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WOMEN *and the* GLOBAL ECONOMY

PODCAST: Trouble in Paradise: A Conversation with the Feminist Scholar Eudine Barriteau

HOST: Welcome to the International Museum of Women and this podcast for *Economica: Women and the Global Economy*.

EUDINE BARRITEAU: *We can be a playground, you know, we can be just a tourism destination, just coconut and palm trees and nice cruises, and as if like real people don't live there with real economic concerns.*

HOST: Feminist scholar and activist Eudine Barriteau studies gender and economic relations in the Caribbean Islands. Barriteau was born on the island of Grenada, and today serves as Deputy Principal of the University of the West Indies in Barbados.

Economica curator Masum Momaya sat down with Eudine Barriteau at the 2009 conference of the International Association for Feminist Economics. They began by discussing how the Caribbean economy stands today:

BARRITEAU: One of the things that distinguishes the Caribbean is a very high percentage of female headed households. And when I teach I say to my students, that one statistic, that one fact should influence how you see everything that happens because there are other features that sit right behind female headed households. There's not another adult partner present whether male or female who is helping to bring resources into that household. So the person who is the head of that household—when it is single-headed 95% of the time it is headed by a woman.

So that person, whether that person is a prostitute or a priest it's not a morality issue, is responsible for earning the resources and then seeing about the allocation of the resources. And I would say as a regional average we have about 44% of households headed by women. But one of the things that distinguish the Anglophone Caribbean, and again comparatively speaking, there is relatively high investment by successive governments in social infrastructure.

So that education—there's high literacy rates, primary, secondary and tertiary education tends to be fairly good and in some countries better than others. So like in Barbados for instance, through the Anglophone Caribbean I would say, we have a

literacy rate of about 98% and that is standard. Investment in health tends to be very good.

But because we are small, dependent, open economies the greatest degree of vulnerability is around trade, economic issues because of imperialism and colonialism, and at the start of the post Columbian we were a plantation agriculture and one of crop production. And this has changed from about the middle of the last century, 20th century. Most countries produce either bananas or sugar and that has changed dramatically and there has been a wide shift to tourism. Tourism related services and also offshore banking and the offshore financial sector. And because of the global economic crisis these are now all in all in abeyance to a large extent. So the implications of that for earnings and for unemployment is something the governments are now grappling with.

MOMAYA: And how have women been impacted by some of those shifts?

BARRITEAU: Well, very heavily in a negative manner because as I said, a lot of the households are headed by women. One of the other things about the Caribbean is it is a region characterized by heavy migration. So you find Caribbean migrants have gone to the Panama Canal in the 19th century to build it, have gone to Cuba, have gone to Costa Rica, have gone to the United Kingdom in the post world war to rebuild London and so on, the United States. Migration has always served as an outlet for surplus population and when you didn't have sophisticated economic bank versification.

The migration outlets have dried up and so you have a situation now where people cannot migrate because remittances matter a lot. The migration people would send money back home to families even though they started new families. In the early days the migration was heavily by men. We have a phenomenon now where in migration, when it does happen, is it by women leaving their families behind trying to find work.

But what I would say overall is that the migration outlets have dried up to the extent that nobody's sucking labor from the Caribbean in the way they used to and so, there is high unemployment generally. The U.K. and Europe are given unfair preferences to the Caribbean region. They removed those preferential quotas that existed. And even though the aggregate output from the Caribbean was relatively small it mattered to the Caribbean economies and countries and societies. And with that gone, one plantation in Latin America could produce about maybe 70% of the bananas that came from the Caribbean. So that has gone.

So you have surplus labor coming from the agricultural area. You don't have the migration outlet, so we have now is a phenomenon of drugs. Planting of marijuana, this has become extremely lucrative. And I remember writing somewhere in the 1990s, it's really kind of ironic, that the U.S. has lobbied through WTO to remove the preferential treatment the Caribbean got as formal Colonial countries of European counties. And so, remove that and also at the same time we have a problem with drugs and you'll get

assistance for fighting drugs you know, at the end of it. But you won't get the kind of assistance that would enable you to create employment.

But as it relates to women, everything impacts on women heavily and more negatively because women tend to be the backbone of the families in the Caribbean. Because 44% of households are headed by women. It means that they carry undue burdens when there is unemployment. Female unemployment has traditionally been higher and has always been higher for women than for men. So even sometimes when you have aggregate the national unemployment rates dropping you can have a situation where that drops but female unemployment rises.

I know of in Barbados where I'm based one year the aggregate rate came down and it came down because male employment rose sharply in the construction sector. But female unemployment also rose highly. Because Barbados used to have a number of data processing plants, American Airlines used to have all their tickets processed through there.

But now with the shift to a lot of online and electronic processing there wasn't a need for those young women entering data in that sense. So in that particular year a lot of young women were laid off. So female unemployment rose sharply, male employment rose, the national average came down. It probably could have been lower the unemployment average but because of the spike in female unemployment.

And of course with single headed households women have to provide and these households are not just single headed households with young women they you know, just negotiating life. There's usually about two or three children sitting behind them. And so, they have to provide care for their children. So that is also a serious concern.

The challenge is to have policy makers internalize that in creating employment opportunities they need to factor in employment opportunities for women, because that is still something that is an afterthought. When there is a concern about unemployment it is still unemployment as it affects men. That is deeply embedded in the economic and social policy.

And the sheer will of women to survive, which is something again that has characterized Caribbean women and perhaps women elsewhere, accounts for a lot of their capacity to make do and working class women to triumph. Then often that information is then taken and trumpeted as said, well you see look how well women are doing. But a lot of it is women individual resources and capacity to try to make ends meet for their families that matter more.

The economy in the Caribbean in the Anglophone Caribbean that has the most challenge is the South American country called Guyana, it borders Venezuela and so on. The economy is really in a very poor shape. And a lot of Guyanese both men and women have been migrating to other Caribbean countries. The country where I live,

Barbados, is seen as affluent in comparison, say, to Guyana. One U.S. dollar is two Barbados dollars, one U.S. dollar is two hundred Guyanese dollars.

So Barbados now is under pressure because it has a lot of Guyanese immigrants who come in search of work and a lot of them are, in fact, highly skilled women who would have high school qualifications and so on. But they come to Barbados and they take work as maids and whatever they can do to survive. A lot of women in the Caribbean too, will also travel to Puerto Rico, which is part of the U.S. or St. Martin, which is sort of free-trade zone and buy goods. And then attempt to sell it back in their own countries. This was very big in the 1980s and it was called the suitcase trade, it still exists but not to the same extent.

Some women have gotten involved in prostitution and sex work. We don't know the numbers because again, because of the illegality of that, that is also a factor there. Women take part-time work, women try to take less work for less pay. And I think the very fact that a lot of women have children that sit behind them it sets them up to be more accommodating in the workplace. Because you know you have to feed these children. You'll probably prefer to give them better meals whatever you have to give them, less nutritious meal is better than no meal at all.

So there's a whole of what I call sufficing, attempting to get by. In some countries the state attempts to provide a social network and with varying degrees. So Barbados has a semblance of a welfare state kind of approach but that also is challenged by the fact that government revenue decreases when tourism revenues are down.

MOMAYA: So I wanted to ask you, have the governments, given this history of providing education and health services, have governments been able to maintain that or has that been really challenging?

BARRITEAU: In Barbados I would say yes it has been. But what they attempt to do, I have to give them credit and I can speak fairly knowledgably about Barbados. They try to maintain the investment in education and health and a certain degree of social services. But how they will attempt to come back that expenditure is attaching user fees in other ways or taxation in other ways. So taxation and licenses, you know the licenses to drive has gone up like 300%. But I don't mind and the people—if you have a car and you can pay it will help someone out.

Because simultaneously the current government has also made public transportation free for school children, which really relieves a pressure. Because it used to be an average of a \$1.50 per day U.S., and it could be if some kids need to take two buses it would have been \$3.00 U.S. a day. So parents now do not have to face that and so the government absorbs that but some of the government services that you may require, the water rates will go up, the monthly water rates or something like that.

So there's an attempt to cover revenue and they're making a valiant attempt and I'm speaking of Barbados now, they're making a valiant attempt because I know that government revenues are down. But it is extremely hard and in the current economic crisis it is even more challenging.

MOMAYA: Do women and women works in particular, do they organize around things like wages and benefits?

BARRITEAU: Not enough, not enough, hardly enough. I think that right now in the Caribbean we used to have a women's movement and I say, used to have, because it is very fragile and fractured. And one of the things that happened, that's coming out of the Beijing conference and just around that time, there was a whole thing started that men are in crisis. Caribbean women are seen as very strong and very vocal and go-getters. They also care very much about what happens to their men and their boys.

And I think the powers that be and the men's movement, because we have a men's movement that has emerged, who were very opposed to the power of the new women, started to say men are in crisis. So ordinary women who are not feminist and there are very few feminist, got caught, I like to say, in suspended animation. It's like, oh my god I didn't know that when I attempted to do this I was hurting men and boys. And this is beaten all around so the Caribbean women's movement have been caught unawares and were unable to respond to this attack.

So that even though there are very bad conditions for women, women are afraid to work as a group. I would say, to articulate as a group the problems that they face because most of the attempts to do that are considered attempts to hurt men and marginalize men. So that the vibrancy of the women's movement and the level of women's organizing that existed I would say in the 80s and the 90s is now in abeyance. And when people make stabs at it you hear, they hate men, they want to hurt boys, and it's the boys that are in crisis.

And sometimes you hear women leaders actually forever apologizing, well I know women face problems and I want to say that I'm saying that even though men have problems. So, even though you have women in trade union movements, the trade movement does not come out as speak about the conditions effecting women. So I am dissatisfied with that and it is one of the areas in which I would like to see a greater emphasis on articulating and claiming that public space and saying, because we make a contribution to the well-being of society, because what we do effect the wellbeing, even if you put as for the men and boys, that this should be done.

But most women leaders are afraid to make that articulation and most women on the ground—well I don't think they've reflected enough on the strategy that it was an attempt to really curtail the power of the women. So we are really facing that backlash in a sense. We had academic at the university, a scholar who came up with the marginalization of the black male. Borrowing a lot from the arguments that existed in

the U.S. and probably resonated better in the U.S. and more relevance given [they're a] minority population.

But when I speak on it and I'm so tired of it, I tell them I'm not speaking on it anymore. But when I used to speak on it and I've written a chapter in a book and a paper on it, I would say look you can't just do this massive importation in the Caribbean black men are the majority. The majority of the power holders are men. And if you're going to do a class analysis, working class people suffer and they're working class women and men not only working class men.

What I would say has emerged differently in the Caribbean over the last 30 years is that, yes there are more women in professional positions where 30 years ago there would not have been. But still, they represent only a minority of all working women. So the majority of women who are working, are working class women; are shop-girls, are maids, are women without qualifications.

What has changed is that now you can point to some judges and some lawyers and women, so what has changed is a group of women have emerged. But there if you look at the whole breakdown percentage wise they do not represent 20% of all working women. But they're the ones that are thrown out there to frighten everyone from talking about the very poor conditions women experience in terms of work. And the difficulty in getting government to pass legislation that deals with issues of sexual harassment and so. That often women are exploited at the workplace and that is the real big area in the Caribbean that I would say is that kind of sexual exploitation and women not knowing how to combat it.

Women know intuitively when something is wrong. Women know that they're experiencing conditions that are adverse and yet still they don't want to say anything because they're afraid of rocking the boat. Shrugging a sense of resignation—well it's something that happens to you when you're a women, especially if they're working class women. So often they might try again individually to handle it and leaders make lovely public noises you know, we mustn't exploit our women. But in terms of really going after the people who did that, that is lacking.

MOMAYA: Would you still look to, so this is an open question, do you still feel like there's a role for the State or for the government to intervene in terms of rectifying inequality?

BARRITEAU: Oh definitely.

MOMAYA: And what would that look like?

BARRITEAU: There is always a role for the State. I curse the State and I warn the State and I think most feminist have an ambivalence about the State. But the State through legislation and policy offer you a backup. The thing is, and sometimes you do have a

piece of legislation or you do have a State policy and it's to get women to [meet] that policy. But I think because the State ends up being a final arbiter and the State is powerful and the State can either impose sanctions or remove penalties. I mean, in the immediate post first World Conference period when there was both an excitement and a pressure from the international communities in 1975, the first World Conference on Women. A very influential piece of policy by the U.S. Aid, the Percy Amendment in the U.S. Aid act said that – no developing country would receive aid if they didn't have a woman in the development program. Though a lot of us cuss the women in development program but it became an opening. So that a lot of governments, oh, okay, we will start a women's desk, will start a women's bureau. But that mechanism provided an opening.

After that a lot of punitive legislation were lobbied and, in fact, the work that was done in the '70s and '80s I don't think we have the willpower and the capacity to do it now. So there was a lot legislation between 1975 to 1984 that was changed. In a marriage, women could not determine their domicile. So that before the legislation was changed if you were married in Barbados and your husband decided he wanted to move to Timbuktu and you had a good job and he didn't and you didn't move, it was that you were violating the conditions of the marriage. So that legislation has changed. You couldn't own property independently. So there were nine pieces of legislation all the titles, I cannot remember which were changed and that is the State acting. So that the State provides a kind of protection and if the State passes policies on sexual harassment or passes legislation on sexual harassment, that is very good.

Now you have to have the lawmakers then say – well yes this man said to this woman that you cannot get this job unless you have sex with me. I mean, there are so many different interlocking sectors so that you do need the State to pass the policy. You do need people in key positions at a tier level to interpret the policy and to enact the policy. You need administrators to enforce the policy.

But you do need the State so we cannot ignore the State, the State has to be there. And I'm not letting the State off the hook. What we are trying to do you really fighting endemic conditions of systemic inequalities, a long held belief that women are inferior and insubordinate. So it's not going to change overnight.

And the role of the State in sanctioning the equality of women, although I'm more into gender justice than gender equality, I think the first tier is equality. And I think the State has an incredible role to play in ensuring that and saying that. And even if they're actions that are seem symbolic, they have to be in place and I think even in terms of different kinds of messages of trying to change behavior, understanding that this is going to be a very long term, incremental and glacial process, that it still has to be done.

MOMAYA: It also strikes me that there's a complexity in terms of the role of the State given how governments in the Caribbean are positioned within the international

community. So, I don't know if you want to touch on the positioning of countries in the Caribbean in relationship to the international powers—

BARRITEAU: Yeah. But I know that the countries in the Caribbean if you put the leaders feel particularly vulnerable. I mean, they won't articulate vulnerability but it is quite clear. And there is an inequality of players. I mean, you know as you suggested or said, we don't set the policy and what again, goes wrong in terms of gender and gender analysis on what happens to women is that as soon as there's a stringency one of the first things to go is any conditions considerations about women and the inequalities around gender, because the country's in crisis where you going with that. Because again, it is as almost as if conditions, speaking of gender equality is an add-on. So okay, well let's get this right and then we will deal with that.

MOMAYA: Then we'll do that.

BARRITEAU: Without saying that this is part of what you need to get right. But yes, there is a hierarchy of interest and there's a hierarchy of who gets to play and who gets to decide. So just like generally there's a prioritization of the public over the private. It is just so as developing and industrialized and who gets to be developing and who is regarded as the south and who gets determine that. So, that is also played out in those scenarios.

The international relations, the geopolitical relations is mapped onto internal State relations. The degree of vulnerability that countries of the south especially small regions; because the Caribbean is kind of fascinating and complex, very small countries, island states, very much a product of the West, born of confluence of colonialist powers intersecting. And so, the Caribbean is very westernized in ways that even sometimes we are taken by surprise and we have to interact with other parts of the world to recognize how Western we are. And for somebody like me, sometimes it's painful because for all kinds of nostalgic and ancestral and historical reasons you want that identification.

But we are a product of Western penetration, colonialism, imperialism and so on. And we all know in the 19th and 18th century, before massive industrialization, when Europe was feed by products, by agricultural products then we were extremely beneficial and useful. We are no longer that way. And in a sense the interest that European and northern industrialized powers had once in a region, a tiny region where the English speaking population couldn't clear 8 million of all the 15 countries making up the Anglophone Caribbean. There isn't that interest anymore because we don't have the natural resources that these countries go after.

So it's an interest in an area say like, sub-Saharan African is not only driven by altruism, Africa is just driven with resources. So they want to be all over Africa because they want the African resources. And because we fit into the middle income we get bumped off. So that if you compare Caribbean countries say with some sub-Saharan African

countries, I can't think immediately of any Asian countries, we would look comparatively better off. And the UNDP indicators where they're ranked and so on, we look that way.

But we have serious problems and those problems don't get consideration because okay, we don't have all these terrible diseases or the incidence of AIDS is not the same way. And so you're punished, you can't get funding for instance to bring people to conferences or do certain projects. We have graduated from certain things.

But because we have graduated, we have graduated out from development funding, we have graduated out from concessions by the WTO, pressuring the group in Africa ACP, Caribbean and Pacific countries. So we have graduated out in that manner and all the G7 will decide that Caribbean countries like the Turks and Cacaos and Barbados and whatever, our offshore sectors are unregulated which is totally untrue. But it becomes an easy dumping ground.

It is almost in a way and I like to find cynicism I don't believe in it. But we can be a playground, you know, we can be just a tourism destination, just coconut and palm trees and nice cruises. And as if like real people don't live there with real economic concerns. You know, you can see the disparities more readily in an area as sub-Saharan African and I want Africa to get attention and I want African academics and scholars and politicians to do better by Africa. But in a sense the Caribbean becomes a no man's land in terms of, we're not asking for handouts, we have quite competent and capable people. But we're asking for fair treatment in terms of where we ranked and how we are treated.

The fact that because of the lack of massive size, besides the lack of a critical population, all of those factors influence the way Caribbean countries are treated and what happens to us as a people. And that is really unfortunate because again, Caribbean people I would say are not asking for handouts. We just want fair treatment and that in terms of the international powers looking at what happens in terms of the global economic crisis. You don't squeeze small countries and small regions, because again, you take one simple act and you can almost put a whole country out of commission and lives are hurt and then there is nowhere to go.

The U.S. has this rather evil policy that if you have Caribbean migrancy to the United States, they can migrate at two years old and at forty years old they commit a heinous crime, they export them back to the Caribbean. We have had really serious crime problems with these international deportees who are not Caribbean in the sense of culture or anything. So they dump back on us and they come because they sophisticated criminals who have grown up in the U.S. and they come and they wreak havoc.

I remember the time when the policy just started, some started dynamite in the ATM machines and the police were just like, not able to deal with it. I think with the new Obama administration there's some negotiation with the new attorney general to see if

they could curtail that. Because again, in a country with a population of 1,000,000 you send back 50 criminals, very sophisticated criminals, they make a difference you know, you're not talking about house burglary or anything.

So yes, back to the heart of your question. We do see a lot in the Caribbean that when the large countries sneeze, we get pneumonia. Again, we have to push for equitable treatment as countries, as people and to ensure that our governments don't surrender things that would end up putting women at a greater disadvantage.

MOMAYA: If there are public policies that you think are important to maintain or things that you think need to be added. What would they be, the few things that you think are really key?

BARRITEAU: I would like to ensure that there are widespread public policies as it relates to conditions of work. I would like women as workers to be respected on the job. Mind you, if the policies are there, there still has to be great educational...

MOMAYA: Implementation.

BARRITEAU: ...outreach to have women. Because women are coming from a situation, the vast majority of women have internally, a kind of second class status in terms of their own rights. They may think they have a right to education, they may have a right to those broad parameters but somebody passes, squeezes a breast, they'll think twice about reporting that. And so that sets up conditions of abuse. But I want the policy that if you pass and squeeze a women's breast you're in trouble.

I want the legislation for that and I want it throughout the Caribbean. I don't want it either sounding noble, getting up and saying, "Oh we have to respect our women or the women are the [clothes] of the Caribbean, they're the mothers of the Caribbean" and all the other crap. I want the policy in place throughout the Caribbean, the legislation in place. So that I would like to see.

Then I would like to see policy that recognizes as single women face a particular set of constraints that they are the main revenue earners for their households and they also have to deploy that revenue. And that, if the State can't provide some backup support for them as it relates to having somebody trying to get children to school and those kinds of things. As I say in Barbados with the introduction of free public transportation for school children, that's a major help. I would like to see that more widespread.

I think I want governments to understand that if they invest in education and the care of our children it prevents the burgeoning of a prison population later on. I hate to put it in a utilitarian senses except that I think governments understand that. Because I think you should have investment, women have a right to the resources of the State because they just have a right as citizens.

MOMAYA: As human rights.

BARRITEAU: That'll be a great start those areas it would be wonderful, it would be like Christmas all year long. [laughs]

HOST: You've been listening to Caribbean Scholar and Activist Eudine Barriteau in conversation with Masum Momaya, curator for ***Economica: Women and the Global Economy***, at the International Museum of Women in San Francisco.

This is one of a series of talks with experts who attended the 2009 conference of the International Association for Feminist Economics in Boston, Massachusetts.

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