

Scott Timcke & Shalene Gomes (Eds.) (2024). *Race, class and nationalism in the 21st-Century Caribbean*. University of Georgia Press 384pp. pbk. 978-082036702-6. US\$34.

This volume offers an in-depth examination of the political and social dynamics shaping contemporary Caribbean societies. It compiles the insights of multiple contributors who analyse how historical legacies of colonialism, racial stratification, and economic systems intersect with contemporary global development. The text is a significant addition to Caribbean studies, tackling issues at the core of identity, power, and economic change in the region.

The book is organized into four broad sections, each addressing critical facets of race, class, and nationalism in the Caribbean. *Formations and Formulations* explores the foundational historical paradigms and theoretical frameworks that define the region's sociopolitical fabric. *History and Activism* examines how historical events and movements, such as labour struggles and anti-colonial activism, have shaped the region's current systems and ideologies. *Domination and Expression* discusses cultural and political hegemony, looking at how race and class inequalities manifest in Caribbean societies. And *Local Politics and International Pressures* investigates the broader global influences that challenge and reinforce existing structures, including the impact of China's growing presence in the region.

The editors seek to bridge historical analysis with contemporary debates, emphasising the importance of political economy in understanding the complex interplay of race, class, and nationalism.

The book's overarching argument focuses on how enduring inequalities and racialised systems of governance continue to affect identity formation, political participation, and socioeconomic outcomes. It does so on the premise that the power dynamics of the twenty-first-century Caribbean are shaped by race, class, and nationalism and that these dimensions of identity must be analysed as interconnected phenomena grounded in the region's colonial history.

The context is aptly set by Timcke's critical introduction to the Caribbean's historical and contemporary struggles, stressing the need for a renewed Marxist critique of political economy. Timcke draws attention to lingering colonial frameworks in managing labour, land and identity, urging readers to consider economic systems as vital to understanding race and nationalism. He gives a few noteworthy examples, including the discussion on how Caribbean states leverage their citizens' bodies within the service-based tourism economy.

A commodification of labour and identity for financial gain is a colonial legacy that is reflected in this practice. Kamala Kempadoo identifies how Caribbean political economy embeds sexuality into national strategies for competing in a globalised economy, taking advantage of "fluid types of transactional sexual relations" (p. 5) to draw in tourism money.

Thereafter, Kerrigan proffers one of the most thought-provoking chapters examining the shifting construction of difference in Trinidad. By analysing how narratives of Creole identity and carnival culture are employed to enforce or challenge social hierarchies, the chapter reveals competing visions of nationalism that either unify or polarize the population.

Themes of economic pressure and identity also emerge in Gomes' chapter, which explores the lives of highly skilled Trinidadian women who return to provide care for aging relatives. It highlights their caregiving as unpaid "labours of love," (p. 113) shaped by cultural expectations and neoliberal economic pressures. These women balance professional work, personal sacrifices, and emotional tolls while navigating societal norms, historical legacies, and systemic inequalities within Trinidad's healthcare and familial structures.

Cultural differences also have political consequence, as illustrated in Edwards' study of Guyana's 2020 election impasse. In its detailed analysis of ethnicized politics, it highlights how historical divisions between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese communities, shaped by colonial labour systems, have spawned electoral tensions and eroded democratic governance. Using census data to illustrate ethnic division adds a well-supported, empirical dimension to the discussion.

The book also addresses the region's cultural and ideological dimensions. For instance, chapters on Cuba (Ch. 6) and the Dominican Republic (Ch. 11) highlight how nationalism can marginalise minority groups while reinforcing state power. These sections provide insights into the historical and cultural logics of discrimination that permeate national policies.

In building these complex arguments, *Race, class and nationalism* makes several notable contributions to the field of Caribbean studies. It combines historical analysis with contemporary case studies and provides a holistic understanding of the forces that shape the region. Contributions from multiple scholars ensures a diversity of perspectives, making the text relevant to both regional specialists and global scholars interested in issues of identity, development, and postcolonial studies.

One of the book's strong points is its pairing of empirical data and qualitative research. For example, discussions on migration in Trinidad and Tobago are enriched by personal narratives of returnee women and their caregiving roles, illustrating how migratory patterns affect family structures and economic decision making. This nuanced approach bridges academic analysis with human stories, making the text both rigorous and relatable.

Furthermore, the book's critiques of neoliberal global systems resonate with broader debates on globalisation, inequality, and sovereignty. The focus on China's role in the region situates the Caribbean within global geopolitics, demonstrating how external pressures continue to shape local realities.

While the book offers an impressive breadth of coverage, some chapters represent a more comprehensive analysis than others. The sections on small island states, for example, are at times overshadowed by discussions of larger states like Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana. Greater attention to the unique challenges faced by smaller economies could have enriched the analysis. Additionally, a dense academic tone may limit accessibility to non-specialists, reducing the book's appeal to policymakers and general readers. Finally, the book is light on solutions to the systemic challenges it identifies. While the analyses are robust, concrete proposals for reforming political systems or addressing racial inequities are less developed.

Despite these limitations, the book addresses themes such as ethnicized politics, migration, and globalisation, speaking directly to ongoing debates in governance, development, and identity. Here is a roadmap for scholars, activists, and policymakers interested in unpacking the region's historical roots and future trajectories.

Race, class and nationalism in the 21st-Century Caribbean is an insightful work that deepens our understanding of the region's sociopolitical complexities. Its thorough analysis and diverse perspectives make it a valuable resource for anyone interested in the Caribbean's past, present, and future. This book is a must-read for those seeking to unravel the intricate threads of race, class, and nationalism, and their implications, in a rapidly changing world.

Akins Vidale

Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies

Trinidad and Tobago

vidalea@cclcs.edu.tt