

BOOK REVIEWS SECTION

Patsy Lewis, Terri-Ann Gilbert-Roberts and Jessica Byron (Eds.) (2018). *Pan-Caribbean integration: Beyond CARICOM*. London: Routledge. 310pp. Hbk. ISBN: 978-1-1380-5671-8. £100.

Regionalists face a fundamental dilemma: smaller groupings are more likely to share common interests, but have less capacity to influence external affairs. Larger groupings have greater capacity and influence, but struggle to align diverse interests. The implications of this dilemma are evident in the Caribbean where the most homogenous group of islands with the greatest imperative to cooperate, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), have achieved the deepest integration. In contrast, the broader membership of CARICOM and ACS have had to work much harder to achieve consensus on a smaller number of issues.

Pan-Caribbean integration: Beyond CARICOM documents the recent attempts by Caribbean island jurisdictions to resolve this dilemma. It is a project with a long history. The short-lived West Indies Federation is typically considered a highpoint for Anglophone integration, with each later phase seeking to recapture the singular vision of that period. The claim then and now is that integration allows small Caribbean island states and territories to diversify their economies, increase state capacity, and reduce vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks. In this way, they may overcome the endogenous limitations imposed by their diminutive size. The problem for regionalists is how to achieve these ends in the face of centrifugal tendencies and island nationalism.

The book's point of departure from these debates, captured in the subtitle 'Beyond CARICOM', is its explicit focus on broadening rather than deepening. It has five parts, with chapters that sequentially consider the involvement of French *départments d'outre-mer* in regional institutions, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and then the Spanish speaking Caribbean and growing links with Latin America. A general discussion of the conceptual basis of Caribbean regional projects precedes these contributions. The final section considers global trends, including migration and the rise of the BRICS.

Nearly all edited volumes, emerging as they so often do from workshops or conferences, face the problem of uneven contributions. While there are always more topics a volume can consider, I found the singular focus of *Pan-Caribbean integration* on the trend towards broadening the regional project provided a greater degree of coherence than usually found in the typical edited collection. The editors are therefore to be congratulated for the way that each chapter successfully demonstrates the general dilemma from multiple perspectives.

What emerges is a debate about how to understand and accommodate the complexities of diversity within a coherent narrative about what the regional project can and should achieve. On the one hand, Caribbean regionalism is a form of resistance to a shared history of slavery, plantation and neo-imperial dependency (Hintzen). In turn, this has begotten a shared identity that defies fragmented island geographies (Girven) and includes the growing diaspora (Trotz). On the other hand, broadening necessarily involves accommodating those island communities that seek development while retaining dependence (Galy), speak languages not typically used by CARICOM states which has implications for policymaking, migration and citizenship (Manigat, Phipps, and Amezquita), and have different economic and geopolitical imperatives (Reno, Reinoso, and Gomez), shifting alliances (Piedras), and relationships with larger states (Montoute and Adbdenur). It also requires alterations to visions of how dependent territories

fit in the foreign policy architecture of metropolitan states (Petit). Taken together, these tensions highlight how island communities engage in regional initiatives to simultaneously increase their sovereign autonomy from larger states and each other, while also reducing their economic and geopolitical vulnerability (Byron and Lewis).

In all cases, much of this discussion centres on the decisions of political elites. A common criticism of regional projects, in the Caribbean specifically but also across the globe, is that these are primarily elite games. The contributions to *Pan-Caribbean integration* are at odds on this point. Perhaps the best argument in favour of the elitist nature of the regional project is the bewildering array of acronyms that describe multiple, overlapping institutions and agreements that constitute the 'Caribbean' (pages xviii-xxi list them all). The collection pays considerable attention to language as befits the desire to look 'Beyond CARICOM'. And yet, regional technocrats appear to have their own dialect: this both insulates them from their communities but also demonstrates the complexity endogenous to creating a broader and more inclusive regionalism across multiple institutions and agreements.

The argument against this view is put most forcefully by those who see regionalism as a means of disrupting and resisting external dependence. Here, the claim is that the region already exists in the hearts and minds of its people. The problem is that nationalist politicians have not been keeping up their end of the democratic bargain. This is potentially a significant point but unfortunately it is asserted rather than substantiated. It relies on us accepting that politicians are unconscious supporters of dependence who manipulate their citizens into institutionalised lethargy. There is a counter argument, however: that of favouring regionalism only when it enhances sovereignty, thus reinforcing fragmentation and centrifugal tendencies. From this vantage point, politicians are responding to their constituents who are inherently suspicious of domination by island neighbours, let alone those from other places further away who have a different history and language. This analysis may better explain the preference for broadening over deepening at the heart of the book. Broader integration can be based on economic and functional imperatives, and abandoned when geopolitical conditions change. Deeper integration requires a much more substantial commitment and sense of shared identity of the type only partially achieved by the OECS states.

The book might have been enhanced by paying more explicit attention to the question of whether the desire to broaden 'Beyond CARICOM' is in fact a consequence of the failure to create this deeper regionalism over several decades, and whether the elitist project of a wider membership was likely to succeed where the previous effort is said to have failed. And yet, in relation to its core aim – documenting how this broadening has occurred and the complexities involved in doing so – the book succeeds remarkably. It thus represents an important and timely contribution to the ongoing discussion about the future of the Caribbean specifically, but also small islands states generally, and their attempts to achieve viability via regional cooperation.

Jack Corbett
University of Southampton
United Kingdom
j.corbett@soton.ac.uk