



Scaling Caribbean (in)dependence

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Abstract

Recently there has been much ado about the territorial implications of globalization. Geographers have made a significant contribution to these debates, pointing to the tension between forces of deterritorialization and those of re-territorialization. In particular, there is a growing body of work in political and economic geography that draws attention to processes of re-scaling where, at the same time as scales such as the nation-state appear threatened, new scales of economic, political and social regulation emerge. Much of this literature, however, focuses on the ability of already powerful states to re-scale their activities and manage the border crossing abilities of global capital. In this paper I examine the process of supra-national regional integration in the Caribbean as an example of re-scaling and re-territorialization in a post-colonial context. I draw attention to the historic permeability of Caribbean states and argue regionalism in the Caribbean needs to be viewed as part of a longer process of defining economic, political and cultural independence in what, for post-colonial states, has always been an interdependent world economy. This analysis suggests that while new scales can be understood as spatialized attempts to manage changing global economics, they are also ambivalent productions, and as such, sites of resistance as well as domination and regulation.

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1. Introduction

Over the last few years there has been an explosion of interest in the question of geographic scale. What is now a diverse body of literature prompts attention to the social production of scale and the role that scale plays in the organization and regulation of global capitalism. Much of this work has emerged in an attempt to make geographic sense of the impact of globalization on nationally organized patterns of accumulation. It suggests that just as the role of the nation-state is currently being re-worked, other scales such as the transnational region are emerging to take on new importance in the regulation and organization of economic, political and social processes (Swyngedouw, 1992; Brenner, 1999). At a time when talk of a time accelerated global economy often comes with an assumed decline in the importance of geography, work on scale provides a useful and important reminder that space and spatiality are at the

very heart of processes of economic and political restructuring.

Placing scale in relation to global processes of restructuring, however, has come with increasing reliance on a now familiar narrative of global structural transformation, where economic globalization and welfare state decline take on explanatory primacy in understanding the emergence of new scalar arrangements such as the supra-national region. While these processes are producing important geographical re-orderings, the spatiality of this account of scalar transformation, usually narrated from the Euro-American center, is rarely acknowledged. That there is a tendency to generalize about the nature of scalar processes from the specific experiences of Western Europe or North America is cause for concern for it determines what is and is not assigned value in our analytical models. Several feminist and post-colonial critics have suggested that without more nuanced understandings of the particular forms and experiences of spatial transformation, other processes, other narratives and other actors are at danger of becoming marginal and secondary to what often then

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appears as a singular and inevitable process of change (Gibson-Graham, 1995; Massey, 1999; Escobar, 2001; Nagar et al., 2002). Nagar et al., for instance, argue that recent critiques of globalization have not paid sufficient attention to post-colonial experiences or the perspectives of marginalized groups such as women and indigenous peoples. They suggest that, by beginning analyses of globalization from these alternative locations, new insights into the operation of global power relations can be achieved. Marston's (2000, 2002) work is a good illustration of what can be learned by narrating scalar processes from other social locations. Starting from the lives of middle class American women, Marston demonstrates the theoretical and empirical significance of gender relations and the scale of the household to processes of state re-structuring. Only by broadening the field of analysis, away from what is becoming the focus of both the globalization and scale literature, can such important and rich insights become possible.

It is my objective in this paper to open the scale literature to the possibility of an alternative narrative of scalar transformation, one emerging from the particular context of the post-colonial Caribbean.¹ Specifically, I want to consider the scale politics behind the post-independence production of a supra-national region. At many levels, regional integration in the Caribbean has, like it is European counterpart, gained significance as a response to the pressures of globalization on the territorially defined nation-state. For small, externally oriented national economies, scaling-up certain programs and policies to the scale of the supra-national region has repeatedly presented a promise of greater protection against unequal global integration. However, despite this commonality, the specific meaning of re-scaling in the Caribbean differs in that it is always mediated through a particular history of colonization and dependence. I argue that attention to the specificity of this historical experience is important not only for understanding the particularity of scale in the post-colonial context but also for revealing the significance of other processes at work in the production of scale in general. Thus, for example, I examine the role cultural processes have played in mediating scalar shifts. In the Caribbean, where national economic and political autonomy have been historically undermined, the formation of a sovereign cultural community in resistance to external integration has played a central role in the formation of scalar geometries. Such contextual differences suggest that scalar accounts rooted in the specific experiences of Europe and North America may not travel easily to the post-colonial context. However, by

accounting for these differences it is possible to gain insight, for example, into the thoroughly interdependent nature of economic, political and cultural processes that might also be worthy of further exploration in other contexts, including Europe.

In the next section I discuss some of the principle ideas advanced in the literature on scale. My goal is not to be all encompassing but rather to draw specifically on that work which provides useful insights into the re-organization of scale and re-signification of supra-national regions.² While I want to highlight the ways in which the literature on scale encourages a more nuanced and politically vibrant understanding of scale, I also want to point to some of the limits to this literature for understanding the scale politics of post-colonial states. In particular, I am concerned with the constraints of an explanatory narrative over-dependent upon the empirical experience of Euro-American nation-states. In the second section I consider the Caribbean case in detail. I foreground some of the distinctive features of scalar processes in the post-colonial context and suggest ways in which these might push a deepening of the conceptual and theoretical categories used to understand geographic scale. I pay particular attention to the nature of the post-colonial nation-state, the significance of a cultural politics of resistance and, as a result, the unquestionable ambivalence of processes of regionalization in the Caribbean. Following Escobar (2001), it is my belief that such an analysis is necessary to both acknowledge the field of possibility for resistance and imaginative alternatives to capitalist globalization while also continuing to search for and critique the appearance of Eurocentrism in our geographical theories.

2. The politics of scale and the supra-national region

While the diversity and ever shifting boundaries of what is named "Caribbean" defy the construction of neat parameters, the supra-national region in the Caribbean is frequently treated as an unproblematic container of integration processes, the success and failure of which are most often the focus of attention (Elbow, 1997; Hall, 2001; Bernal, 1994). Recent literature on the politics of scale problematizes this container approach to scale and, building on the work of Neil Smith, David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, re-activates scale as a temporary and contingent socio-spatial production. This literature points to the active and dynamic role that the very production of scale plays in the organization of social processes and, as such, places scalar arrangements at the center of efforts to under-

¹ "Caribbean" is a mobile signifier used to describe a variety of geographical orderings and cultural identities. In this paper Caribbean refers to the 15, largely English speaking, states that are members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

² Marston, 2000 and Brenner (2001) provide excellent reviews of the increasing range of scholarship on geographic scale.

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