Transnational Migration, the State, and Development: Reflecting on the “Diaspora Option”

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In the program for the symposium that generated this special issue on rethinking Caribbean studies, the organizers asked, “Ought the ‘Caribbean’ be theorized under the sign ‘diaspora’?” Here we take up this provocation to address “the national and transnational networks and linkages that have come to constitute the Caribbean beyond its geography and its political and subject formations,” by reflecting on how these extra-territorial relationships come to matter for the contemporary state.¹ Long recognized as a space of migratory flows, over the past decade the region has witnessed a growing official interest in naming, mobilizing, and capitalizing on the homing instincts of diasporic populations. In this essay we reflect on how Caribbean studies might provoke critical attention to these emerging governmental strategies (what we call a nascent diasporic governmentality) in a neoliberalized Caribbean.

James Clifford has differentiated between diaspora as a set of specific historical phenomena, as conceptual frame, and as political discourse, distinctions that are heuristically useful but often difficult to sustain in practice, and that also prompt us to think reflexively about how our institutional-intellectual projects are implicated in the current romance with diaspora in several quarters.² The

² James Clifford, Routes: Travels and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
purchase of diaspora in our world today thus requires us to carefully and precisely specify who is invoking it, under what conditions, in what ways, and to what ends.³

Diaspora has now become a capacious analytical category and term of self-description; if the idea of dispersion remains central, it is no longer clearly associated with an exilic state and the impossibility of physical return.⁴ This shift derives from increasing attention over the last two decades to the networks developed by migrants and the ways these make for a social field that cuts across the territorial borders of the nation-state.⁵ Few among us today would assume that a journey ends on arrival at a destination, severing ties to the sending country. Charles Carnegie argues that methodological nationalism precluded recognition that the space of residence was never a container for the business of daily living, urging instead a starting point that would reckon with the itinerant, routinized, and gendered activities that frequently transgress territorial boundaries. He underlines the conceptual significance of the Caribbean to thinking through contemporary transnational practices, as a site where “particular historical and structural conditions have produced cultural predispositions toward imagining community in global terms and enabled a matching cultural circuitry for building translocal images.”⁶

Studies attuned to these multistranded relationships have ranged from explorations of the family as the glue that holds transnational connections in place to the role of remittances in sustaining households left behind.⁷ Attention to gender has revealed the different ways women and men experience and participate in cross-border networks, in a region with a high proportion of female-headed households and a sturdy tradition of women emigrating in numbers equivalent to, and at times exceeding, those of men.⁸ Others have focused on wider sites of affiliation such as hometown or alumni associations, or turned their attention to mapping broad typologies that might more accurately capture the scope of transnational linkages.⁹ Caribbean migrant involvement in politics in the region adds yet another dimension, whether exemplified in Leonel Fernández’s return to the Dominican Republic after several years in the United States and his successful bid for the

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4 For a critique of this loosening, see Aihwa Ong, "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics among Transnational Chinese," Interventions 5, no. 1 (2003): 87.
presidency in 1996, or in the significant role of US- and Canadian-based Haitian women activists in the anti-Duvalier struggles of the 1980s.¹⁰

Historical work has tempered the instinct to claim these deterritorialized spaces as something completely new, as demonstrated in Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan’s exploration of the role of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association in the rise of nationalist movements throughout the Caribbean, as well as Michelle Stephens’s discussion of the transnational dimensions through which US-based Caribbean male intellectuals articulated a global black consciousness in the first half of the twentieth century. Sean Mills has examined the influence of third world decolonization struggles on political activism in 1960s Montreal, a city that was home to the Caribbean Conference Committee as well as a branch of the New World Group. Migrants played a critical role not only in shaping Pan-Caribbean political imaginaries but also politics in the region, from Walter Rodney’s expulsion from Jamaica and the riots that followed in 1968 to Black Power in Trinidad and Tobago in 1970.¹¹ While the 1920s and the early postindependence period revealed the political power of the transnational networks generated by migrants, the economic upheavals and crises of the 1980s and 1990s generated renewed attention to the potential economic power of these flows. Today's rekindling of interest in Caribbeans overseas, therefore, differs significantly from earlier periods of migrant transnational political fomentation, to the extent that current efforts to engage diaspora are not being generated only from below but are increasingly the product of the efforts of nation-states and international development agencies as well as of migrant groups themselves.

Frequently characterizing the initiatives of transnational migrants as inventive, enterprising, and even entrepreneurial responses to various forms of exclusion, current efforts to "harness" the power of diaspora are a clear outcome of the economic challenges that the Caribbean region faces in a world predicated upon the increasing mobility of capital and the more heavily scrutinized and regulated movement of certain kinds of labor. The popularity of diaspora is also a reflection of an emerging institutional infrastructure that, as Jagdish Bhagwati urged in 2003, "integrates past and present citizens into a web of rights and obligations in the extended community defined with the home country as the center."¹² If the emerging diaspora model of development has prompted new efforts to redraw the map of human possibilities generated and represented by these border-crossers, we should also recognize that scholarly interest has played no small role in making migrant economic transnational flows visible and has been the primary force in the transformation of migrants into the newest agents of development.


Weak Capital, Weak Skills?
The Challenges of "Development" in the Postindependence Period

Current efforts to mobilize diaspora as entrepreneurial subjects capable of reviving the economies of the region are coming from a myriad of scholars, policymakers, and international financial institutions. But few have given critical consideration to issues surrounding the nature of Caribbean business cultures, investment practices, social and professional networks, and external and internal economic control that preoccupied scholars between the 1950s and the 1980s. Yet, as we contend in this article, ignoring these earlier studies of business and investment in the region potentially restricts the adequate theorization of the promise and the limits of the current diasporic turn.

William Arthur Lewis's Nobel-winning research on industrialization with unlimited supplies of labor in the 1950s, for example, identified the absence of skill as the primary obstacle to the creation of local manufacturing industries in the region. He argued that across the anglophone Caribbean, the British government had done little to create an environment in which local manufacturing industry could flourish. Lewis believed that industrialization was the key to Caribbean development, but this could only be possible if the capital, technology, and skills that the region so sorely lacked could be generated. The British colonial government had actively dissuaded countries in the Caribbean from trying to industrialize, by drawing upon environmental deterministic tropes such as the unsuitability of the climate and cultural practices to industrial production, advising instead that the colonies remain focused on agriculture. Influenced by Puerto Rico's industrialization experiment, popularly known as Operation Bootstrap, Lewis called for Caribbean governments to create similar institutional infrastructures to attract foreign investors and highly skilled foreigners from abroad. He argued that if foreign investors were to set up branch plants in the region, then not only would the constraints of capital and skills be overcome but, crucially, some of their technological knowledge would be transferred to local entrepreneurs. As more and more local entrepreneurs acquired the technologies and skills needed to be industrially competitive, their numbers would ultimately become so large that the economy would cease to depend on foreign entrepreneurship. Lewis was a staunch nationalist, and the prospect of inviting foreigners from the global North to fill the highest paid jobs and to profit from the region's low-cost labor was not one that he happily endorsed, but he argued that he was willing to accept the colonial inequalities that such a policy would perpetuate because he saw this as the "temporary cost of more rapid growth."  

Lewis saw the lack of domestic industrial entrepreneurship in the Caribbean as the result of the colonial governments' reluctance to upgrade the level of skill held by colonial subjects as a whole, but later, in the postindependence period, he also argued that a significant hurdle lay in the business cultures held by West Indians themselves. In an address to the board of governors of the

14 Ibid., 182.
15 W. A. Lewis, "The Shortage of Entrepreneurship: Statement by Sir Arthur Lewis, President Caribbean Development Bank to the Board of Governors" (presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Development Bank's Board of Governors, Jamaica, 26 April 1973), 37.
the Caribbean Development Bank during the 1970s, for example, Lewis argued that this culture of business in the region—which issued privileges and rewards on the basis of an individual’s location within the colonial ethnoracial class structures, rather than on the basis of achievement and capabilities—generated inefficiencies that ultimately limited economic development. Thus in his speech to the board of governors of the Caribbean Development Bank, Lewis argued:

> Here in the West Indies we live in a half-way house. We have great respect for achievement, and yet we still have plenty of hangovers from the old system of thought. Race, colour, family and political connection still play a major role in appointing to jobs or awarding contracts, to the disgust of many of our skilled and educated people, whom this has driven to emigrate. Also, our convention that a man holding high public office cannot be dismissed for inefficiency if he is a West Indian has played havoc with some of our more important public institutions.  

Lewis’s faith in the developmental gains to be derived from enticing foreign entrepreneurs and skilled personnel to invest their capital, knowledge, and skills in the Caribbean was vigorously contested throughout the 1960s and 1970s by a new generation of scholars using radical political economy frameworks. These intellectuals, many of whom became leading members of the New World Group, questioned the model of foreign-investor-led development by pointing to the tendency of such investors to repatriate their profits and safeguard their technologies, as well as their reluctance to fairly compensate the countries whose natural and human resources their profits depended on. Norman Girvan, for example, argued that the vertical integration of multinational corporations (MNCs) discouraged the development of the sort of multiplier effects needed for initial local investments to generate further growth. He concluded that this type of foreign-investor-driven development could not be self-sustaining, noting the tendencies of MNC inputs to be sourced externally, of host-country raw materials to be processed abroad, and of the difficulty of adequately taxing MNCs’ profits, much of which were reinvested abroad.

Situating Caribbean economic development within the context of plantation frameworks, members of the New World Group and scholars who utilized explicitly Marxist frameworks drew attention to the structural factors that continued to pose an obstacle to economic development. Unlike Lewis, who located the obstacle to economic growth in the dispositions of individual West Indians toward business, these writers identified inequalities in access to land, capital, education, and employment as the primary constraint to the ability of Caribbean peoples to move beyond the internal and external structural constraints of the plantation. Rather than advocating for the foreign investor to be the principal agent in the development process, they focused on the Caribbean state and its role in the building of the human, economic, and social capacities needed to break the structures of dependency that kept development in the region in suspended animation. In
some New World models, the popular masses, a group that had hitherto remained external to the process of development, confined to the rural economy, and labeled unproductive and surplus to requirement, emerged as the principal agents of development. But proponents of this position also recognized that without state intervention, the cultural legacy of plantation racism would remain a major hurdle that limited the potential of Caribbean people.

While New World political economy focused on changing the national/international relationship through policies such as regional economic integration, land reform, and local ownership, a growing number of younger scholars in the late 1970s and the 1980s began to tackle the structures of what Kamau Brathwaite called the “inner plantation,” that is, the dynamics that continued to reproduce aspects of the relations of production evident within the earlier plantation system. Pertinent to the current diasporic turn within policy circles, this younger generation sought to examine the relationship between Caribbean economic dependency and elite control within the professional and business sectors. Drawing heavily on the plantation framework, and influenced by the black nationalist movements sweeping across much of the Americas, these authors sought to make explicit the important role that race played in the structuring of financial and business relationships in the region. Like the New World group, they believed that foreign capitalists were more likely to serve metropolitan economic interests than local development needs, and that in order to truly decolonize the Caribbean, the region’s dependence on foreign capital and skills needed to end. But they also believed that financial and business control by the region’s small and “whitened” local minorities was equally problematic because of the distorting effect it had on economic growth and the process of democratic economic development.

The corporate control wielded by the region’s ethnic minorities was seen as damaging on economic grounds because it facilitated a business culture that not only supported inefficient monopoly practices but also deepened the existing uneven distribution of wealth and power. Stanley Reid, for example, traced how corporate power and control in Jamaica came to be concentrated in the hands of twenty-one families of primarily white, Jewish, Syrian (Lebanese), and Chinese ancestry. Showing how economic power was consolidated through practices such as intermarriage, the purchase of land, and, importantly, corporate collusion through interlocking directorates, Reid concluded that if entrepreneurship required risk taking in the context of uncertainty, then it could not be said that an entrepreneurial class existed in Jamaica.

For other scholars, ethnic minority control represented an extension of metropolitan control, because these groups acted not only as intermediaries between foreign capitalists and Caribbean states but also as gatekeepers of the private sector who effectively excluded the majority of the region’s populations from gaining either ownership or control over the economic forces that shaped

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their lives. Thus, as David Lowenthal observed in a 1972 article titled “Black Power in the Caribbean Context,” “Metropolitan economic control is channeled through a handful of local families, mainly white or light. Most West Indian blacks play little part in economic decision making and own or dispose of few local resources.”

Similar observations were shared by Hilary Beckles in the infamous “Mutual Affair,” when the majority black policyholders of the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society campaigned to have democratically progressive black directors placed on their white-dominated board. Beckles pointed out that despite the fact that Barbados’s white community comprised less than 5 percent of the island’s population, they controlled all of the large locally owned corporations, the largest local life insurance company, and the most prestigious accounting, auditing, and financial services companies. Like Reid, he also noted that by virtue of sitting on the boards of these corporations and dominating their top executive positions, these groups were placed in a position to “direct the destiny, not only of the corporate sector, but of the overall national economy.” Arguing that most of those dominating the corporate managerial structure had achieved their positions by virtue of their social ties to the white community, Beckles questioned the extent to which the racialized culture of business and finance threatened the principles of democracy on which the Barbadian nation-state was founded.

The challenge that racialized patterns of ownership and control in the Caribbean posed to the vision of development that scholars like George Beckford and Lloyd Best had envisaged is most clearly articulated in the work of Carl Stone. Stone brought questions of race and racism to the forefront of the Caribbean development question and sought to theorize the conditions under which the uneven ethnic division of labor could be changed. Significantly, he argued that economic and political change would not be possible if active measures were not taken to nurture into existence an entrepreneurial class that was representative of the majority of the population.

In fact, throughout the 1990s, reflections on the ethnoracial ideologies that structured the culture of business and finance in the domestic private sector came abruptly to an end as scholars turned their attentions to the economic and social crisis engulfing the region. In policy circles, earlier commitments to democratizing the region’s business and financial sectors were also hastily abandoned as states, facing rising debt and public spending cuts required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), resumed their courting of foreign capital. The abandonment of efforts to cultivate a domestic private sector began as early as the late 1980s, when Edward Seaga, arguably the region’s most vocal proponent of neoliberalization at the time, expressed his lack of faith in the ability of the local private sector to generate investment without state assistance. While some corporate interest groups viewed Seaga’s doubts about the private sector as evidence of his weak commitment to the principles of free enterprise, his reticence was illustrative of the magnitude of

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24 Beckles, Corporate Power in Barbados.
25 Ibid., 19.
the challenge that faced attempts to fundamentally transform the colonial culture of business that continued to define Caribbean entrepreneurialism.\textsuperscript{27}

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), became the new mantra of Caribbean governments (with the exception of a few countries such as Cuba). FDI was argued to be more resilient during periods of crisis than other sources of private capital because direct investors had longer-term perspectives when they engaged a host country. Unlike short-term debt, FDI was believed to be “bolted down” and therefore unable to “leave so easily at the first sign of trouble.”\textsuperscript{28} Breathing new life into the strategies put forth by Lewis in the 1950s, governments rolled out invitational packages that were even more generous than those advocated by Lewis himself.\textsuperscript{29} In the early 1990s, liberalization and deregulation had a positive effect on FDI inflows in virtually all of the region, and most notably in Anguilla, Belize, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago. But as revealed in a 2003 study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean / Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, much of the growth in inward FDI took place in resource extractive sectors like oil and gas in the case of Trinidad and Tobago and gold in the case of Guyana.\textsuperscript{30}

Since the start of the new millennium, the emphasis on FDI and on developing policies to attract foreign investors has lost much of its luster. This is in part due to the failure of the export-oriented development model to generate significant levels of development in the region, but more so because of the growing recognition among states of the value and consistency of migrant remittances.\textsuperscript{31} With this recognition has come a significant shift in the focus of economic policy toward Caribbeans abroad, who are emerging as the long-awaited entrepreneurial class that successive governments had previously been so unsuccessful in bringing into existence.\textsuperscript{32}

We believe that the growing attention to diaspora as a potential source of investment and entrepreneurship is a form of recognition, in part, of the limited success that strategies aimed at inducing foreign direct investment have had on sustained industrial development. Less evident in the current bid to harness diaspora capital, however, has been any reflection on the practices that hindered

27 Timothy Ashby's monograph Missed Opportunities: The Rise and Fall of Jamaica's Edward Seaga (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1989), attracted praise from US corporate interest groups such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, for “revealing” Edward Seaga's reluctance to allow the private enterprise to become the primary engine of development.


29 Although Lewis sought to foster labor intensive industries, with the assistance of foreign capital, to absorb the region's "surplus" labor, he advocated for these policies to be done behind trade barriers so that domestic production capacity could be built up before export activity was undertaken.


32 Ironically, as early as the 1970s in the Caribbean, Lewis identified diaspora members as more likely to embody the risk-taking, innovative traits that were key to business success. He argued that immigrant minorities tend to do better economically than the people among whom they live because they cannot rely on advancement through family connections and so have to rely on their own effort. They stick together and help each other.
past efforts to create and sustain a regional democratic and efficient business culture, and the potential opportunities or obstacles that the incorporation of diaspora might present in this regard.

Reviving the Elusive Promise of Private Capital—the “Diaspora Option”

Caribbean governments, like many others across much of the global South, are increasingly embracing the idea that the human and financial capital held by members of diaspora can be “tapped-into,” “mobilized,” and “channeled” into state development strategies, in ways that are more loyal and dependable than FDI. It is this belief that has given rise to the “diaspora option”—a policy orientation that is geared toward incorporating the human, economic, and social capital and networks of émigrés. Diaspora members are increasingly viewed as development partners, not only because of the volume of financial capital that they faithfully inject into the region but also because of their assumed willingness to take on financial risk. Institutions such as the World Bank and the Latin American Development Bank have played an active role in encouraging governments to view their diaspora as potential investors, or as one press release put it, “an untapped pool of oil.”

This position resonates clearly with the Caribbean, a region whose major export today is arguably not sugar, rice, coffee, bananas, bauxite, or oil but its people, a region that has been described as having “one of the largest diasporic communities in the world, in proportion to population” (with Dominica and Guyana estimated to be experiencing net population declines). Estimates from the mid-1990s place the size of Caribbean communities in Europe and North America—destination points for the vast majority of extra-regional migration—at 6 million, a figure that does not include undocumented migrants.

Recent levels of out-migration are the product of economic dislocation, companion to the introduction of structural adjustment programs across the region from the mid-1980s onward. While scholars in the early 1990s documented the steady flow of remittances across the diaspora and its role in reinforcing the regional social fabric under the onslaught of systematic rounds of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, these transnational reproductive practices became the object of policy in the late 1990s as development institutions and Caribbean states began to look for new sources of investment capital. The “diaspora option” therefore represents an important shift in the emphasis and value placed on the transnational exchanges generated by migrants. If academics during this period revealed the importance of these circuits to the preservation of identity, the strengthening of reciprocal familial and community bonds, and the social reproduction of Caribbean households across territorial boundaries, policy makers within institutions such as the World Bank focused singularly on the ways the economic flows could be channeled into projects that could ultimately serve state mandates to repay international debt and boost levels of economic

35 See Olwig, Caribbean Journeys; and Peggy Levitt, Transnational Villagers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
production. In the 2005 study "A Time to Choose: Caribbean Development in the Twenty-First Century," the World Bank, observing that "given its small size, the Caribbean does not present many opportunities for 'marketseeking' types of investors," moved that the region's diaspora be given a greater role in the generation of investment. However, the role for the Caribbean diaspora envisaged by the World Bank was not as a direct source of capital but as a networked community with the potential to link the region's private sector with firms and investors in their home countries.

Spurred by the loss of preferential market access to the European Union, increased global competition for investment, falling productivity in traditional areas, and, importantly, the achievement targets of the Millennium Development Goals, Caribbean governments have increasingly trained their sights on developing linkages with the diaspora. The popularity of this option across the region is evident in the number of states that have begun to develop formal institutions to capture the economic, human, and social capital of the first-, second-, and even third-generation overseas Caribbeans. Initiatives have ranged from the establishment of formal consultative boards to the creation of diaspora portfolios within ministries of foreign affairs and trade. For example, since 2004, the Jamaican government has hosted a biennial diaspora conference, the first of which was called "Unleashing the Potential." Similarly, in 2010, following a budgetary speech in parliament in which he identified expatriate Barbadians as a national resource, the late David Thompson (then prime minister of Barbados) convened the country's first diaspora conference, titled "Strengthening the Bonds That Unite Us." And the government of Guyana, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, has recently announced its intention to develop a skills database for the Guyanese diaspora.

Notwithstanding World Bank and other documents that underline the "staggering" aggregate impact of streams of remittances from diasporics earning incomes that are "modest by the standards of rich nations," an interesting development is also suggested by the Jamaican case in particular, in which the official celebration of remittances in general appears to be narrowing its focus to a more selective or strategic targeting of skilled emigrants. In reports issued by the World Bank and the IMF, Caribbean countries comprised thirteen of the top twenty countries in the world with the highest emigration rates of educated workers to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. The top seven were all Caribbean, from Guyana with 89 percent, in the first position, to St. Kitts and Nevis in seventh, with 78 percent. While there continues to be concern with identifying obstacles to retaining professionals in the region, a developing intellectual and policy-oriented trend focuses on converting brain drain to brain gain, not by reversing what many see as an inevitable pattern or even encouraging return migration but, rather, by recruiting

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38 Ibid.
these skilled members of diaspora to redirect a portion of their resources and networks homeward (with Indian information technology professionals in the Silicon Valley region frequently identified as precursors of this new potentiality).\footnote{See Patsy Lewis, "Training Jamaicans for Export: A Viable Development Strategy?," \textit{Social and Economic Studies} 60, no. 2 (2011): 67–104.} Indeed, as Jagdish Bhagwati advised in an article endorsing the diaspora model as the only option left for developing countries faced with high levels of skilled emigration, states in the global South would stand to benefit if they were to offer property ownership and absentee votes in exchange for responsibilities in the form of taxation.

Alongside this official recognition, and in contrast to the more uniformly pessimistic view of earlier research (focusing on such issues as brain drain, the nonproductive nature of remittances, and the consumerist and dependent habits of recipient households), scholars have recently begun to turn their attention to the question of how Caribbean states might best capture the dynamic potential evident in the deterritorialized practices of these diasporic actors. In a wide-ranging manifesto for Jamaica’s future, Brian Meeks proposes the establishment of a Constituent Assembly of Jamaicans at Home and Abroad with a deliberative mandate and even the creation of parliamentary seats for diaspora delegates. His emphasis on political incorporation as a mechanism for deepening democratic engagement stands in contrast to other approaches that emphasize economic strategies rather than the question of diasporic political rights and responsibilities.\footnote{Brian Meeks, \textit{Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives} (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), 130, 142-44.} A consistent theme in this literature is the juxtaposition of diasporic agency with the sluggishness of policy at the national and regional levels. Individual connections as well as collective actions (alumni, hometown/village, and other diasporic associations) become the condition of possibility for state initiatives, not the other way around, and their contributions materialize despite, not because of, enabling institutional structures. It is the diasporic who deftly navigates across transnational terrain, occupying a third space between the foreign investor and a local capitalist class and offering new possibilities for invigorating Caribbean economies.

It is in this vein that Orlando Patterson enjoins Caribbean leaders to wake up to the postnational world that migrants have pioneered, admonishing them, "It’s catch-up time again, fellows."\footnote{Orlando Patterson, "Reflections on the Caribbean Diaspora and Its Policy Implications," in Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn, eds., \textit{Contending with Destiny: The Caribbean in the Twenty-First Century} (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 229.} He urges savvy Caribbean leaders to learn to play the “ethnic lobbying game” in Washington—including hiring consultant firms to teach them how to do it—by drawing on the numerical strength of Caribbean peoples in states such as New York and Florida.\footnote{See also Meeks, \textit{Envisioning Caribbean Futures}, 143-44.} Patterson also proposes the implementation of economic policies that are less insular and national in scope, ranging from training and exporting professionals to other parts of the world (for a fee) to establishing private boarding schools for diaspora families and even to—in a twist on what anthropologists refer to as medical tourism—opening well-equipped and fully staffed retirement residences in the Caribbean that might also attract northerners in cities like Miami looking for quality and affordability. Keith Nurse similarly recognizes diasporic consumers as an important source of foreign exchange, in his suggestion
to more carefully cultivate the diasporic tourism market as well as cultural and other exports that target Caribbeans overseas.  

In Patterson’s vision, these Caribbean transmigrants can enable the region to skip straight to a knowledge economy that can compete on global terrain. Although he does not elaborate on precisely which diasporics might be best suited to such bold projects, others clearly narrow their focus to the upper echelons of the workforce currently streaming out to extra-regional destinations. In a talk delivered at the Central Bank of Barbados, Jay Mandle draws attention to an apparent paradox, in which the Barbadian government has historically invested heavily in human capital and in training professionals, yet continues to be unable to reap the rewards through technological and other innovations. Citing a 63.5 percent out-migration rate of those with tertiary education, Mandle agrees that remittances are far outweighed by the losses suffered (as a result of educational outlay and incomes lost due to workers migrating) and argues that “it is human capital in the form of technical skills and entrepreneurial capabilities that a country like Barbados needs.” According to this perspective, the focus should be on recruiting these “Argonauts,” providing an infrastructure for engagement in the domestic economy to highly skilled and mobile actors with resources, networks, and specialized knowledges.

But it is in a recent and rather remarkable commentary, appearing in the Jamaica Gleaner, that we see the most explicit argument put forward for the selective recruitment of elites. Reflecting on Jamaica’s annual diaspora conference, David Jessop “put[s] it bluntly: This is a very different community to that which the Caribbean is trying for the most part to engage.” While the article underlines the heterogeneity of the overseas Caribbean community, it advocates an approach that is based on “understanding how and where the power in the Caribbean diaspora really lies.” Moreover, if Patterson and Mandle suggest bypassing the industrial age, Jessop goes one step further by arguing that the knowledge economy can only be accomplished by skipping generations, moving beyond an older cohort principally concerned with matters of discrimination and social questions. Unlike Brian Meeks’s suggestion that an interest in and affiliation with the Caribbean declines with succeeding generations of Caribbeans overseas, Jessop is confident that what he calls a largely “dormant army” can be pressed into the service of a radically reimagined economic development strategy.

Here it is not individuals trained in the region who have to be wooed back but savvy and successful Caribbeans born and raised outside of the region:

45 Nurse, “Diaspora, Migration, and Development,” 6. This argument is also elaborated in a recent documentary, Forward Home: The Power of the Caribbean Diaspora, dir. Lisa Wickahm (St. James, Trinidad and Tabago: Imagine Media International, 2011), of which Keith Nurse is executive producer.


47 The term Argonauts is taken from Anna Lee Saxenian’s study of skilled entrepreneurs whose fluid movements between Silicon Valley and their home countries across Asia forms the basis of their ability to act as economic adventurers who generate wealth in both sites. See Anna Lee Saxenian, The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).


49 Meeks, Envisioning Caribbean Futures, 142.
They are the men and women of a third generation who are citizens of the country in which they live, have gone through higher education, have significant academic qualifications, are working in highly paid jobs in the mainstream of society, are often close to the highest levels of government or the private sector, and have a very different relationship and attitude to the Caribbean to those who came before. They are individuals who are international in outlook, understand how politics and business works, are well connected in mainstream society, and have influence. What they require is peer-to-peer relationships, to be embraced by the region’s political and intellectual elite, to be able to meet with ministers and prime ministers on the basis of equals, and to be engaged in dialogue to see how their networks might benefit the nations of their family background.\textsuperscript{50}

What is more, skills and capital can be repatriated without the physical relocation of bodies. These are the Caribbean’s flexible citizens, a mobile elite class of privileged passport holders whose value lies precisely in their success and embeddedness in North America and Europe.\textsuperscript{51}

The Price of Recognition: Caribbean Studies Meets Diaspora

State recognition of the instrumentality of diaspora capital and networks represents a significant shift in the way the Caribbean’s far-flung and deterritorialized members are imagined, engaged, and incorporated into the region’s quest for social transformation. In the context of the ongoing global financial crisis, the perceived importance of diaspora to development across the global South will only continue to grow, as evidenced by the cover story of the 18 November 2011 edition of the \textit{Economist} magazine, simply titled “The Magic of Diasporas.” Although reductions in remittances and FDI in 2008 contributed to the 0.2 percent decline in the rate of growth in the entire Caribbean region (3.6 percent for the anglophone Caribbean), at the time of this writing, remittances to the region had already begun to show signs of recovery—a testimony to the faithfulness of these capital flows.\textsuperscript{52}

This essay is a preliminary attempt to reflect on the consequences of this official recognition of the “value” of diaspora. While the “diaspora option” has been embraced in some quarters as the long-awaited solution to the challenge of Caribbean development, in a recent essay on Jamaica, Jay Mandle argues that it is the region’s intellectuals “upon whom the burden rests to persuade the country of the necessity of encouraging diaspora-initiated growth” that will lead the Caribbean to “economic modernity.”\textsuperscript{53} Although we share Mandle’s concern with the determinism that can sometimes underpin dependency frameworks, consigning the region to a state of perpetual marginality, we remain unconvinced that the answer lies in throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. As Norman Girvan notes, “Whatever criticisms may be made of the movement over

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{52} Auguste Kouame and Marie Ivanova Reyes, “The Caribbean Region beyond the 2008–2009 Global Financial Crisis” (paper presented at “Options for the Caribbean after the Global Financial Crisis,” conference of the University of the West Indies, the Central Bank of Barbados, and the International Monetary Fund, Bridgetown, Barbados, January 2011).

the past decade, New World has elaborated a systematic intellectual critique of the existing economic order and in the process has laid the foundation of a new political economy. Its contribution remains perhaps the most comprehensive body of literature specifically oriented to the West Indian development problem.154

It seems to us that the danger of the current romance with diaspora in several quarters is that it comes at the expense of careful consideration of such issues as the culture of business, investment practices, professional networks, and economic control, issues that Caribbean studies is well positioned to take up. The debates of the late 1980s over the relationship between race and economic class and the nature of the "inner plantation" seem regrettably to have largely disappeared, their relevance to understanding the promise and danger of the diasporic turn sorely undertheorized. While Mandle and others emphasize innovation and change, they remain curiously unreflective about the continuities, in particular the questions surrounding the unequal distribution of opportunity, wealth, and capabilities that preoccupied previous generations of Caribbean scholars (as well as, in a few instances, their own earlier work).

The irony is that it is the sheer scale of remittances (which we might characterize as a grassroots response to the inequalities engendered by neoliberalism) that first brought these transnational actors to the attention of the international development and financial community, prompting official efforts to design diasporic initiatives in the service of deepening those very economic arrangements that precipitated the outward flight of people from the Caribbean in the first place. But if the diasporic is imagined as a privileged subject in this new global dispensation, not all members of a given diaspora are the same or desirable. Whether in the form of critiques of the value of remittances, or in terms of the emphasis on skilled professionals and entrepreneurs, this turn within development policy circles devalues and renders invisible the vast majority of Caribbeans abroad who are concentrated in the low-paid and marginal segments of labor markets abroad but who nevertheless regularly seek to support families and communities back home in the face of an eviscerated state sector. Given largely feminist contributions that have foregrounded the centrality of women in these transnational household strategies, it is critical that we address the gendered implications of these emerging policies. In particular, the emphasis on the economic potential of migrant economic and human capital severs the mutually reinforcing relationship between social reproduction and economic production that these transnational flows animated. Here, then, we might recognize and move beyond the invisibilizing effects of Caribbean dependency theory's definitional restriction of the economy to the formal and waged sectors, as Cecilia Green importantly argues:

The invisibility is particularly harsh to women, who are not the workers in the mineral-export or major import-substitution operations; who are not the principal entrepreneurs in the residiency sector; who are not the leading party, government and union officials; and who tend to specialize in the nurturing or lowest-paid, lowest-prestige "mass" professions. On the other hand they play critical roles in the household-domestic and informal economies, as well as in the nonexport sectors such as small-scale food production and marketing.  

We also need to reckon with the fact that if sovereignty can no longer be understood in traditional territorializing terms, this does not mean that the nation-state is becoming an irrelevant entity. The challenge for Caribbean studies is to track the transnational circuits through which the state participates in reconfiguring the terms of sovereignty and citizenship, maintaining control over some areas while relinquishing power to other institutional spaces (domestic and foreign NGOs, international financial institutions, corporations, supranational organizations, etc.). The embrace of the idea of diaspora goes hand in hand with efforts to nurture into existence new subjects with the sorts of habits and preferences imagined to be crucial to the creation of a new entrepreneurial class. In a world where neoliberal ideologies have come to define the orientation and disposition of most governments, we might see this newest appeal as a diasporic governmentality, that is, a set of organized practices aimed at governing and directing the behavior and actions of "familial foreigners" toward the goal of market competition and expansion in homelands they have left. While governments are significant actors in this rescaling of state power, diaspora members, the private sector, and a host of other international development institutions are the primary architects of the technologies used to redefine citizenship and belonging.

The technologies that constitute diasporic governmentality can be differentiated between strategies aimed at extending the territorial boundaries of governments to places where the state has no jurisdiction, and those aimed at creating new "citizens." Instances of the first can be seen in the proliferation in the past ten years of dedicated diaspora government ministries, diaspora conferences, and the creation of diasporic ambassadorial roles in overseas trade councils. These procedures aim to facilitate the involvement of diaspora members in national development policy and overseas trade practices. Similarly, the development of financial instruments like the diaspora bond, aimed at formalizing the flow and direction of diasporic capital, constitutes a technology of

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57 See Richard Warren Perry and Bill Maurer, eds., Globalization Under Construction: Governmentality, Law, and Identity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xii-xiii; Aihwa Ong, Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind," Current Anthropology 42, no. 1 (2001): 125-38. To be sure, not all states are equally positioned to navigate these relationships, a point we should bear in mind when we consider how this process materializes across a structurally adjusted Caribbean in free trade zones, the financing of ministry-run initiatives by the international nongovernmental organization sector, or in the more extreme example of the remarkable admission by Prime Minister Max Bellerive in the post-earthquake period, in response to allegations that Haiti had surrendered its sovereignty to the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission, that the Haitian government had little choice in the matter.

58 Francesco Ragazzi uses the term diasporic governmentality to highlight how diaspora has become a specific state category that has deterritorialized the boundaries of belonging in ways that constitute a new dichotomy between the "included" and the "excluded." We use this term in a more expansive sense to include the technologies used by the state and by diaspora members to acculturate themselves to the demands of the market. See Francesco Ragazzi, "Governing Diaspora," International Political Sociology 3, no. 4 (2009): 378-97.
power because it seeks to incorporate overseas populations considered “friendly to the state” not only as partners in the process of governing but also as financiers of these processes themselves.59 Examples of the second type of technology can be seen in the discourses and practices used to identify and incorporate new “citizens” who are friendly toward the state and, indeed, desirous of becoming governing partners.60 Drawing on ideas of neoliberal citizenship61 that emphasize the importance of self-sufficiency, entrepreneurialism, and individual responsibility, these strategies are oriented toward professional and skilled members of the diaspora in an effort to create a new middle class, one in keeping with the market ethos and orientation of neoliberalism itself.

Given the rate of attrition of the formally educated workforce that, as noted, is the highest in the world, it is hardly surprising that these traveling discourses and technologies have begun to take official shape in the Caribbean. They present us with the methodological challenge of tracking the various sites (national, regional, and international) that converge in framing the debate; in assembling the data; in calculating familial, professional, and community affinities through the vector of remittances; and in converting them into accumulated figures that have rendered the diasporic a highly desired/desirable figure, upon whom the Caribbean’s future now significantly rests.

While many of the rationalities, procedures, calculations, and techniques generated by Caribbean states and extra-regional subjects alike rely on neoliberal discourses of market and individual freedom to influence the members of imagined diasporic communities, they also draw on deeply held and affective understandings of family, responsibility, aspiration, and even social justice. We need to carefully attend to how emotion operates as a key technology of diasporic governmentality. In an important discussion of Caribbean remittances, Jenny Burman calls for an interdisciplinary approach that can challenge the distinctions that tend to be made between narrowly reductive and economistic approaches about the affective character of diaspora that sustains in-kind, monetary, and other types of transfers; the term she uses, “affective investments,” succinctly captures these overlapping modalities.62 Burman creatively proposes yearning (which she opposes to nostalgia) as a way of reckoning with how the emotive dimensions of remittances disclose the operation of diasporic agency in globalization, in ways that cannot be scripted in advance (that is to say, such affective investments come with no guarantees that they will challenge the status quo). This is a useful point of departure for tackling how, for the Caribbean state, emotion becomes the technique for inducing the diasporic subject to participate in and shape neoliberalist projects in the region.

How is affect consciously deployed to recruit and seduce a human resource base that is no longer jurisdictionally restricted to the region? How do these courtship rituals draw on desires for respect and respectability that are themselves deeply classed, gendered, sexualized, and racialized?

59 Ragazzi emphasizes the selected nature of the process of naming overseas populations as diaspora. See ibid.

60 We draw on feminist theories of citizenship in order to decouple an individual’s ability to participate in the shaping of decisions made by a community from the formal rights and responsibilities defined by states as a prerequisite for inclusion in the nation-state.


How are these ruses of seduction not just a reactive response to overseas Caribbeans' desire for recognition but also actively implicated in producing diasporic desire for the region? In other words, if the deterritorialized citizen has become visible to Caribbean state managers, how does the circumscribed space of the Caribbean materialize via state-led overtures as a potential horizon of possibility, and for which diasporics?

The growing popularity of the diaspora option, then, perhaps represents not so much a quiet admission of the failure of the FDI approach to attract the sort of foreign investor likely to stimulate domestic industrial development as it does a willingness to invoke emotional attachments to place in order to secure overseas financial flows. A World Bank press release puts it bluntly: "Unlike high-net-worth investors who tend to be more coldblooded about where they put their money, typical diaspora members might invest with their hearts or not at all." Quoting Dilip Ratha, lead economist and manager of the Migration and Remittances Unit, the press release goes on to add that tapping into that emotion might actually allow a government to get a discount on interest rates, if diaspora members are willing to accept lower interest rates on loans to their home countries.

We have moved well beyond the time when Sir Arthur Lewis proposed foreign investment as a limited but necessary driver of "industrialization by invitation" policies for Caribbean countries on the brink of independence, in the absence of a relatively cohesive local business class with the requisite savvy and networks. If today that elite group is not territorially bound, it remains tied by consanguinity. The appeal takes a familial form (exemplified in the Barbadian diaspora conference slogan of 2010, "Strengthening the Bonds That Unite Us") and may even have a home-court advantage that would not have been imaginable in Lewis's world, an edge that derives from the projected reliability and patriotic loyalty that joins economic and affective investments in the figure of the diasporic entrepreneur.

We suggest that Caribbean studies is well placed to take up these critical issues and that its interdisciplinary promise offers the best vantage point for tracking the transnational entanglements of affect and economy across a number of actors and sites: individuals and groups in and outside of the Caribbean; states; international organizations; and intellectuals. In refining the questions we ask and the idea of the Caribbean that animates our intellectual, political, and ethical work, we should neither restrict our focus to the cultural dimensions of the diaspora nor take a narrowly materialist approach to the emerging initiatives that would see them as pragmatic, technocratic, and political-economic projects. Understanding what is at stake requires us to diligently track the

63 For instance, Dominicans took a leading role in setting up a database and in 2001 inaugurated the first Dominican diaspora conference, which ended with a call to the government of Dominica to implement their recommendations. See Thomson Fontaine and Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "National Development Planning: The Case of Dominica," in Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, ed., Diasporas and Development: Exploring the Potential (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 185-203.

64 World Bank, "Harnessing the Diaspora's Resources."


cultural shifts engendered by these diasporic discourses and initiatives, shifts that substantively alter the ways we conceive of territory, citizenship, community, sovereignty, personhood, and identity in neoliberal globalization.

Nor should our intellectual-ethical horizons be limited to what is fast appearing to be a singular vision/version of diaspora; in this respect, one of our tasks might be a reflexive consideration of how our own scholarly production is implicated, partially constituting the contemporary conditions of possibility for Caribbean states to recognize postnational locations and the investment potential within them. In our efforts to critically examine the uses to which diaspora is being put today, we might also engage this hegemonic register by tracing alternative genealogies and recalling trajectories that open diaspora to a world of other transnational possibilities (as we saw in some of the historical scholarship described in the opening section of this article), scripts that cannot be so easily conscripted into the logic of neoliberalism. In the service of a hopeful criticality, only a finely honed interdisciplinary approach—declaring fidelity to nothing but the persistent pursuit of these spatiotemporal processes in this complex and deeply unequal world of ours—will do.

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