Caribbean In/Securities: Creativity and Negotiation in the Caribbean (CARISCC)

Working Papers Series

Caribbean in/security and creativity: A working paper

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Introduction

This working paper exists as part of a Leverhulme funded network that attempts to re-theorise the everyday negotiation between security and insecurity (in/security) in the Caribbean, connecting it with the forms of everyday creativity that are so much a feature of Caribbean life. The project conceives of in/security in a broad interdisciplinary sense, including everyday experiences of violence, conflict and criminality at a range of scales (in the home, neighbourhood, nation and region), but also including environmental, livelihood and, most broadly, human security. Rather than understanding security as a fixed set of experiences, or as defined by government in terms of levels of security threat, the project begins from the concept of in/security as a politicised realm: there is an everyday struggle or negotiation between a range of different players about what constitutes a threat or what constitutes safety (an in/security), how in/securities should be prioritised, and how they should be addressed. For an earlier but deeper version of this working paper, see Noxolo and Featherstone (2014).

Expanding the study of in/security

The dominant narrative of the early 21st century is that issues of security, and above all insecurity, exploded into the global imagination through the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center buildings in central New York (9/11). A simple story, it tells of a call to attention aimed at the most powerful financial centres, and an authoritative response from those centres ever since. However, the project to which this working paper is attached, Caribbean in/securities and creativity (or CARISCC) aims to lengthen, deepen and complicate the story of in/security, moving it beyond the actions and responses of armed militias and security professionals in Euro-America, and exploring the ways in which in/security has been at the foundation of the global system for at least the last 500 years, as well as the ways in which the negotiation of in/security can be understood as a diffuse and intimate element of everyday life for the majority of the people living on the planet, in all their different roles.

Certainly in terms of academic work, these insights have been developing over several decades. There has been a marked expansion in the sources of insecurity: from a focus on geopolitics and anti-terrorism measures (largely dominated by Political Scientists), there has been a proliferation in the use of the term insecurity, including human, environmental, food and livelihood insecurities. Part of the politics of in/security, these expansions are in large part demands for greater attention to be paid to the insecurities that affect the global population as a whole: though human-on-human

violence is a worldwide problem, human-induced environmental change is a well-documented existential threat affecting not only humans but also all the other creatures on the planet. At the same time, in a highly unequal world, poverty and basic needs (the struggle for food, clothing, shelter) are still the most pressing issues for a large proportion of the population. A corollary of this is that the study of in/security has become an interdisciplinary task, multi-focused and requiring pooled expertise.

Attention to these larger insecurities has brought a marked expansion in the temporalities of in/security. From a focus on discrete security events, such as terrorist atrocities (with the silent assumption that violence is an exceptional disruption to peaceful existence), academics have become concerned about the negotiation between security and insecurity (in/security) as a much more chronic and diffuse feature of human experience, pervading relationships and a range of forms of expression. Here in/security comes to be understood as perspectival and diverse: what one person or group might do to make themselves more secure might be very different to another person's strategies, and moreover might work (sometimes inadvertently) to make another person or group much less secure. This can happen at a range of scales: at the global scale, for example through actions for economic security that exacerbate environmental insecurity, to the scales of the community and home, in which for example patriarchal household forms that are often justified by the need to provide security through strong and sustainable leadership can become places of fear and intimidation, where women, children or elders live in fear of abuse. In terms of practice then, the investigation and management of in/security becomes a concern not only for national governments, but also for non-governmental organisations, both international and community-based, as well as for anyone who cares for or takes responsibility for others. In terms of its conceptual development and interrogation, the study of in/security is

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carried out not only by professional academics, in a range of disciplines, but also by communities and by expressive and creative practitioners.

Re-centring the study of in/security around the Caribbean

These expansions, taken together, unfix the meaning of in/security, destabilising 9/11 as the catalyst of security concerns. Moreover, a Caribbean perspective on in/security, the starting point for this project, unsettles the new-millennial, US-centric quality of 9/11 as an event, and forces both a longer historical perspective (through slavery and through 500 years of colonialism and less than 100 years of independence), and a wider global perspective (the Caribbean has a range of transnational links, geopolitical, diasporic, economic and political). This re-centring of in/security means that the Caribbean can be understood as an alternative prism through which wider questions of global in/security can be refocused.

To acknowledge that long history, beginning with slavery, is to wed in/security to a system of chronic violence, structured into everyday life over centuries. There is a need to hold onto an awareness of both the physical and the emotional force of this violence: although slavery is a long time back historically, its psychic and affective resonances are still very strong. In particular, Caribbean populations and their diaspora continue to live with the complex cultural and racialized legacies of slavery and plantation economies. Enslavement also highlights the links between violence and power: the violence that many people still face in so-called 'garrison areas' is linked with structures of governance, and those structures of governance have been linked with wider global relationships, for example the close proximity of a global super-power, and the complex transnationalisation of global networks of illegal drugs and firearms.

Caribbean in/security is not only linked with violence however: it is also negotiated as precariousness, instability or even

ephemerality. The insecurity of livelihoods has been discussed in relation to the region's reliance on tourism in a changing global economy (see Susan Mains' working paper, in process), and on agriculture in changing climatic conditions (see Kevon Rhiney's working paper, in process), and both of these remain concerns. A focus on livelihood in/security in urban areas reveals high levels of unemployment in many islands, combined with insecure access to housing tenure, which in its turn is linked to insecure political and economic rights (see Rivke Jaffe's working paper, in process).

Caribbean in/security and creativity

However, the question of precariousness puts the notion of negotiation of in/security in a new light. To what extent can insecurity be seen as a cultural resource that is sometimes deployed strategically to secure livelihoods or political rights? In the context of armed conflict, it is understood that some groups have economic and political stakes in maintaining violence, contributing to the durability of some forms of disorder: this could be seen as part of the dynamic of garrison areas in Jamaica. However, in creative arenas like dance, music, and literature, instability of meanings of words can be hugely productive of new insights or subversive messages, for example in calypso and in a range of literary creation. In Jamaican dancehall the unpredictable failure of female dancers' clothing to avoid exposure is part of the element of risk that enlivens dancehall arenas, and it is open to multiple interpretations. Similarly, during certain historical periods, seafarers and political activists, tourists, and maroon communities, have made creative use of the insecurity of political meanings, finding capacity in the slippage of meaning for unexpected economic and political agency (see David Featherstone's, Anyaa Anim-Addo's and Ron Cummings' working papers, in process).

This creative insecurity is often uncomfortable and is not always open to control by those with little structural power. Recognition of the slippery politics of creative insecurity pushes towards a re-theorisation of the negotiation of in/security, which combines a recognition of how the creative fluidity of meaning is actively negotiated with the fixing of borders to meaning. The Caribbean Sea is an accessible metaphor for thinking through this border/less fluidity, and a range of Caribbean writers (e.g. Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott) provide creative frameworks for deploying this metaphor (e.g. tidalectics), which can be placed in productive dialogue with other theoretical frameworks, such as Foucauldian critical security frameworks.

Conclusion

It is to explore this range of practical and conceptual issues, and the particular prism that the Caribbean region provides in relation to global in/security, that the CARISCC network has come about. More about the network can be found on the CARISCC website: http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/cariscc/index.aspx.

References*

Noxolo, P. and Featherstone, D. (2014) "Commentary: Coproducing Caribbean Geographies of In/security," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 39(4), 603–7.

*Note that this is a short working paper – references have therefore been kept to a minimum, but will appear in full in published academic versions. A list of relevant reading appears on the CARISCC blog site: https://cariscc.wordpress.com/relevant-reading/

About CARISCC

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