



‘New Regionalisms’: Caribbean perspectives

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The region’s contemporary challenges are generating a novel conceptualisation and related policy responses

“**W**hat constitutes the Caribbean? Among scholars, ‘the Caribbean’ is a socio-historical category. It embraces the islands and parts of the adjoining mainland – and may be extended to include the Caribbean Diaspora overseas. As one scholar observes, there are many Caribbeens. In short, the definition of the Caribbean might be based on language and identity, geography, history and culture, geopolitics, geo-economics, or organisation.”¹

This reflection focuses on the varieties of new regionalisms in the Caribbeens (NB both plural conceptualisations!) at the start of the second decade of the 21st century. In so juxtaposing, I seek to advance analysis and practice as the global financial crisis of the turn of the decade impacts both this and other regions differentially, albeit somewhat less intensively or negatively elsewhere. This time, the established trans-Atlantic region has been the hardest hit with the Asian one the least so, so that the latter is saving the former, unlike the ‘Asian’ crisis of the late-1990s when it was cast as the culprit rather than the savior. And the Caribbean has been hit much harder than Asia and the rest of the hemisphere, with implications for intra- and inter-regionalisms, in part as spill-over from the Anglo-American contraction. In turn, inequalities between and within the islands have intensified with human development/Millennium Development Goals (MDG) scores being lowest in Haiti and highest in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, along with one or two of the Overseas Territories (OTs) like the Caymans, Martinique and Guadeloupe, and St Maarten.

My insights into the diversities of ‘new regionalisms’ at the start of a new decade – a relatively novel approach proposed after the end of the Cold War bipolarity, towards the end of the 20th century – are increasingly informed by my three short years in Trinidad and Tobago, including very welcome collaboration and interaction with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), as well as Caribbean private companies, chambers of commerce, civil society and

media networks. I arrived at Piarcó in mid-2007 a very green academic with little insight into the region. But I was somewhat informed by networks on ocean/island governance around Dalhousie University in the heady days of the Law of the Seas (LoS) negotiations in the last quarter of the last century and by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) advocacy around the Commonwealth in the early part of this century.

‘New regionalisms’ perspectives draw attention away from the formal regional inter-state relationships and institutions and towards the non-state and informal, sometimes illegal. They also recognise a range of levels of regional interactions from the micro- to the macro-through the meso-levels. And informed by an earlier Secretary General of the ACS, my current colleague, Professor Norman Girvan, I’ve come to appreciate the several possible definitions of the Caribbean, including the diverse set of diasporas in North America and Europe: “The Caribbean is not only multilingual, it has also become transnational.”²

A veteran, respected commentator on Caribbean issues, Ronald Sanders³ has recently provided a very useful contemporary overview of regional challenges, from debt and climate change to remittances, crime, drugs and guns. And I’ve begun to identify a range of transnational relations in this case, from families and civil society to supply chains, crime networks and governance. Finally, I recognise that the region may be at a turning point as the long-standing Secretary-General of CARICOM, Edwin Carrington, moves towards retirement at the end of 2010: the end of an era indeed. What’s next? The next section treats debate about such ‘regionalisms’ in 2010: how transnational, compatible and/or competitive are they? And advanced through what forms of private/public governance?

Caribbean as the quintessential transnational region: impacts on inter- and non-state regionalisms

“The circulation of commodities is one of the unifying aspects of Caribbean history. Globalisation has not



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just happened to the Caribbean. The Caribbean has participated in the making of globalisation – four things circulate: people, capital, drugs and information.”⁴

In terms of the first form of circulation identified by Alejandra Bronfman, Rosina Wiltshire suggests that “The creation of Caribbean transnational networks rests on the foundation of a transnational family, in which migrants and their families have multiple home bases with ongoing commitments and loyalties that straddle territorial boundaries.”⁵ Such is the reformulation of ‘new’ regionalisms beyond the power of the state to myriad sources of innovation, such as communities.

This leads towards the recognition of ‘varieties’ of regionalisms/capitalisms/civil societies and economies. The Caribbean economy, both contemporary and historical, typically is a mix of several overlapping economies: beyond the formal and informal, including service sectors like finance, especially Offshore Financial Centres (OFCs), and internet gambling and, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, a century of oil and gas production; and onto transnational diasporic economies in which remittances are central via Grace, MoneyGram, Western Union and others.

The range of regional and global multinational corporations (MNCs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) stretches from Republic Bank/Sagicor/Flow/Guardian/Trinidad Cement to Digicel/Royal Bank of Canada/Scotiabank and onto British American Tobacco (BAT)/British Gas (BG)/BP/Nestle/Unilever, and from Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)/Cropper/Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)/Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) to Oxfam/WWF. These include the ‘hubs and spokes’ of airlines (American in Puerto Rico, Copa in Panama, Caribbean Airlines in Trinidad and Tobago), couriers like DHL, FedEx and UPS, and container companies, the latter impacted by the expansion of the Panama Canal.

The illegal economy features exponential transnational dimensions: drugs, guns and gangs, following the earlier era of pirates. According to Bronfman: “Illicit flows of all kinds have been part of the Caribbean’s history. Goods have circulated to the region, from the region, and through the region.”⁶ So, Jamaica may be the quintessential illegal economy and Haiti the informal. As Bronfman argues: “Jamaica occupies a unique place in the history of illicit flows because both marijuana and cocaine move in and out of the island.”⁷

Such an inheritance has generated an expanding range

of regional and global state and non-state responses, including Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP), Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO), Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and CARICOM-IMPACS (Implementation Agency for Crime and Security). Ubiquitous insecurity has led to the burgeoning of private security companies (PSCs), again national (for example Guardsman in Jamaica and the northern Caribbean) and global (G4S): but how are these regulated, and by whom? Moreover, the small arms and light weapons (SALW) flow through the islands around the coasts of Florida and Texas is impossible to contain given extra-regional catalysts and logistics. In turn, the distinctive experience and situation of Central America and the Caribbean is leading from the comparative, generic notion of ‘human security’ to region-specific idea of ‘citizen security’: from UNDP’s regional Human Development Report (HDR) on Central America last year to the Caribbean next. In short, the region’s contemporary challenges are generating a novel conceptualisation and related policy responses.

Of necessity, Caribbean communities are familiar with endless threats to their existence, particularly economic and political and now ecological vulnerabilities. They were central to the SIDS’ response to developmental and LoS issues following independence. And they now have to face a growing range of challenges, including climate change/sea-level rise.

Varieties of regionalisms in the Western Hemisphere and the Caribbean: compatible and/or competitive?

“Something remarkable is happening in Latin America. In the five years to 2008 the region’s economies grew at an annual average rate of 5.5 per cent. While squabbling Latin American politicians blather on about integration, the region’s businesses are quietly getting on with the job – witness the emerging cohorts of ‘multilatinas’.

Two things lie behind Latin America’s renaissance. The first is the appetite of China and India for raw materials with which the continent is richly endowed. But the second is the improvement in economic management.”⁸

The several levels or scales of region in the Caribbean and Hemisphere – macro-, meso- and micro-regionalisms, both formal and informal – have led to a proliferation of varieties of regional governance. These can be treated as ‘new regionalisms’, especially the impacts of the informal/illegal non-state relations on the formal/legal and inter-governmental. Such varieties of regionalism are today especially apparent in the Southern



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Cone: the Organisation of American States (OAS) versus the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). And extensive, extra-regional relations or inter-regionalisms multiply the competition, such as links within the Hemisphere between NAFTA and Mercosur or CARICOM and ECLAC. The most controversial and recent is the so-called Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between CARIFORUM and the EU. Canada is now negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Caribbean at the same time as one with the EU.

And the remaining bits of empire in the Caribbean complicate regional connections. Some OTs are associated with ECLAC and the OECS; for example, the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) of ECLAC includes eight Associate Members. And the Caribbean Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association includes the anglophone OTs. And the Association of Caribbean Universities and Research Institutes (UNICA) chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of the most regional university, UWI, my own, likewise includes metropolitan universities in the region.

One form of transnational service sector – finance – has become increasingly controversial: offshore financial centres (OFCs). In response to the attack from the G8 and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on these OFCs, the Caribbean created its own Financial Action Task Force (FATF). And the well-established Caribbean Centre for Money and Finance (CCMF) at UWI continues to monitor the region's financial development for its central and commercial banks. The global crisis has served to bring emerging financial/ethical dilemmas to the fore: from CLICO to Stanford. These will take time to resolve in both legal, financial and organisational terms.

Lessons for/from the Caribbean about regional governance at the start of the second decade of the 21st century

The Caribbean, however defined, can both learn from but also contribute to comparative regional development. As at the global level, regional governance is increasingly becoming more 'hybrid', with myriad actors and decision-makers. But there are inherited structural constraints on Caribbean regional development. Any sustainable development will have to reflect a growing range of interests and communities including diasporic and so move towards forms of private and/or transnational governance, symbolised by the inclusive membership

of the Cape Town-based World Commission on Dams, which included MNCs as well as NGOs and states/international organisations (IOs), albeit at regional levels. And given the growing relevance of the 'rest' – in other words non-state and -hegemonic actors – the Caribbean in its intra- as well as extra-regional relations needs to move away from rather exclusive inter-state or 'club' diplomacy towards more inclusive, hybrid 'network' forms involving 'public' diplomacy with heterogeneous non-state actors.

The Institute of International Relations (IIR) has recently been associated with the work of others on the ACS's embryonic Caribbean Sea Commission on comparative environmental governance networks for such seas. And since the start of this calendar year we have been pleased to host a trio of regional workshops with CARICOM/CARICOM-IMPACS on SALW, UNSC 1540 on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and contemporary diplomacy (the last supported by AusAID), all with multiple non-state/civil society and state partners. Over the next two years, with Project Ploughshares in Canada and civil society in the Caribbean, we are focusing on the development of private security companies in the region. And with the University of Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in Belgium we are in the middle of a comparative regionalisms network with mainly African partners.

In short, emergent and future regional and transnational relations demand innovative analytic and theoretical approaches as well as creative policy responses from state and non-state actors alike. I conclude by again echoing Girvan: "If the Caribbean was an invention of the 20th century, it seems certain to be reinterpreted and perhaps transcended in the 21st. The Caribbean of tomorrow will not be an exclusively Anglophone or Hispanic conception; and it will not be tied exclusively to geographic space or definition. If it survives at all, it will be a community of shared economic, social and political interests and strategies that encompasses different languages and cultures and the Caribbean Diaspora."⁹ ■

¹ Norman Girvan 'Reinterpreting the Caribbean' in Dennis Pantin (ed) *The Caribbean Economy: a reader* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2005) 304

² *Ibid* 306

³ Ronald Sanders 'The Commonwealth as a Champion of Small States' in James Mayall (ed) *The Contemporary Commonwealth: an assessment 1965-2009* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 82-102

⁴ Alejandra Bronfman *On the Move: the Caribbean since 1989* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2007)

⁵ Rosina Wiltsire 'Implications of Transnational Migration for Nationalism: the Caribbean Example' in *Annals of the NY Academy of Sciences, Volume 645: towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration* (NY, 2006) 175

⁶ Bronfman *On the Move* 8

⁷ *Ibid* 12

⁸ 'Nobody's Backyard. The Rise of Latin America' *Economist* 396(8699), 11 September 2010: 13

⁹ Girvan 'Reinterpreting the Caribbean' 315