

“A SUMMARY ACADEMIC BIOGRAPHY OF PROFESSOR RHODA REDDOCK: DEPUTY PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, ST AUGUSTINE”

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Abstract

Professor Rhoda Reddock of the University of the West Indies has had a long and distinguished career as an academic and in the field of education administration. This article is aimed at highlighting her distinctive contribution to both of these spheres of tertiary education. It examines her early life, education and training, her especial and pioneering work in the field of women and gender studies in the Caribbean, and her exemplary contribution to tertiary education administration.

Introduction

The term of Professor Rhoda Reddock as Deputy Campus Principal of the University of the West Indies (The UWI) St Augustine Campus in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago came to an end recently. Professor Reddock assumed that position in 2008 and demitted office at the end of the 2017/2018 academic year. This paper is crafted as a small tribute from a student to a professional woman who has given years of dedicated and excellent service to The UWI, not only in her capacity as Deputy Principal, but also through a host of other academic and administrative contributions. The primary motivation for this tribute is the fact that despite the dynamic contributions of Professor Reddock to academia, to date there exists no detailed scholarship historicising her numerous achievements. Several online journals and magazines such as *STAN*, *Pelican* and *Kreol Magazine* have published short articles on various aspects of her professional life, but there is much more that requires coverage. This paper is an initial instalment towards this worthwhile undertaking. It is structured along two broad dimensions; her early life, and her academic training and achievements, including publications, teaching and administrative experiences.

Rhoda Reddock

Rhoda Elizabeth Reddock was born on 7 June 1953 in Kingstown, St. Vincent, the largest island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, to Rosa Salome Reddock (née Stephen). Her mother was born in Trinidad and Tobago, migrated to St Vincent after her marriage and was a teacher. Her father served as an agricultural officer and adviser to Vincentian farmers. Rhoda was the eldest of her siblings and has one brother and one sister. She attended primary school at Kingstown Preparatory in St. Vincent until the age of 7 when she returned with her mother and siblings to Trinidad and Tobago. Her father was at this time pursuing tertiary education in the USA and joined his family in Trinidad and Tobago later when he graduated. In Trinidad, she completed her primary education at Eastern Girls' Government Primary School in Port of Spain and completed her secondary education at Bishop Anstey's High School.

On leaving secondary school, Reddock pursued a BSc. in Social Administration from 1972-1975 at UWI, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago and Mona, Jamaica. She recalled "I wasn't primarily interested in focusing on helping individuals but rather in exploring how social policy and social institutions could address the structural and systemic challenges facing our societies in the region. Today I understand better that these processes are also gendered" ("Professor Rhoda Reddock" 2015). This understanding included a one-year study of two prisons in Jamaica. Roughly three years after graduating from The UWI, and after two years as lecturer at the Cipriani labour College in Trinidad and Tobago, she enrolled at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague in the Netherlands where, between 1978 and 1980, she completed her Masters in Development Studies, specializing in Comparative Development Strategies. In 1981, one year after the completion of her master's degree, she began to read for her Doctorate in Social Sciences (Applied Sociology) at the University of Amsterdam, completing the process in three years. Professor Reddock has a life partner and companion, artist, Dean Arlen, with whom she has had a relationship for approximately 17 years (Rhoda Reddock, in discussion with the author, April 2017).



Rhoda Reddock became interested in women and gender studies very early in her life, developing from childhood an innate sense of justice and equity which caused her to be perturbed that, as a girl, she was treated differently from her male counterparts. She recalls: “From very early I had a concern with social justice so when I experienced what I perceived as discrimination as a girl this was the start of my feminist consciousness”. What sealed her interest in this area was that her mother introduced her to books about women who had achieved much despite the challenges they faced. These included, for example, biographies of Marie Curie the scientist, Helen Keller, the deaf-blind author, political activist, and lecturer, and Ana Pavlova the ballerina; women whose experiences subconsciously influenced her to believe it was possible as a woman to overcome significant odds to achieve one’s fullest potential (Rhoda Reddock, in discussion with the author, April 2017).

As a young academic, Rhoda had several mentors on her journey to academic excellence. Among them were Mia Berden, lecturer on Labour and Development at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague, and founder of the ISS Women and Development Programme; Professor Maria Mies, Rhoda’s doctoral supervisor, Constance Sutton, Professor Emerita of New York University, and Dr Peggy Antrobus, founder of The UWI Women and Development Unit, who invited her to prepare the concept paper for the initiation of women’s studies at The UWI, which led to the establishment of the CGDS. Additionally, Professor Reddock is eternally grateful to Professor Bridget Brereton, Professor Emerita of History of The UWI, St

Augustine Campus who strongly encouraged her to pursue her career all the way to the professorial level (Rhoda Reddock, in discussion with the author, April 2017).

The list of teaching and administrative positions she held is long and impressive. It includes her first teaching appointment at the Cipriani Labour College, Trinidad and Tobago, 1976-1978. Then followed her appointments as Research Fellow and Associate Lecturer at the ISS, in The Hague from 1983 to 1985, contributing to the development of its fledgling master's programme in Women and Development. Returning home in 1985, she assumed a position of Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)² at The UWI St. Augustine until 1990. Her first teaching appointment at the institution covered the period 1990 to 1994 when she served as a lecturer in the Department of Sociology. In 1994, she secured promotion to Senior Lecturer at The UWI St Augustine Campus. It was during this period that she approached Christine Barrow of The UWI Cave Hill Campus to collaborate on the textbook *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*, which was eventually published in 2001. Her impact in these positions was already so critical that she acquired international recognition as manifested by her 1992-1993 Rockefeller Residency Fellowship at Hunter College New York and her six-month stint as the Claudia Jones Visiting Professor in African – New World Studies at Florida International University (FIU) in 2000. Between 1986 and 1995, she served as the ISS staff representative on The UWI/ISS³ Project of Cooperation in Teaching and Research in Women and Development Studies at The UWI. This regional project was pivotal in the establishment of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies in 1993. In 2001, her professional title was changed again when she became Professor Rhoda Reddock. Later, in 2004, she was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley.

Prior to her appointment as Deputy Principal of The UWI, St Augustine Campus, Professor Reddock's administrative experiences locally, regionally and internationally were in the field of women and gender studies. This was not surprising, considering that she was among the pioneers in the creation of an autonomous and secure space for the study of women and gender at the institution.

² Now SALISES -The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies

³ Funded by the Netherlands Department of Development Cooperation (DGIS).

But there were also other interests, such as development studies and race and ethnic studies. For example, from 1990 to 1992, she was research coordinator for the project *Race, Class and Gender Sector, Future of the Caribbean* of the ISER/UWI. She also served as first Head of the CGDS at The UWI, St Augustine from 1994 to 2008. Beginning with one additional staff member, the now Institute for Gender and Development Studies has developed a reputation for engaged scholarship and innovative research and publications. Professor Reddock has served as consultant for a number of international agencies, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the preparation of the Five-year Programme for the Caribbean as part of the Participatory Action Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean and, together with Rosalie Barclay, prepared a national report on “Gender Violence Against Women and Girls” for the United Nations Inter Agency Campaign to End Violence Against Women.

Professor Reddock’s administrative responsibilities took a quantum leap when she assumed the position of Deputy Campus Principal in August 2008. Under this portfolio, she assumed with the Principal of The UWI responsibility for the overall administration of the Campus and deputised in his/her absence. More particularly her position focused on student-related issues such as initiatives to improve and maintain their academic progress, implementing and assessing student services and co-curricular programmes which supported their development and success at St. Augustine Campus. Professor Reddock was also directly responsible for supervising the staff in charge of a number of student services, and staff within her own office, and liaised internally and externally with a number of other student-centred stakeholders. Some of the units which were within her remit included the Academic Support/Disabilities Liaison Unit, the halls of residence, Health and Counselling Services, Student Advisory Services, the Student Activity Centre, the Sports and Physical Education Centre, Campus Security (Student Issues), the International Office (Student Issues) and the Guild of Students and Campus Concessionaire.

As Deputy Principal, in addition to supervising directly the various student services units, Professor Reddock was responsible for managing a wide range of other crucial nerve centres of The UWI, St Augustine. She was chair, deputy chair and/or committee member of a significant number of campus boards and committees responsible for formulating important policies and making critical decisions relative

to the functioning of the University over which she was second in command. These included the Academic Quality Assurance Committee, the Sabbatical Leave/Scholarly Leave Committee, UWI Games Committee, Academic Board, the Campus Appointments Committee, Campus Finance and General Purposes Committee, the Board for Undergraduate Studies, Campus Council, University Finance and General Purposes Committee, the University Executive Management, Graduation Planning Committee, the Disciplinary Committee-Industrial Relations Matters, the St. Augustine Campus Selection Committee-Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence, the Senior Staff Review, the Principal's Summary Hearing, and all advisory committees. The administrative load alone that she carried was mammoth and testified to the yeo(wo)man service she rendered to The UWI over the years.

Professor Reddock's tenure as Deputy Principal saw a number of innovations and transformations, for example, the expansion and integration of the student services into the Division of Student Services and Development. This included the introduction of new offices: for example, Financial Advisory Services, International and Regional Students Support, Commuting and Off-Campus Students Support and the Co-curricular and Community Engagement Office. She was particularly concerned with staff and student engagement beyond the campus and the enhancement of the diversity of the curricula to produce the Distinguished UWI graduate. Reddock also oversaw the approval of a campus alcohol policy and The UWI-wide Sexual Harassment Policy and supported the establishment of an after-school care centre for the children of UWI staff and students.

Despite the heavy demand on her time and talent, Professor Reddock did not neglect her research and publications, the hallmarks of any successful academic career. To date, she has written or edited eight books; edited four special journal issues and published over seventy peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Her initial scholarly focus was women's labour, women, gender and history, and their intersections with race and class. Her early articles, "Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective" (1985) and "Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago 1845-1917: Freedom Denied" (1986) have become classic works. It is this orientation that mobilized her publications of *Elma François, The NWCSA and the Worker's Struggle for Change in the Caribbean* published by New Beacon Books in London in 1988 and *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and*

Tobago: A History published by Zed Books in London and by Ian Randle Publications in Kingston, Jamaica in 1994. These were pioneering works on women in Trinidad and Tobago and, by extension, the Caribbean. Her edited volumes include *National Liberation and Women's Liberation* (co-edited with Maria Mies) and published by the ISS, The Hague, in 1982; *Ethnic Minorities in Caribbean Society* published by ISER in 1996; *Women Plantation Workers: International Experiences* (co-edited with Shobhita Jain and published by Berg Publishers in Oxford and New York in 1998), *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings* (co-edited with Christine Barrow) published by Ian Randle Publishers in 2001, and *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses* published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2004. Her book chapters include "Popular Movement to Mass Organization: The Case of the National Women's Organization of Grenada (NWO) 1979-1983" in D. Slater (ed.) *New Social Movements and State in Latin America* published by CEDLA in Amsterdam in 1985 and "Women in Revolt: Women and the Radical Workers Movement 1934-1937," in Roy Thomas (ed.) *The Trinidad Labour Riots 1937: Perspectives 50 Years Later* published by The UWI Extra Mural Department, in St. Augustine in 1987. Among her more recent publications are "Radical Caribbean Social Thought: Race, Class Identity and the Postcolonial Nation" *Current Sociology*, vol. 62 no. 4, July 2014 and "Up Against a Wall": Muslim Women's Struggle to Reclaim Masjid Space in Trinidad and Tobago", in Aisha Khan (ed.) *Islam and the Americas*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2015.

The accolades which have been heaped on Professor Reddock are irrefutable proof of the profundity of her life's work. In 2001, she was a recipient of the illustrious UWI Vice-Chancellor's Award for All-Round Excellence in Teaching and Administration, Research and Public Service. In 2002, she was the awardee of the Seventh CARICOM Triennial Award for Women customarily bestowed in recognition of an outstanding CARICOM woman whose work made a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the Caribbean. In 2008, the US Department of State International selected her for the Woman of Courage Award, as they saw her as an exemplar in the exercise of leadership, courage, resourcefulness and willingness to make sacrifices in promoting the rights of women. Professor Reddock is also the recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of the Western Cape in Bellville,

South Africa. These honours clearly signify that her work has been accepted and respected within and beyond the Caribbean.

For forty-one years from 1976 to 2017, Professor Reddock was committed to making a positive difference in the lives of those for whom and with whom she worked. She ought to be commended for her prolific scholarly contribution to the new and growing discipline of women and gender studies in the Caribbean. More than a mere educator, she operated with the temperament of a mild-mannered, pragmatic and indefatigable administrator who never ignored the necessity of producing academic work and fostering scholarship that has and will continue to influence the process of change. For her multiple roles, all of which she has so successfully executed over the years, she deserves a space in the canons of recorded history.

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