MEDIA AND CARIBBEAN INTEGRATION: LEVERAGING THE 21ST CENTURY MEDIA EXPLOSION

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Introducing the Media

Integration is both an aim and an end state (Evans and Newnham 1998). It is understood that in terms of International Relations it is the process by which sovereign states (whether geographically defined or otherwise) streamline originally individual pursuits through agreements in areas such as economic speculation, diplomatic relations, security management and political processes—among many others, to the point where any approach to those with whom the group engages, is unified in word and also through actions taken by any state under the agreement. Integration in this sense speaks to a unity of purpose and an active willingness to engage in collective decision-making and to also accept collective responsibility for the future of all within the grouping.

In the Caribbean there have been several attempts at integration. One of the earliest was the West Indies Federation. “Its brief existence (1958-1962)” has been labelled as the foundation stone upon which CARICOM was built (CARICOM 2011). The follow up, the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) founded in 1965 also failed to live up to expectations since its overarching objective—to facilitate the convergence of the economies party to the agreement—was never fulfilled ultimately but has been transmogrified into what is known today as CARICOM. This paper seeks to determine to what extent the use of Media – New and Old — is a viable route towards reconfiguring/rebranding the Caribbean and its integration efforts.

How do we know what we do? Why do we behave the way we do? React the way we do? How can one be certain that when one writes or speaks, the correct message is conveyed to the listener or reader? Ontology speaks to this issue. It “is the result of a slow and complex historical and social construction” (Laclau and Mouffe 1990). Professor Girvan in a recent lecture in honour of C.L.R. James made a very valid ontological assumption when he said, “Young people today [in the Caribbean] don’t know enough about C.L.R. James and the other greats of our history. If this knowledge, this consciousness was steeped in their bones there wouldn’t be so much confusion in the region today about who we are, about where we are coming from, and where we are going” (Girvan 2011, 4). This then is the major underpinning of the decision to address the use of media in this paper; to explore and highlight the options available via the use of media to correct this imbalance in societies in the region to achieve
the integration dream that persons like C.L.R. James envisioned.

The media in its cumulative understanding is one tool which can be used to foment integrative attitudes and reconstruct the current mindsets of the populace to buy-in to the tenets of integration. Media can also, if used innovatively and consistently across the region, spearhead the key link missing from the vision of ‘One Caribbean’ and facilitate the re-conceptualization of current ontologies through the protracted use of their various forms to promote and advocate for a more empowered and involved citizen.

One Caribbean?

The Caribbean, all islands forming the archipelagic chain on the Eastern side of the Caribbean Sea, the countries from Mexico in the North to Colombia in the South and stretching across to end at French Guiana in the North-East of the Southern Continent- is a melting pot of history. Revolution in its midst bore fruit as equality in France and saw a reorganization of the class lines in England due to a technological revolution financed with funds from a prosperous slave and sugar trade leading to the emergence of a new class of *nouveau riche* that demanded equal access in British society. Professor Girvan puts it succinctly when he states that the “Caribbean is a socio-historical category commonly referring to a cultural zone characterised by the legacy of slavery and the plantation system. It embraces the islands and the adjoining mainland – and may be extended to include the Caribbean Diaspora overseas” (Girvan 2001).

In the Caribbean, communication via the media has largely been through traditional forms such as newspapers, and the radio. This paper speaks to the capacity of the Caribbean region to foster integration through the use of both the old and new media if rebranded and promoted innovatively, such that it can encourage the efforts currently being attempted, pushing them to the point of completion.

A groundswell movement across the regional landscape attempting to re-brand the region – indeed deconstructing the current prevailing standard that has been allowed preeminence, is required. Replacing the old standards of CARICOM, with one determined by those it impacts the most – the citizens of the Caribbean will be a first, key step to the realisation of the One Caribbean hope of the peoples of this region.

Of major concern are the ways in which the region can possibly reorganise its Caribbean identity to better serve the interests and needs of its local populations. This paper serves to underscore the importance of harnessing the different forms of media that are gaining prominence. Rapid advancements in media capacity globally means that some states may inevitably be left behind, whether because of financial constraints, political stumbling blocks, or lack of personnel to effectively manage the emerging areas. It is in the best interest of developing nations and particularly small, developing nations like CARICOM states to be able to efficiently harness media as it develops in order to safeguard their positions in the international system.

The Caribbean region as outlined previously entered the independent media business quite late with most islands of the region gaining independence from the early sixties onwards. This late entrance translated into areas such as slower achievement of full publication capacity, radio signal strength and coverage, computer
penetration and use in the market and general literacy all of which conspired to produce a locally generated and determined information vacuum. Even today with many newspapers around the region, millions of computers accessing the internet superhighway daily and almost one in every three persons in Trinidad and Tobago alone with two cellular phones or more, the management and efficient use of media in the region is still below international standards (Caribbean News Now 2010). The recently completed 2010/2011 Competitiveness Index study carried out by the World Economic Forum (WEF) noted that most islands and countries making up the Caribbean Basin are below par in terms of the innovative use of technology in their business life, almost totally precluding them from access to up-the-chain products and services, and creative inputs into already established technology (Schwab 2010).

Traditionally, research on the issue of forging a durable regional identity has been dressed in the garbs of trade, politics and institutional arrangements. These tools have proven, over time, ineffective. Trade initiatives fleshed out at the CARICOM – COTED (Council for Trade and Economic Development), and bilaterally have all come up against and failed to surmount the issue of sovereignty and the even bigger obstacle of the realist paradigm which many leaders in the Caribbean - and particularly, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados have employed over the years to seek individual interests over that of the Caribbean whole. For media to be effectively harnessed in this region, a ceding of some portion of this sovereign agenda must occur if the region is to actively enter and survive the modern media landscape.

The Internet @ge

The internet has transformed the way communication is negotiated, as well as the time it takes people to contact others, learn about global issues, or complete a purchase. The internet is used today to help like-minded individuals find each other in a world whose population has exceeded all prior estimations; to inform the public about events that would have quietly passed them by and to allow peoples of different regions to express their diversity.

The information revolution has made that all too familiar public good, knowledge, become the raison d’être for many across the globe.” All too frequently when the term ‘global’ is used in conjunction with the communication media or industry, it refers primarily to the extent of coverage, with the popularity of satellite television and computer networks serving as evidence of the globalization of communications” (Servaes and Lie 2008, 62) and overlooks the very important subtext of the intimacy it introduces to previously detached contact between people around the globe.

Wilkinson (1997) notes that what we use today to inform decisions - the media - came from very humble beginnings - market gossip, travelling salesmen carrying news from previous locales, servants privy to decisions made at dinner parties hosted for former slave masters. The surfeit in existence today is a direct reaction to the past where only a particular class and educated subset had access.

The UN in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19 states:
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UN 1948)

The Internet is perhaps the best expression of the intent of that message. Online the world is at your fingertips; access to information is unprecedented and curiosity or suspicion can be dispelled or reinforced with a few keystrokes – new media at its best.

**Media and the Caribbean**

Several regional Media Houses make up the bulk of how communication of information is managed across the Caribbean region within modern times. The original ones are the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) formed in 1970, tasked with managing the broadcast of materials from the English, Dutch, French and Spanish speaking Caribbean via radio and TV. The Caribbean News Agency (CANA) which was initially the brainchild of a joint government and Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) came into being in 1976 based out of Barbados to service the needs of the CARICOM membership (Mitchell and Murugan 2000, 6-7). The following section gives a brief overview of the map of traditional media across the region.

**CUBA**

“Cuban political power flows from the thousands of grass roots committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) to the 499 deputies in the National Assembly of People’s Power... The CDR meetings can transmit instantaneous nationwide news...” (Carty Jr 1990, 131-133). For this island, living with a decades-old embargo depending on whom you talk to, the media serves two major purposes, to share positive messages about the island gained because of its socialist tradition and to work in favour of Cubans and American seeking to end the Castro administration while recreating a capitalist system of governance on the island. Cuba also has a long tradition of remembering the history of its people through a festival called El Festival Caribe which serves to underscore among Cubans its close blood ties to much of the rest of the region; success in revitalizing the integration movement through media can transform this festival into one of the premier vehicles for the expression of Caribbean identity and unity thereby improving and building the over-arching aim of One-Caribbeaness long absent from the region.

**Guadeloupe and Martinique**

“Any attempt to describe the media in Guadeloupe must base its terms of reference on the essential fact that the system operates within a French colonial context... Much could be said about the content but what emerges essentially is a daily [newspaper] that invalidates the legitimacy of local political reality, by neutralizing controversy involving the system and, by emphasizing a vision of the world which constantly focuses between the Metropole and Guadeloupe, thus eliminating any identification with the Caribbean” (Ruprecht 1990, 223-225). If the region is to truly accept and direct its activities towards a substantive homogenization of regional identity a long hard look at ways to contradict this paradigm must be made with the French speaking islands. Even in the face of its ties to France, much can be done to encourage better relations with these islands and their neighbours in terms of building an understanding of the other. Suggestions for improving these relations are outlined in the recommendations offered later on in the paper.
Netherlands Antilles

"As is the case throughout the Caribbean, smallness has been the root of the media problems in the Netherlands Antilles... the first Newspaper... *The Gazette of St. Eustatius* was published between 1790-93...[and] was bilingual in Dutch and English... The second... was *De Curacaosche Courant* [1812] first as *The Curaçao Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* [becoming the *Courant* in 1816] surviving to present age as the official organ of the government of Curaçao... Curaçao was one of the last major Caribbean islands to have a press: Jamaica had its press as early as 1717, Martinique in 1727, and Santo Domingo 1750" (Lent 1990, 209-221). Today Curaçao is transforming its media landscape to take advantage of ICT technology to make it more relevant in today's world. Taking advantage of moves in this direction by more well established media houses can serve to introduce the islands to one another and promote better relations (Caribbean News Now 2011). In so doing a further link in the chain of states forming the Caribbean region can be built spurring better relations and propelling the integration thrust more directly across the language barriers currently in existence.

Leeward Islands

"The Leeward islands of Antigua, Anguilla, Montserrat and St. Kitts & Nevis, as part of the Commonwealth Caribbean, owe their media development to the British [1747-1969]...The [major media transition period] in the development of the leeward Islands’ press centered around the labor movements of the 1930s and 1940s... Broadcasting had a relatively late start in the Leewards. Whereas Guyana, Barbados, Bahamas, Trinidad and Jamaica had radio stations in the 1930s, the first in Montserrat was in 1950, Antigua 1955, and Anguilla 1969... [Up to the 1980s the Leewards were] served by weeklies” (Lent 1990, 103-106).

The citizen’s interest in promoting their brand through the use of media, supplemented by the positive interest of the government in pushing the move to better media coverage and engagement offers useful data which can be capitalised on as the media revolution continues to move through the region. The region’s states have been building pockets of media fronts; a general recognition of the importance of media on nation building in getting one’s message out to the wider community has been accepted. Building synergies across these bodies will produce a cross-pollination of direct information flows and policy orientations that currently lie well beyond the capacity of the individual states in this region to accumulate. This type of bridge building goes beyond the capacity of the current CARICOM machinery and makes the argument all the more persuasive that employing media strategically can hasten the integration efforts faster than any undertaking this organization can bring to bear on the region. Media enters the homes via so many different avenues that using its many forms as the foundation of a region-wide thrust toward integration can impact the current ontology of the isolated nation paradigm replacing it with one recognising the proximity and parallels of the lives led in this region.

Marxism and Media

Innately conflict-based, Marxism offers a radical picture of the citizen’s relations to production. Control of the major media houses are closely held in the hands of the elite classes across all societies around the globe. Alternative offshoots seeking to offer a different picture not
in conformity with the current paradigm have often found themselves branded leftist and anti-democratic. Several examples of this abound the media landscape. The Global Research Newsletter, a site known for engaging several well-known academics and specialists in various fields has often come under fire for stirring issues such as the truth behind the events of 9/11, who controls what is currently happening in Libya, Yemen and Syria, and for uncovering cover-ups at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant in Japan. In particular is a recent article entitled “Fukushima and the Mass Media Meltdown: The Repercussions of a Pro-Nuclear Corporate Press” (Snow 2011).

The Caribbean has long been dominated by major media conglomerates offering a Western, often anglicized picture of the region. A move by local/regional media with a regionalist outlook provides a way to counteract the current prevailing ontology of the region’s citizenry that it is so separated and ‘different’ in terms of language and culture that intermediaries are required to facilitate a true picture of the entire space. Most people in the region, often unconsciously, routinely accept opinions of elections, integration, trade, democracy matters, and fiscal best practices from these foreign sources. Too often local persons with technical, academic and professional qualifications are ignored in favour of the status quo. A concerted effort by the various regional entities involved in media such as the One Caribbean Media, CANA, Caribbean Broadcasting Union, The Stabroek News of Guyana, La Prensa in Curacao, The Tico Times of Costa Rica among many others; persons involved in advocating for integration and a One Caribbean identity is the only way that such core-periphery Marxian tendencies can be somewhat neutralised.

Functionalism and Media

Durkheim (1982) posits that in much the same way one understands that to leave or enter a house by means other than the doors are negatively sanctioned, so too does social structure define how we manage activities; how much latitude one receives in the system to follow paths outside the ‘norm.’ Limits to behaviour are externally driven and thus part of the wider system of intrinsic control. This feeds directly into the media debate on control which posits that persons involved in activity seeking to expose cracks in the system are often recipients of negative sanctioning; effectively silencing them from active contribution to independent thoughts and ideas. A prime example of the above is the current Julian Assange/Wikileaks case. Mr. Assange was able, through a series of people, to uncover millions of true ads of diplomatic interactions with governments and their representatives in countries around the globe. What this revelation on the part of Mr. Assange did was to simply pull back the curtain on how international relations are carried out by certain governments. Interestingly, major interest in the Wikileaks site only grew exponentially when the US government launched a very public investigation into the persons responsible for supplying Mr. Assange with information. Suddenly a case of rape was brought against Mr. Assange from two ladies who up till the international furor raised by the US, had been strangely quiet on the alleged attack by Mr. Assange. This has led to a stall in the operations of the Wikileaks website to some degree while Mr. Assange, forced to focus on these charges, has been unable to effectively manage his information site (The Independent 2011). More recently the former IMF Head Dominic Strauss-Kahn’s incident revealed the dualities possible with the media (Rushe 2011). On the one hand several
mainstream news houses smeared the details as revealed by the alleged incident on the front pages and web-pages of their organisations immediately information came to hand. In contrast several smaller media bodies - not content with simple reporting, engaging in their own independent research were able to locate very contradictory information regarding the same incident. It has recently come to light that several gaps exist in the case originally sensationalized by mainstream media.

It has also brought to light the strength the media can wield. Dominic Strauss-Kahn was widely believed to be the person best placed to threaten President Nicholas Sarkozy’s hold on the political reins of French society. Indeed the media’s role here articulates the possibilities - if employed neutrally and issuing objectively and more importantly, the most reliable bits of information, the media can change the perceptions and opinions of its readers or listeners. It is widely accepted that Strauss-Kahn’s chances of contesting the Presidency have been severely crippled, if not totally destroyed through the swift pen strokes of media personnel who have appeared unconcerned with the impact of the message they disseminated - or perhaps entirely too aware and partisan in a Marxian sense similar to discussed above. It has also raised questions over whether this was engineered to prevent the many reforms to the IMF that Strauss-Kahn had been advocating (Baker 2011; Question More 2011).

What is unquestionable though is the fact that the media is a powerful force to be reckoned with and if wielded for positive purpose can enjoy the same level of power and reach. Using the example of the media, it is thus possible to understand the mushrooming of alternative sources of news media such as Alai.net, Al Jazeera, Telesur, Caribbean 360 and venezuelanalysis.com among many others. These along with academic blogs and issue-based internet lobbying have all carved niches outside of the established information network of services such as the CNN, BBC, AP, and Thomson Reuters to name a few. In 1988 Stuart Hall and his fellow researchers concluded that with the remaking of the world, “in the process...identities ... sense of self... subjectivities are being transformed... [the world is] in transition to a new era” (Hall et al. 1988).

Postmodernism and Media

Postmodernist in orientation, Jean Baudrillard “…was arguably the most important and provocative media culture theorist of the 1970s and early 1980s” (Kellner 1995, 297). Influenced by early media theorists such as Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, his theory of ‘hyper-reality’ speaks to an emerging world where “…social classes, genders, political differences, and once autonomous realms of society and culture imploded into each other, erasing boundaries and differences in a postmodern kaleidoscope” (Kellner 1995, 297). In the late eighties early nineties, Baudrillard noted the changing systemic function of the media; the broadcast media – television, especially increasingly influenced people around the globe to the point where now it is easier to identify with the images on television than to the actuality it represents. For Baudrillard, “in an age where the mass media are everywhere, in effect a new reality – hyper-reality – is created, composed of the intermingling of people’s behaviour and media images. The world of hyper-reality is constructed of simulacra: images which only get their meaning from other images and hence have no grounding in the ‘external reality’” (Giddens 2001).
The Constructivist Approach

“A Liberal-Realist Approach advocated by Alexander Wendt [Constructivism engages the notion that] self-interested states [are] the main actors in world politics; their actions are determined not by anarchy but by the ways states socially ‘construct’ and then respond to the meanings they give to power politics” (Kegley Jr. and Wittkopf 2004, 52). Currently many of the leaders of the larger countries in the Caribbean region appear to follow a realist policy orientation. Federation’s failure uniquely exemplifies the general attitude of leadership.

A media fraternity engaging in independent research and follow-up of governmental positioning and official stances on different issues can be perfectly poised to either support, question, or dismiss the rhetoric disseminated to the wider public. Fully cognizant of their role in informing and at times directing public consent, Caribbean media that is fully apprised of other states’ issues and concerns can serve to protect the interests of the wider citizenry, and indeed bring to bear pressure on leaders who are not following through on their roles, promises and policy programme; a well trained and informed media can ‘construct’ the proper foundations for integration so vital to the futures of most states of this region. Many citizens are unimpressed with a continuation of the prevailing paradigm. In much the same way that many governments are building their responses based on how it may be interpreted in the wider international system, several noted academics around the region are lobbying vigorously for a realignment of priorities. Reconstruction is vital to the continued survival of the region and this fact was recently underscored by Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The prioritization of national concerns over the region’s need to not just survive, but thrive in the international system cannot afford to have “such relative non-engagement” (Stabroek News 2011). There is an urgent need to construct the region’s own identity in the face of increasing external stressors such as the EU ACP arrangement, the changing nature of World Trade Organization (WTO) transactions, IMF engagement and the ever present security concerns that stalk the region. Employing the media to continually promote or deride ideas that are not well disseminated or understood can go a long way to reducing the idea that governmental officials speak ‘above’ those who elected them to lead and can encourage stronger dialogue among citizens regarding those issues which often remain behind the closed door of the conference room in which it was discussed.

Taking the Regional Pulse

For the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), “the information society is seen as an inclusive, collective, and collaborative digital environment where individuals, organi[s]ations, and communities are empowered by the availability of information, access to it, and the means to share, analy[s]e, and to generate knowledge through such interaction” (CARICOM 2010). Within the past four (4) decades and particularly during the 1970’s/1980s, the subject of communication vis-à-vis the media, has been the topic of much international debate-whether the role of the media needs to be scaled back; if governmental control is necessary; whether the media society needs to be more independent of political directives; if the media can in fact be used strategically to advance state agenda.

CARICOM has long been considered the preeminent vehicle of organisation in the region among members of the international community.
Its traditional structure however – English-speaking Caribbean membership with notable exceptions being Suriname and Haiti (the introduction of the Dominican Republic under CARIFORUM is further stretching this original English-speaking context), - has however begun to be considered among citizens of the region as archaic, obsolete or a millstone around the region’s neck depending on which island one visits; “If anything the 32nd Meeting of Caribbean Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) held recently in Georgetown [November 2010], confirmed that the bureaucracy has become prone to certain inertia” (Rooney 2011). A clear and concise article outlining the purpose of this meeting shared with the various media outlets prior to the meeting would have allowed for public debate and feedback to be received by the different states involved and would have allowed the discourse during the meeting to be more robust and studied as opposed to that which prevailed.

The CARICOM and CSME meetings are often viewed as just another way to “waste taxpayers’ money.” It isn’t grounded or connected to the day-to-day issues of island-life. It often struggles for relevance; its instruments and organs seem top-heavy and ponderous, and unable to respond with agility to the regional crises that emerge from time-to-time. It is clear however that CARICOM needs to be in a position to hold its members more accountable for acts and omissions that are inconsistent with approved decisions, direction, goals, etc. A media fraternity strengthened by information rich exchanges across state borders could pre-empt much of this. Decisions taken in one state that could potentially harm the other, exposed because of proper connections between the media can serve to force leaders to be more accountable and transparent in their dealings with each other and reduce the suspicion currently rampant across the region on the intentions of fellow states. How does this relate to the overarching theme of media? CARICOM in its current form fails to complete its stated agenda – integration. It is increasingly a compelling argument to suggest that employing the regional media organisations as a key vehicle of regional integration becomes necessary since it is the most easily identified and harnessed equipment which the region has at its disposal. The media acts as a pulse of the opinions and perceptions of the general public. Believing the ‘government’ to be unresponsive, many turn to call in programmes, write opinions, create blogospheres in which they can vent, suggest, critique and learn about events. It provides a cloak of anonymity for those afraid of repercussions for speaking out and paves the way for those with pertinent contributions who are not in a position of leadership to share their thoughts.

In more developed regions such as Europe and North America, governments have set up entire divisions tasked with building a clear picture of the opinions of the people: what they will accept, and fight against; which debates have traction and which should be rejected. Overlooking the reach and capacity of the media would be tantamount to continuing to patch a favourite article of clothing even whilst knowing it can no longer function in its intended purpose.

**Media Bridge-building in Caribbean – The Recipe**

The groundwork for a media/information driven approach to integration is already in train. Countries around the region have been making great strides in their individual attempts to secure their footing in the ‘mediascape.’ The ingredient missing is that of streamlining –
organisation of the individual segments into a collective whole that can breach the holds of traditionalism and archaic pyramid-like structures of regional arrangements. The key to the entire collective converging on the common denominator of integration lies with the creation of a taskforce whose membership imbues it with the authority and respectability—similar to that quoted earlier from Rooney (Rooney 2011), to make the rounds of the different countries advocating amongst the grass-roots NGOs and civil society groupings for the states’ commitment to creating this storehouse and training ground.

The examples outlined below in their discrete compositions may seem inconsequential, but they reflect an increasing cumulative move by the region to accept the importance of newer forms of media communication tools. The proper administrative infrastructure (backed by governmental support past the point of sovereign borders—which should in this instance be impelled by the citizenry) to harness and coalesce efforts can also be leveraged to the benefit of the region in those other areas that fellow academics have focused on—politics, security, trade, tourism—leading intuitively to the desired end product: regional integration. Let us take a look at the examples.

The recent moves by Barbados to make the entire island Wi-Fi capable, is one example of the kind of reach that targeted media can have if the relevant institutions (in this case, CARICOM) were to actively seek a new relationship with the region (Caribbean 360 2011). Grenada has also begun making the call for a closer embrace of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) revolution by its regional neighbours.

In St. Kitts and Nevis—SKN an ICT Village was held on June 10 2011 to introduce the varied uses of modern communication technology currently available around the island for purchase by the islanders. In Suriname, “a Symposium, held on January 26th [2011] was hosted by the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), in conjunction with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Caribbean Association of National Telecommunications Organizations (CANTO), the Telecommunications Authority of Suriname (TAS) and Packet Clearing House (PCH)” to promote the implementation of a strong ICT base in Suriname to ensure it is capable of navigating the rapidly changing globe (Caribbean News Now 2011). This activity on the Surinamese front offers excellent prospects if the government and private sector can be convinced of the necessity of engaging proactively with the tools of modern communication to secure and maintain their voice in the international world system. The Cuban government in February [2011] officially received control over a new fibre optics cable that runs the length of the Caribbean Sea from Venezuela in the South to its Santiago de Cuba Siboney Beach. This marks the latest move by
the Cuban government to circumvent the US blockade of the island. Its arrival also heralds greater opportunities for connectivities between the rest of the region and the island which has so long been in the shadows due to US influence in the region. The cable which will be tested in July following the continuation of the line to Jamaica to create further bandwidth speed access for Cubans offers a unique opportunity for the region to forge closer ties – an example of the proletariat movement at work. (Caribbean News Now 2011; CMC 2011). In Curaçao “detailed plans are now in place to build in Curaçao the largest datacenter and technology park in the region to service businesses and institutions located in the Caribbean and northern Latin America” (Caribbean News Now 2011). The Honduran government through cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the local police force has launched a novel crime prevention and reduction programme using the cell phones of concerned citizens who report crimes. Using triangulation software and real-time processing of calls regarding crime, the Honduran police force has been able to “streamlin[e] the identification and reporting of crimes. By employing such a prevalent piece of modern technology, the police force which was severely constrained before have “…proven that small changes can yield big results, very quickly and at minimal cost, in developing countries where security systems are at an early stage of institutional and technological development,” said Jorge Srur an IDB specialist on the ground in Honduras during the pilot project. (Caribbean News Now 2011).

A recent UNESCO report revealed that it had launched an Americas and Caribbean database for professional Journalistic Standards which it “expects to increase the awareness of self-regulation among media professionals and organizations in the region, while also encouraging the alignment of local practice with established international standards” (UNESCO 2009). This tool, borne out of a traditional institution of support for developing world countries seeking to improve the living standards of their citizenry is a boon for the region. It can be used to aid the region’s media houses and groups in attaining international standards without sacrificing the unique characteristics of regional news reporting and communication methods.

Additional regulations and legislative arrangements ironed out among regional countries to direct the standards and rights of media personnel will also go a long way towards building respect for the grouping whilst driving home the importance of their roles in building the type of society future generations shall inherit.

Life after CARICOM?

The integrated grouping envisioned for the region by those considered the forefathers has not borne fruit. The organisational mechanism CARICOM has proven itself unable to escape the trap that is technological alienation; a core-periphery/Marxian concern, and rapidly advancing globalisation. Sir Shridath Ramphal weighs in:

If CARICOM is not to end like a leaf falling in the forest, prevailing apathy and unconcern must cease; reversal from unity must end. The old cult of ‘local control’ must not extinguish hope of regional rescue through collective effort; must not allow a narcissist insularity to deny us larger vision and ennobling roles. [West Indians] must escape the mental prison of narrow domestic walls and build the new Caribbean with room for all to flourish.
[West Indians] must cherish [their] local identities; but they must enrich the mosaic of regionalism, not withhold from it their separate splendors (Ramphal 2010).

Even among the more seasoned academics of the region, there is a realisation that the current dispensation of integration efforts is failing. The trajectory intended has not happened and a radical reworking of obsolescent bodies such as CARICOM which has not, and continues to ignore the importance of a strong media presence to propel the integration agenda, is needed. A simple visit to the organisation’s website dispels any doubt as to its level of understanding of the importance of new media as examples, the links do not work, the search box is clearly not able to sift through the documents stored on the page, and documents located once, sometimes disappear into the maze. Arrangements that factor in the imperatives of modernity and globalisation will be key to the survival of the region and this body has not risen to the task.

In fact for all that has happened in the intervening years since the Federation, it is the view of this author that the region, barely represented by CARICOM, has only succeeded in stymieing the wider possibilities of a united Caribbean. Why should President Martelly -the newly installed leader of Haiti in 2011 have to subtly reproach an organisation with this history behind it for not being capable of meeting the language needs of a member state whose population equals the cumulative numbers of all the other members? UN statistics on the literacy of the population could essentially preclude the wider citizenry from following up on a body that claims to be committed to protecting their interests as well. Where are the hired translators and media personnel to ensure that the Haitians right to be able to understand the views expressed on their behalf are in fact what they would wish? (Haiti Libre 2011; Martelly 2011).

Perhaps the argument that the overwhelming core-periphery relationship that presupposes the importance of English over less capitalist international languages is extreme, but the historical tendency to focus on aligning more with mainly English speaking capitalist Core countries does make it a provocative, incendiary argument. Including a division on media communications in CARICOM that is staffed by persons fluent in all the languages that constitute the Caribbean, and making it available on the organisation’s site would go a long way to dispelling concerns amongst the wider citizenry.

Impact of Findings

Following extensive research, several things became increasingly obvious: the time is ripe for a rebranding of the integration effort. Media in their many forms are sprouting up throughout the region. Countries that formerly relied mainly on traditional forms of information from sources such as the BBC, CNN, Reuters are becoming more aware than ever of the benefits to be derived from creating their own internally driven information sources. Persons are also very aware of how much they have ceded parts of their sovereignty to former colonizers and countries through a dependence on them for information. A realisation that accepting a perspective from former rulers, who can never have the best interests of the region at heart for reasons such as special relationships, ideological divides, financial considerations and even simple allowance of archaic ways to continue is now a prevailing cause for argument in many states and leaders would be wise to take notice.
Baudrillard's 'hyper-reality' (Kellner 1995), can be inverted. Images of the bad Caribbean can be supplanted with the correct amount of effort and interest by the stakeholders including the Gov't, NGOs, civil society, bloggers, social media moguls etc. Concerted pressure by academics, NGOs, journalists and citizens across the region to promote and individually seek out the means to achieve multilingualism (French or French Creole; Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and English), a commitment to raise the spectre of the benefits of intra-regional tourism as a panacea for the current ache that is Air Passenger Duties and Visa requirements to visit Northern Core countries can be circumvented if the entire region comes on board. Research on the issue shows that Music, Literature and Sport are the surest ways to build an understanding of other's cultures; using this triad as a launch pad stands to benefit the region more than simply stumbling along to the tune of CARICOM, or the ACS.

Implications

The impact and reach of Media has been a relatively ignored area for the field of Caribbean International Relations, but a move to correct this can have far-reaching consequences if given the chance. Delving into the technical and often confusing field of the mass media provides a perfect opportunity for understanding the way that globalisation affects the region and will continue to affect it in the foreseeable future. Support for further research in the area also offers the opportunity for governments and organisations around the region to leapfrog the painful process that is implementing procedures laid down from outside the region, instead anticipating changes around the globe and introducing the necessary laws and regulations that can forestall possible infringement of rules or multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Moreover, investment in research in the area of Media impact and reach provides the opportunity for the region to fully insert itself into a rapidly changing world system. Grenada's current programme to achieve full ICT competence and Barbados' Wi-Fi undertaking are beacons of light that the rest of the region would do well to mirror and indeed eclipse.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, there are several key recommendations that arise from the discussion. Firstly there is the need for an increase in awareness of the realities of life in neighbouring countries of the region. The importance of reducing the language barriers also emerged from research on the issue. These two suggested areas to target, of necessity, would usually require intra-governmental support for the creation, training and staffing of an arm of CARICOM to facilitate their success. To reduce state burden however several solutions are outlined below.

In the first instance private sector bodies already involved in broadcasting and radio transmission should be approached by members of the government and in some cases, civil society groups, to advocate the airing of more "programmes which celebrate the achievements and beauty of the region"; governments' education ministries should implement a language component requirement for all students - even basic comprehension is better than total ignorance of the 'other,' currently studying a foreign language is merely an option in most secondary schools across the region. In terms of corporate social responsibility, several practical and easily applicable recommenda-
tions are possible; that seminars on best practices become a more frequent occurrence amongst persons working in the field of journalism and reporting is one example. This will encourage a cross-fertilisation of ideas and new insights amongst participants thereby continually improving the performance of this segment of the media society in their dissemination and research on news events in the region. It will also spur more independent research on the region by persons who will now have contacts in any number of countries, thus negating the need for constant reliance on mainstream media sources for data on issues emerging from within the region, supplanting it for news generated internally and distilled through 'local lenses.'

Further to the above, it is recommended that a virtual repository be officially established among regional journalists – newspaper, radio and online bodies - to make fact-checking and archive research that much easier both for professionals and students in the region; as well as the cross-referencing capacity of smaller media players to reduce misinformation and fallacious judgments based on limited data available from members of the region.

It is also suggested that partnering with Universities across the region to engage students working towards degrees in languages be offered internships whereby they use their translation skills to convert documents in exchange for invaluable exposure in training their language skills whilst working and gaining much needed job experience. It is in the interest of news personnel and managers to engage in new ways to capture the increasing numbers of persons born post 1990s whose major reference point is the internet and who stand to inherit the integration movements’ efforts from the current torch bearers - involving them in the process in this manner secures that group in an innovative way. Another recommendation coming out of the data generated by this research piece is the need for more information exchanges amongst the different tertiary level institutions of the region to build synergies and drive research on the region as well as to spearhead the move to reduce communication barriers. A concerted drive towards bilingualism through University-led programmes is but one tack states and individuals can take to capitalise on the growing media thrust around the region. Trade, tourism, and security concerns only stand to benefit from such a drive especially in the face of the fact that there are so many languages spoken in this little region of the world, a mini UN as it were. Conversing in the mother tongue of one’s partner gains one untold respect and smooths the way a lot faster than the ‘greasing of hands’ ever could.

New Media is the 21st century version of a proletarian revolution. Never before has mankind enjoyed the levels of connectivity, knowledge sharing, access to information about far-off places and ability to ascertain the veracity of the goings-on of countries geographically distant from one’s own, that today is nigh impossible to contemplate living without. Traditional organisational arrangements such as CARICOM - just like the UN - are proving incapable of managing the push of globalisation. The blurring of lines caused by bilingualism and the reconfiguration of the system where formerly peripheral states are claiming more ascendance in the international system are forcing many leaders around the world to reassess the way in which they engage their public. The White house has a YouTube page; the Queen can be befriended on Facebook and criminals can be caught in the act of theft by quick fingered text messages on communications devices such as the Research In Motion’s (RIM) Blackberry, Google Inc’s Androids and
the Apple iPhone. Access to internet and satellite connectors means news travels faster than the speed of light from phone to phone, handset to Netbook to tablet PC. Revolutionary movements can be successfully launched based substantively on ‘Twitter’ calls to unite; witness the Egyptian Twitter moves in Tahrir and the ensuing ‘Arab Spring.’ Newspapers are leaving the traditional domain of print format for the more flexible and cost effective web world; information coming out of international conferences, seminars, rallies government officials are quickly disseminated globally and the price of goods and services respond faster than ever to vagaries in the market due to up to the minute information regarding shortages, shipments affected by natural disasters and conflict. The Caribbean provides a perfect convergence zone for the application of these and other forms of technology and stands to benefit exponentially from an efficient concentrated use of modern media. News from around the region need not make the trek from island A to the BBC for example before it can be shared with islands B through Z. An information sharing culture where regional journalists, radio announcers, columnists and sports commentators can secure reliable, first hand information on events around the region will assist the regional effort to become more united in no small way.

New media have effectively removed direct control over the means and relations of production from the hands of the elites and placed partial control of it in the grasp of the everyday citizen since its use can lead to the shutdown of companies, or even their substantial losses and long-term fallouts through sit-ins and boycotts led from the virtuoscape. The task now is to capitalise on its forward momentum to restore some levels of equilibrium in the ordering of things; bringing together a region long fractured by the sore-periphery system which stood to gain more from their relative isolation than from them negotiating as an integrated union (EPA. CARIBCAN come to mind). Traditional ideo-historic relics of the old colonial order have no place in the modern world in which the Caribbean now resides.

Future generations will not be interested in old attachments to grievances such as why Federation failed; indeed even now it is being readily dismissed by today’s youth; it is not a strong call to arms for young persons whose regional reality is markedly different from that of individuals a decade older. Imagine those labelled ‘Generation Y’ and the picture is clearer. Today young people are gravitating to sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter for information which is instant up to the minute and constantly being reevaluated and adjusted. Marx would be in raptures over the possibilities of class consciousness which such virtual spaces provide. Citizens, long denied access to information which directly impacts on their lives, are now provided a way to weigh in on and unite via these media. Holding unfair practices and decisions made by those who control much of the system of things up to the light via these means can now draw support from countries far removed from ones’ own; recall the internationally drawn protest crowds against IMF and WTO methods within the last decade.

History is learnt today through the use of popular acronyms. Rather than placing faith in one’s leaders for access to factual information, tomorrow’s adults have access to groups they share sentiments with, stock market updates, information on international terrorist attacks or even a loved one’s flight progress in the blink of an eye. It is in the interest of those most committed to the ideal of ‘One Caribbean’ to home in on these and other modes of
communication to build a cross-cutting regional identity among the inheritors of tomorrow's world. Change is a fact of life and the faster a regional offensive is underway, the faster can we get on with the business of mastering the multilateral system of things to the benefits of a people long tired of struggling to keep hold of the short end of the proverbial stick.
References


