Promoting Gender Equity – Gender at Work”, in Elizabeth Bryan with Jessica Varat (eds.), *Strategies for Promoting Gender Equity in Developing Countries: Lessons, Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Elizabeth Bryan with Jessica Varat (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2008), 8.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.