

Jwala Rambarran: “The Road to Independence: A Manley Perspective”

Opening remarks by Mr Jwala Rambarran, Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, at the Twenty-Seventh Dr Erik Williams Memorial Lecture “The Road to Independence: A Manley Perspective”, Port of Spain, 28 September 2013.

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On behalf of the Board, Management and Staff, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to our Twenty-Seventh Dr. Eric Williams Memorial Lecture, the first in my capacity as Central Bank Governor. As you may be aware, this Memorial Lecture Series was launched in 1983 by Mr. Victor Bruce, our first local Central Bank Governor, following Dr. Williams' passing in 1981.

Over the past twenty five years or so, the Lecture Series has emerged as a high level intellectual forum that critically examines issues relevant to Dr. Williams' legacy of Caribbean nationhood and identity.

Tonight is no different. In fact, it may be even more poignant. I say this because tonight's Twenty-Seventh lecture takes place against the brutal reality that Caribbean nations must chart a new economic destiny in extremely uncertain and incredibly unforgiving circumstances.

Just as Dr. Williams' doctoral thesis ***“Economic Aspects of Emancipation and Slavery in the British West Indies”*** challenged the prevailing orthodoxy that the causes of the abolition of slavery were not that the British had become morally offended at this sinful trade in human bodies, but was due to the fact that slavery was no longer profitable to British Capitalism, so too must post-colonial Caribbean nations challenge the prevailing defeatist attitude that they cannot escape the forces bedeviling their economies and societies and which threaten to permanently erase their uniquely crafted Caribbean identity.

I am certain that tonight's lecture entitled ***“The Road to Independence: A Manley Perspective”*** will be one of those big conversations about the future of Caribbean economies.

Our Distinguished Speaker, Ms. Rachel Manley, aptly describes herself as of the transitional generation – the last to experience the remnants of unfettered colonialism and the first to experience the coming of age angst of a newly independent Jamaica.

As she might remind you all tonight, Rachel Manley was only 15 years old when she witnessed the Union Jack come down at midnight on August 2nd 1962 and the black, green and gold Jamaican flag shimmy up the flagpole to unfurl the dreams of a new nation, Jamaica.

Perhaps more importantly, Rachel Manley is the granddaughter and daughter of three of Jamaica's national leaders who forever changed Jamaica's intellectual, social and cultural landscape.

Her grandfather Norman Manley or Pardi, as he was affectionately called, was the founder of Jamaica's People's National Party and one of the key figures in the Jamaican struggle for independence. Norman Manley rose to the post of Jamaica's Chief Minister in 1955 and became its first and only Premier when Jamaica gained self-government before Independence.

Her grandmother Edna Manley or Mardi, as she was affectionately known, was the wife of a National Hero and mother to Jamaica's fifth prime minister. Her legacy is firmly entrenched in Jamaica's art, sculpture and painting and poetry and prose. Some say Edna Manley was nothing less than the mother of Jamaica's artistic soul.

Rachel is the first child of Michael Manley, Jamaica's charismatic, controversial Prime Minister who served between 1972 and 1980, and then again between 1987 and 1992, who attempted to refashion Jamaica's unjust post-colonial economy and society into a democratic socialist mould while annoying the United States with his radical foreign policy, especially his friendship with Fidel Castro, and who passionately advocated a brave new world economic order.

Even though she has been part of history in the making, lived close to history makers, and even made history, Rachel Manley affirms that she is not a historian. And although she experienced firsthand her family's intriguing politics and its impact on Jamaican society and the region, Rachel Manley confesses that she is no politician.

So tonight, Rachel Manley is here to speak to us as a writer, an award-winning author and poet best known for her intimate, captivating non-fiction trilogy of memoirs about one of Jamaica's most prominent and glamorous political families, her own Manley family.

Yesterday, I was fortunate enough to meet for the first time, Ms. Rachel Manley, an absolutely charming and endearing woman who is utterly passionate and compassionate about Caribbean regionalism. She gifted me with personally signed copies of her award-winning trilogy of memoirs, requested that I read them at my leisure, warning that afterwards she would quiz me on certain aspects of her three books.

Well, never one to fail an exam, last night and early this morning I skimmed through her trilogy and found them very relevant to the ongoing discourse on the future of Caribbean integration, nation building and development.

The first book in the trilogy is entitled, ***Drumblair: Memories of Jamaican Childhood***, which tells the story about the house that nurtured the brilliant and artistic Manleys.

But to me Drumblair is not only a stunning biography about a house in which Rachel Manley grew up with her grandparents. To me Drumblair represents a deeper narrative about a larger house, the West Indies Federation.

When Edna Manley's own cousin, Alexander Bustamante – Jamaica's first prime minister after Independence – pulled out of the just two-year old Federation in 1962 and caused the collapse of self-government for the entire West Indies, Dr. Eric Williams resorted to a new political arithmetic captured in his now famous utterance "***one from ten leaves nought***" and went on to take Trinidad and Tobago on the road to independence.

Today, Caribbean leaders must consider a new Drumblair, a new house. The CARICOM integration model birthed in August 1973 by the leaders of the then four independent countries – Dr. Eric Williams, Michael Manley, Errol Barrow and Forbes Burnham – as a consolation prize to the Federation has survived for more than 40 years. This is a significant achievement. In my respectful view, however, the CARICOM model which seeks to connect our small island states through trade and markets, has reached its limits.

We need to build a new house – a new West Indian National Economy – that moves beyond trade and markets to one that powerfully unites all nations touched by the Caribbean Sea so that we can better respond to cross-cutting challenges that threaten the region's future.

Regional Central Banks with their powerful development mandate must orchestrate regional solutions to what are undoubtedly regional problems, especially devising a strategy to permanently exit from the Caribbean's massive public debt overhang while redefining our love-hate relationship with the international financial institutions, particularly the IMF.

In her second book entitled "***Slipstream: A Daughter Remembers***", Rachel Manley offers a deeply moving personal account of her relationship with her father both as a child and as a woman, a father who is considered the most loved and feared, cherished and reviled, cursed and worshipped, and forgiven and unforgiven figure in Jamaica's history.

In a most discerning passage about Michael Manley, that I find strikingly reminiscent of the charismatic influence of Dr. Eric Williams on Trinidad and Tobago, Rachel Manley writes “*The island was living his personality. His restlessness, his rapture, his rash impetuosity – his causes and carings, his sudden concepts – seemed to be no different from the nation’s.*”

Again, on a deeper, more compelling level, I found *Slipstream* to be prescient, perhaps foretelling the dismal fate that could befall our present generation of Caribbean leaders if they fail to put aside their “macho” personal ambitions in favor of re-engineering our small, highly open vulnerable economies and societies to withstand mounting pressures, both from inside and outside.

None other than Sir Shridath Ramphal, a Caribbean luminary and the Distinguished Speaker at last year’s Eric Williams Memorial Lecture, emphatically notes that leadership in the region has “put the gears of the CARICOM Single Market in neutral and the gears of CARICOM Single Economy into reverse”.

Completing the trilogy is the book entitled, “*Horses in Her Hair: A Granddaughter’s Story*”, Rachel Manley’s ode to her grandmother, Edna Manley. As Rachel Manley writes “*Looking for the meaning in Edna Manley’s life is baffling if the conundrum is approached head-on. She was always more in the weave of life than in the embroidery. She saw the world in terms of the symbolic, most things open to her interpretation. She understood and lived her life between its lines rather than according to an accepted script. Edna, cousin to both Norman and Bustamante, crept between the starker realities to claim another role – a role, some say, as mother of Jamaica’s artistic soul.*”

In my opinion, *Horses in Her Hair* is a stark reminder that as we seek to forge a new Caribbean home, as we seek to cast away the island hubris of our leaders, we must balance our quantity of life, with our quality of life. Culture must be an important vehicle that inspires our quest for greater Caribbean regional unity.

We have seen the unifying strength of culture in our playwrights like Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, in our folk poets like Louise Bennett, in our creators of dance like Beryl McBurnie, in our artistes like Bob Marley, and in our social commentators like the Mighty Sparrow.

As I close, it is my view that Rachel is ideally placed to render judgment on whether the Caribbean can withstand the existential clash between history and circumstances; to render judgment on whether the Caribbean can withstand the primordial battle between personality and destiny in order to advance the ideals of political and economic consciousness espoused by Dr. Eric Williams.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I invite Ms. Rachel Manley to deliver the Twenty-Seventh Dr. Eric Williams Memorial Lecture, entitled “*The Road to Independence: A Manley Perspective.*”

I thank you.