Introduction

I want to thank Brian Meeks and the SALISES Regional Integration cluster for inviting me to do this Opening Keynote, the many sleepless nights notwithstanding! Although I regret the circumstances, I have to admit that there was a part of me that welcomed the opportunity to unburden myself of a few ideas that I have been wanting to lay out for some time.

Alfonso Munera, the current Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States, is a close personal friend and colleague. I know he would have put his own special imprint on this subject, specialist historian as he is on the Black presence in Colombia; and passionate devotee as he is to the Caribbean project. I hope and expect that he will be invited back to give a distinguished lecture, so that the Mona community may have the benefit of his knowledge and insights.

As many of you here know, some years ago I published a paper which discussed the various meanings and definitions that are attached to the term ‘Caribbean’. I note with interest that although this Conference is titled “Beyond Caricom”, the Caribbean that lies beyond has been the subject of somewhat deliberate ambiguity; leaving participants free to give their own interpretation. It is good to see that a significant number of non-English speaking scholars – several of them are friends of long standing -- have answered the call. I am heartened by this, and
Empire and resistance

There is a sense in which the divisions of language are part of a larger picture that we could call the ‘legacy of empire’ in our region; and it is a useful point of departure. In these reflections, I want to explore how far the on-going project of constructing the Caribbean may usefully be looked at through the optic of the opposing forces of empire and resistance. After a brief tour of the imperial project I will invite you to consider with me some of the principal resistance projects—by which I mean regional projects of indigenous construction—which have impacted our ideas of region and their political and institutional expressions.

The projects I look at are Pan-Africanism, West Indian nationalism—regional and insular—; revolutionary Pan-Caribbeanism; Plantation Pan-Caribbeanism, and Greater Caribbean. (Some of these are invented labels). I will suggest that these different projects have been conditioned by factors such of language and colonial heritage, ethnicity and referential identity, class and ideology, and national state interest.

Believe it or not, I will be brief, for like you I am anxious to get to the more enjoyable activities that follow these formalities.

Influence of Empire

It may be useful to begin at the beginning as it were, by recalling that the linkages among our scattered islands go back a long way. We are told that they were initially settled by people from the mainland to the South thrusting upwards from the Orinoco; and perhaps by others from the

the statements of the Vice Chancellor and others, showing commitment to reaching out to the other language zones of the region.
Yucatan venturing across to Cuba and the Bahamas. But unlike, say, the Japanese and Indonesian islands, our archipelago never benefitted from having an empire of indigenous origin that united the disparate islands under a common language, religion, culture and cosmology. There is no historical memory of being One upon which we can collectively draw.

In Spanish colonial times, the ports of “Terra Firma” on the southern mainland were networked with those of Las Antillas Mayores (Greater Antilles) in the service of wealth extraction and trans-Atlantic shipment. Subsequent incursions by other European nations were to seriously fragment the geo-political configuration of the archipelago; and, as pointed out by the Puerto Rican historian Antonio Gaztambide-Geigel¹, it was not until the latter half of the 19th century that the Sea and its surrounding littoral began to be known as ‘Caribbean’.

This development, as he shows, was a reflection of the imperial designs of an expansionist America. In effect, the Caribbean ‘Basin’ was constituted as the ‘Third Frontier’ of the United States—or, as some would call it, ‘America’s Backyard’. It is in this sense that the seizure of Puerto Rico and de facto of Cuba in 1898, the separation of Panama from Colombia in 1903 in order to build an American Canal, and the U.S. occupations of Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the opening decades of the 20th century, were all steps in the construction of the Greater Caribbean, American style.

This would continue through the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission of the 1940s; and a string of U.S. interventions in the second half of the century in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama and Haiti, Reagan’s Caribbean Basin Initiative and involvement in counter-insurgency in Colombia. Most recently we have had the reactivation of the U.S. Fourth Fleet in 2008² and the pervasive U.S. military presence in the entire region, complete with overflights of drones, conveniently packaged as the War on Drugs.

¹ Gaztambide - Geigel, Antonio (1996); “La invencion del Caribe en el Siglo XX. Las definiciones del Caribe como problema historico e metodologico.” Revista Mexicana del Caribe; . Ano 1, Num. 1; 75-96

Pan-Africanism

My main concern, however, is not with the constructions of Empire; rather it is with those that have arisen in response and from within. In this connection I would like to start with the work of Jamaica’s National Hero, Marcus Garvey. Although Garvey was not a regionalist in the customary sense, his project was to significant degree formed by his regional experience of travel and observations of the common condition of Black workers in the circum-Caribbean and South America. The countries he visited included Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Honduras, Colombia and Venezuela. It was in these communities that his sense of international vocation and vision crystallised; it was here that his skills as an orator, political journalist and publisher were honed; and it was immediately after his return to Jamaica from these travels that he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1912.

And although the focus of his organisation settled on the United States it had a wide regional outreach. I am informed by Professor Robert Hill that there were UNIA branches in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, V.I., Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, Barbados, St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada, Trinidad, Tobago, Guyana, the Bahamas and Bermuda; as well as in six countries in the circum-Caribbean. This extraordinary fact is testimony to the extent to which Garvey’s message of racial pride, self-respect and economic self-development resonated in these societies.

In Arthur Lewis’s autobiographical note, for instance, he records that his interest in the question underdevelopment began when his father took him to a meeting of the St Lucia branch of the UNIA, when he (Lewis) was barely seven years old. It was of course Lewis’s work on the economics of development which won him his Nobel; so I have sometimes quipped that the honours should have been shared with Marcus!
I would here like to mention and pay tribute to Professor Rupert Lewis, Garvey scholar extraordinaire, who is being honoured at a Conference here later this week.

Garvey was, above all, a Pan-Africanist in the audacity of his vision and the tenacity of his organisation; the first in a stellar line of personalities in that tradition who have their political roots in this archipelago. Indeed it is a matter on which we might reflect; that the many of the most influential political thinkers from these islands have never found it possible to confine themselves to the insular space; and have embraced projects of far wider dimensions.

After Garvey we had C.L.R. James, George Padmore, Walter Rodney and Bob Marley; from the French-speaking Caribbean we have Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. We also think of Michael Manley and his struggle for a New International Order, of José Martí’s assertion that Homeland is all of Humanity. We think of Che and Fidel, who have made international solidarity the bedrock of the Cuban project.

It was this sense that our societies and our presence in these parts are the product of global economic forces, and the mission to be part of the construction of a global future, I think, that made a young Walter Rodney, still just a Sixth Form student in Georgetown, declare to his fellow students that “West Indians live more in time than in space”.

My point here is that the construction of region, in our concrete circumstances, must necessarily take account of the imperative of ethnic cultural and psychological self-emancipation which derives from the peculiar and unique conditions under which Africans, by comparison with other ethnicities, were incorporated into the labour regimes of this hemisphere; conditions which are well-known to all of us and with whose legacy we are still struggling to come to terms.
We see this, for example, in the on-going debate over race in Cuba; in the launch of the campaign by Caricom nations for reparations for slavery and native genocide; and in the matter of the treatment of Haitian descendants in the Dominican Republic—to which I will later make reference.

This issue is of course mediated by the reality that people of African origin share the insular and regional space with other ethnicities; including those of primarily Hispanic descent in the Spanish speaking countries and those of Asian descent in the Southern Caribbean.

In such a context if ethnicity is made into the dominant, or only, source of political identity; it can lead to a degenerate form of political tribalism as ethnically-based political Parties vie for state power; it can become a cover for the corrupt use of state assets; and it can be an obstacle to the consolidation of national communities around common goals and objectives.

Mutual respect and understanding, based on a thorough knowledge of historically –derived prejudices and stereotypes is the key; and here of course scholars have a crucial role and responsibility. One thinks of CLR James’s dictum that

“The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental. (The Black Jacobins, 1937).

**West Indian nationalism—regional and insular**

Only three years after Garvey founded the UNIA, at the other end of the archipelago, a young Grenadian named T.A. Marryshow was founding a newspaper called “The West Indian”—the last two words, significantly, joined together in a single word in the banner headline of the first issue.
Thus was launched a second current of resistance social thought and political practice that has impacted the construction of region. This is the current of West Indian nationalism.

This current responded to similar conditions in the colonial order rise which gave rise to Garveyism, but it took a somewhat different form and trajectory. Taking root and spreading over the years, it crystallised in the form of the project of West Indian nationhood when Marryshow and Cipriani held a regional conference held in Grenada in 1932. These people had the audacity and the vision to write a draft Constitution for a West Indies Federation with Dominion status—read “Independence”—long before the British Colonial Office got into the business of mass producing such documents.

The pioneers were followed by the Caribbean Labour Congress in 1938, which explicitly linked the campaign for self-government and nationhood to the cause of emancipation of the working people and the creation of societies based on social justice. Democracy and political sovereignty would not be ends in themselves; they would be instruments for, in effect, a Second Emancipation of the West Indian people.

Yet, as the thrust continued after the Second World War, these goals were to be progressively diluted in their class content; and deprived of their regional dimension.

By the time Marryshow’s dream became a reality in the form of the West Indian Federation in 1957; the writing was on the wall for it to become almost a nightmare; as a result of the emerging dynamic of insular nationalism. By this time too, the regional project had been robbed of its progressive social and economic agenda; and fragmented by virtue of the abstention of British Guiana—not to speak of British Honduras and the Bahamas—as a consequence of cold-war ideological fissures and ethnic politics.

Hence the insular nationalism which, has in large measure displaced West Indian regionalism in the Anglophone Caribbean since the mid-20th century, while also a project of resistance, has become a powerful centripetal force in the region. Since the break-up of the Federation, British West Indians have tried to reconcile the dynamic of insular nationalism with the economic
imperative of regional integration in the form of Carifta, Caricom and CSME; to date with only limited success.

I must say however that the recent ruling of the Caribbean Court of Justice in the Shanique Myrie case is a major development in rescuing the Caricom regional project. Not only does it give justice to a an aggrieved Caricom citizen in her treatment by the functionaries of another Caricom state, it also establishes minimum standards for unobstructed hassle-free travel with which all states are bound to comply; and it gives much greater legal force to decisions of the Caricom Conference of Heads of Government than had hitherto been thought to obtain.

In the 1980s; a spirited debate erupted over the relative merits of “deepening” vs. “widening” the Community by the inclusion of non-Anglophone states. The Report of the Independent West Indian Commission on this question (1992) was actually a vigorous reaffirmation of the case for consolidation of a West Indian identity that had been elaborated by the early visionaries; and speaks to its enduring appeal. It is captured in the eloquent words of the Chairman, Sir Shridath Ramphal in his Preface to the Report:

That fluent sculpture of time has already changed us; we the diverse people of scattered islands and mainland countries plucked from far continents by cruel history, drawing strength from our variety of race and culture and place of origin, but reaching beyond them for other strengths from uniting elements. Historical forces and the Caribbean Sea have divided us; yet unfolding history and that same Sea, through long centuries of struggle against uneven odds, have been steadily making us one. Now West Indians have emerged with an identity clearly recognisable not only to ourselves and our wider Caribbean but also in the world beyond the Caribbean Sea.

I am the fourth generation of my family’s anguished transplantation. Other West Indians have been here over a longer period, and through systems of greater anguish; yet it was natural for me to remind an audience during the Commission’s consultations that “I am a Guyanese before I am an Indian; I am a West Indian before I am a Guyanese”. Oneness had replaced separateness in four generations. So it is for most of the people of our CARICOM Region. That oneness is the basic reality of our West Indian condition.
This notion of ‘West Indianness’ as a composite of historically subordinated ethnicities in the English speaking Caribbean; melding as a result of the processes of creolisation; continues to occupy a central place in the construction of wider regional identities. It is buttressed, materially and organisationally, by a complex of regional institutions and common socialisation processes in which this University plays a not insignificant part. I like to tell people that I entered the Mona Campus over 50-odd years ago as a Jamaica nationalist and left as a West Indian regionalist; and I have never recognised any contradiction between the two.

Yet we must concede that it is an identity that is derived from common British colonial experience in which language and common institutional heritage is the main medium of communication and of shared understanding. Going forward, ‘West Indians’ will be more and more challenged to accommodate this feeling of uniqueness with the necessities of wider regional and hemispheric circles of association in which other languages and insitutional legacies predominate.

**Challenging the narratives**

Now in the seven years between 1938 and 1945 four books were published by writers from this region which in one way or another challenged the prevailing imperial narratives of Caribbean history. The books to which I refer are *The Black Jacobins* by the Trinidadian C.L.R. James; *The Caribbean: The Story of Our Sea of Destiny* by the Jamaican W. Adolphe Roberts, *Capitalism and Slavery* by Trinidadian Eric Williams and *The Caribbean: Sea of the New World* by the Colombian Germán Arciniegas.

It can hardly be a coincidence that these books should have appeared at a time when colonial peoples were on the march, and the political economy of Latin America was being refashioned as a result of the Great Depression. But what seems to me of great significance is the way in which
these books, both individually and collectively, effected fundamental changes in the way in which we look at ourselves. As I hope to show, their import lay in transcending the frontiers of language and colonising power and in laying the foundations of a pan-Caribbean historical and political consciousness that continue to shape our constructions of region to the present day.

**Revolutionary Pan-Caribbeanism**

C.L.R. James wrote *The Black Jacobins* as a weapon in the anti-colonial struggle. What is of interest is that he took his inspiration from the Haitian Revolution that had occurred some 150 years before and was the first successful Revolution against slavery and colonialism in all of Latin America and the Caribbean; and that he looked to the person of Toussaint for lessons in the brilliance of Black political generalship, strategy and tactics.

James’ project was the more audacious, in that since its self-liberation Haiti had been relentlessly demonised in the Anglophone imaginary, used as proof that it is futile to defy Imperial power and that Black people are incapable of governing themselves without extended periods of white colonial tutelage.

In the 75 years since it first appeared, probably no other single book as *The Black Jacobins* has so awoken the consciousness of English-speaking Caribbeans to the wider community of imposition and resistance of which we are an integral part.

James leaves us in no doubt as to his revolutionary Pan-Caribbeanism when in the 1963 re-publication of the book he adds an epilogue titled “From Toussaint Louverture to Fidel Castro” and makes this declaration:
Castro's revolution is as much of the twentieth century as Toussaint's was of the eighteenth. But despite the distance of over a century and a half, both are West Indian. The people who made them, the problems and the attempts to solve them, are particularly West Indian, the product of a peculiar origin and a peculiar history. West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution. Whatever its ultimate fate, the Cuban Revolution marks the ultimate stage of a Caribbean quest for national identity. In a scattered series of disparate islands the process consists of a series of uncoordinated periods of drift, punctuated by spurts, leaps and catastrophes. But the inherent movement is clear and strong. (CLR James, Black Jacobins, Appendix).

It is to the Haitian Revolutionaries, therefore, that we ultimately owe the foundations of our consciousness of self as a regional people of equality, self-respect, dignity and essential humanity. The historical connections operate as at a subterranean level in collective memory. We think of the often-overlooked fact that Boukman, a prime initiator of the Haitian Revolution, came from Jamaica; that Bolivar was materially assisted by Petion; or there persists a fallacious notion conveyed in French texts, as the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano reminds us, that Caribbean slavery was abolished by the benevolent French in 1848!

In 1885 the Haitian anthropologist Anténór Firmin became one of the first writers to challenge the fallacious science of racial hierarchies in his book *De l'égalité des races humaines* (English: On the Equality of Human Races), for which he was reviled, ridiculed and marginalised from the French academy. Firmin’s book was written in rebuttal to the Frenchman de Gobinou’s pseudo-science *The Inequality of the Human Races*. Only four years later, at the other end of the Caribbean, the Trinidadian John Jacob Thomas published his book *Froudacity*; itself a brilliant polemic in rebuttal to the ill-informed and bigoted travelogue by the Englishman James Anthony Froude's 1888 book *The English in the West Indies*, in which he argued that West Indians were congenitally unfit for self-government.

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[^3]: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%A9nor_Firmin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%A9nor_Firmin)
The similarity is self-evident. It was not necessary for Thomas to know of Firmin’s work, let alone to have communicated with him, or vice versa. Both Caribbean writers were taking aim at ideas then prevalent in the imperial centres. The language of Empire is the same, no matter what language it speaks in. Let us remember that this was happening in the same decade as the imperialist ‘Scramble for Africa’, the Congress of Berlin that carved up the continent, and the accompanying doctrines of ‘White Man’s Burden’ and *Mision Civilatrice*.

The spirit of Haiti, indeed, persists as a kind of thread connecting the French/Creole, Anglo and Hispanic world of spiritual and intellectual *marronage* in the Caribbean space. We owe to the Cuban literary critic Emilio Jorge Rodríguez the beautiful notion of a *Transcaribbean Literary Identity*, with Haiti as its driving force. In his book of the same name, published in Spanish and English in a single volume by House of Nehesi in Saint Marten in 2011, Jorge Rodríguez tells of his love affair with Haitian literature. He traces its impact on, and connections with, the Cuban intellectual and artistic canon associated with Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, Wilfredo Lam and several others who visited Haiti in a process of mutually creative exchange in the 1940s and after.

Jorge Rodriguez himself made the pilgrimage to Haiti, so to speak, in several visits commencing in 1995 and complete with an exhausting and emotional trip to the Citadelle Laferrière; to which Lloyd Best has said every Caribbean child should be taken to gaze in wonder, awe and inspiration. In his modest way Jorge Rodríguez points us in his conclusion to possible future undertakings:

> Indeed, studies on Caribbean trans-nationalization indicate the expansion of culture beyond national administrative boundaries… Perhaps a look at Caribbean renationalization based on intra-regional studies may contribute to demonstrate how identity-building has shaped our history and culture.
..just as Alejo Carpentier highlighted in 1951 the pressing need of taking into account Haitian novels when drawing an overview of Latin American literature, today we can assert that in any attempt to define the cultural geography of the Caribbean and Latin America, the trans-Caribbean links emerging since the Haitian Revolution are one of the pillars that gave rise to our hemispheric specificity. (133-134)

The incorporation of Haiti into the Caribbean Community in 2002 can thus be seen as the latest step in the regional validation of the Haitian experience; and a belated but welcome recognition of our historic debt to Haiti, as has been recognised by Caricom and by this university in their programmes of collaboration with Haitian institutions post-earthquake, and by bodies including ALBA and UNASUR, by Venezuela; and especially by the magnificent example of the Cuban Henry Reeves medical brigade serving in urban and rural communities in Haiti.

But this is very much unfinished business, as witness the shameful ruling just last week by the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic to strip of their citizenship some three generations of native born Dominicans who hitherto fore enjoyed that status, on the spurious grounds that their forebears were illegal immigrants, who, as it happens (!), are in the vast majority of Haitian origin. It has to be said that this ruling has been roundly condemned by a wide coalition of human rights organisations in that country.

**Plantation Pan-Caribbeanism**

In 1944 there appeared Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*, thought by many to be the intellectual offspring of *The Black Jacobins*. You could hardly ask for a more comprehensive yet meticulous work of turning the colonial narrative on its head; by its thesis that slavery and the slave trade had fuelled, if not financed, the British industrial revolution, while foreclosing all possibility of economic development in the Caribbean.
But more than that, Williams provided a theoretical and analytical frame by which we can understand all such economies, irrespective of colonial power and associated linguistic and institutional heritage. In furtherance of this understanding Williams spent several months doing post-doctoral research in the Spanish-speaking islands and Haiti in 1940, and maintained a lively correspondence with the Cuban luminary Fernando Ortiz, *eminence gris* of the documentation of the African presence permeating Cuban culture.

Returning to Howard University, he published his first academic article in 1941 calling for a Pan-Anitllean Union or Federation, in which he declared *inter alia* that the “defence of the Western Hemisphere does not require, nor does it need, U.S. domination of the Caribbean”, but rather “the end of colonial rule and the assumption by the islands of full control over their internal affairs” (Humberto Garcia, *Pensar el Caribe*). Williams later wrote that the time he spent in Cuba was the most important of his intellectual life.

I call this construction of region **Plantation Pan-Caribbeanism**. After this book, we begin to understand Caribbean economy, and hence society, as a system, whether preceded by the qualifier British, French, Dutch, or Spanish. For Williams, this system lay at the core of his historicised thesis of the essential Caribbean condition of fragmentation caused by Imperial rivalry, colonialism and slavery; and his utter conviction that only by means of economic and ultimately political integration of these islands could true economic emancipation, independence and self-development be achieved.

Williams remained steadfast to this conception throughout his political career. He fought for the West Indies Federation to have a strong central government, responsible for economic development; after the break-up of the Federation, he convened a conference of states and territories of all the language zones to forge a Caribbean Economic Community in 1963; he insisted that the Economic Commission for Latin America should establish a Caribbean office to promote cooperation in this region; and he initiated the establishment of a Caribbean
Cooperation and Development Committee of ECLA—now ECLAC, in 1975, along with Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. When he published his other major work of Caribbean history—from Columbus to Castro—in 1970, Williams made clear that his Caribbean was the archipelagic Caribbean, with the three Guianas and Belize added because of their historical with the archipelagic experience.

Intellectually, the road from Capitalism and Slavery would lead to the New World Group in the 1960s and the Theories of Plantation Economy of Lloyd Best, Kari Polanyi Levitt and George Beckford in the 1970s; and to the Association of Caribbean Economists in the 1980s. Most notably, and without gainsaying the enormous contribution of eminent Caribbean historians who followed Williams, it is the scope of “Caribbean” that underlies the magisterial UNESCO History of the Caribbean project launched in the 1980s; now published in six volumes.

Even then, we find a growing elasticity around the edges its notion of Caribbean region. As early as 1968 we find Lloyd Best beginning his famous essay on “Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom” with an assertion that the Caribbean, as the world of plantation America, extends from the Northeast of Brazil to the South of the United States. In the aforementioned UNESCO history, we find that the region is defined to include those communities—as distinct from states--in the circum-Caribbean that share the core experience. Indeed, Colombian and Venezuelan scholars take great exception to any suggestion that they are in effect, not one of us; at least as far as the Caribbean coast of these countries is concerned. The Caribbean Studies Association has held successful conferences in the Colombian Caribbean island of San Andres, and even as far away Salvador da Bahia. All of which leads to other two books to which I wish to refer; which have to do with the construction of the Greater Caribbean as from a perspective from within.

**Greater Caribbean**
W. Adolphe Roberts’s book *The Caribbean: The Story of Our Sea of Destiny* was published in 1940. Now Roberts was not only a self-taught historian, he was a passionate Jamaican nationalist; some credit him with “conceptualising and initiating the march towards Jamaican self-government” from his base in New York; where he founded the Jamaica Progressive League on September 1, 1936. His book of 46 chapters and 340 pages spanned a 450-year story of the lands lying in and around the “1,800 miles from the Serpent’s mouth, between South America and Trinidad and the Yucatan Channel” (p. 14).

It might seem to be curious paradox that a man of such intensely insular nationalist orientation should publish a book of this magnitude claiming a proprietorial relationship with the larger space that we inhabit; and asserting it as the locus of our destiny. But what this tells us is the powerful role of history, landscape and seascape in forming the sense of our place in the world. So many of our poets, novelists and artists derive their inspiration from what lies around us. Just last week I watched a new film on Derek Walcott, *Poetry Is An Island*, where he says that if he travels outside St Lucia for more than a certain period of time, he feels literally incomplete, almost ill, with longing for his islandscape. The hinterland of Guyana has evoked some of the most compelling, almost mystical, prose of the writer Wilson Harris. This sense of place, in the widest sense, is the foundation stone of a truly expansive regionalism that fixes the Greater Caribbean as the centre of our world.

We encounter this, too, in Germán Arciniegas, public intellectual *par excellence*, diplomat in the service of his country, and one of the most distinguished and revered men of letters of the 20th century of his native Colombia. In the 65 years from 1932 to 1997 Arciniegas “published practically one book a year along with hundreds of essays, articles and speeches”. (Back cover). His *Biografía del Caribe* (1945, published in English in 1946 as *Caribbean: Sea of the New World*) is a ‘breath-taking and magisterial work, encompassing four centuries of history of the

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Caribbean basin in its broad sweep’ (Girvan Foreword viii); and remains one his most acclaimed works.

These two books were written, therefore, as part of a political vocation to create OurStory in place of Their (His)Story. As Professor Bridget Brereton has written, they were among the first, if not the first, to break with the Imperial traditions of Caribbean historiography in writing a general yet accessible history of the region that straddles the centre of the hemisphere.

In centring their narrative on the Sea, both Roberts and Arciniegas find themselves characterising the Caribbean as the Mediterranean of the Americas, a place of clash of cultures and perpetual imperial rivalries, pawns in a power game of Emperors and Kings, objects of the unworthy attentions of pirates and other assorted criminals. Nowadays, this strategic location gives us the dubious importance of sitting astride the principal drug trafficking routes between South America, North America and Europe, and as a result having some of the highest homicide rates in the world. It is almost as if the cocaine and marijuana of today are like the gold and silver of yesteryear: sources of fabulous wealth that traverse our borders; acting like magnets of greed and unmitigated ruthlessness. And we have our own 21st century pirates too!

One the other hand, we continue, as we must, to seek opportunities for leveraging this location to legitimate advantage; as we see from the plans to create a Logistics Hub in Jamaica, and the recent opening of the huge transhipment facility at the Port of Mariel in Cuba; in order garner the spin-offs of the expansion of the Panama Canal.

We will always be where we are; and the Sea will always be with us. We have no choice but to centre our world on this space; to embrace our Sea and make it ours. One of the most important imitatives of the Association of Caribbean States—the principal institutional expression of the
Greater Caribbean so far—is to have the Caribbean Sea designated by the United Nations as a Special Area for Sustainable Development.

You would expect me to say something about the ACS, which was launched in 1994 after the Report of the West Indian Commission. What is actually noteworthy is the speed of change in Latin America and the Caribbean that has profoundly altered the hemispheric configuration since then. One consequence is that new and attractive avenues for cooperation between the Caribbean and the continent have been opened up that go beyond the ACS. Undoubtedly the most important of these are PetroCaribe, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America—ALBA; the Union of South American States UNASUR and CELAC.

PetroCaribe has become far and away the largest single provider of concessionary finance to Caricom, the majority of which are members of the scheme. Four of them have carried this further by becoming full members of ALBA and two others are in ALBA as observers. In the case of UNASUR, to which Guyana and Suriname belong; a huge Brazilian-led initiative to integrate the infrastructure of the continent in roads, waterways, energy and telecommunications is underway. The road from Brazil through Guyana to the Atlantic/Caribbean will soon become a reality.

CELAC furthermore is set to become an increasingly important political actor in hemispheric affairs. Every Caribbean country participates and – very importantly-- Caricom has been allocated a permanent seat on the Bureau of CELAC. This is of course in recognition of the voting power of the Community and the distinct circumstances and interests of this group.

The ACS therefore now concentrates on those areas of functional cooperation that can best be served by an organisation centred on this geographical space—areas like natural disaster mitigation, sustainable tourism, air transport. The key areas for the future are certainly going to
be protection and sustainable management of the Caribbean Sea; and cultural cooperation and exchange in the Greater Caribbean.

**Caribbean cultural community**

Let me say that there is no question in my mind that culture, widely defined, holds the key to wider Caribbean integration. It is the means by which we develop a consciousness of ourselves as a regional people’, and of fostering mutual understanding and respect across the boundaries of language and ethnicity.

In the past couple of years I have been attending literary festivals, film festivals and festivals of traditional folklore in different locations in the Caribbean space; and it has been eye-opener and a consciousness raiser. In July 2011 I was in Santiago de Cuba attending the annual Festival del Caribe. During the festival I had several Epiphany moments which I would like to share:

“As scholars pondered Pan-Africanism in Cuba and Jamaica and the development of Black consciousness in Martinique and Trinidad and Tobago; Vudú and Yoruba religious ceremonies were being performed in communities adjacent to Santiago. The cultural procession held in the city centre before the culture ministers of Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago and a crowd of several thousand ended with a street jump-up which to all intents and purposes was a j’ouvert—except that it was Santiagueran Conga. A Jamaican would have recognised Jon Cannu and Rastafari among the Cuban groups; a Trinidadian would have recognised familiar Carnival characters like Moko Jumbies and Dame Lorraines. Santiago’s Steelband del Cobre and Trinidad’s Valley Harps steel orchestra had half their audiences at Teatro Heredia jumping on the stage at the end of their respective performances. The homage to the Cimmarón (Maroon) held on a hilltop in the community of Cobre was a ceremony with powerful spiritual impact—complete with possession—which reminded me of Jamaican Kumina and, I am told, shared many elements with Trinidadian Shango. Bob (Marley) was everywhere.
Attending several of the cultural events, I came away with a strong sense of the power of music, dance and spiritualism as the common language of Caribbean people. The barriers of language and political status virtually evaporate in the heat of music, dance and shared rituals. 

The sense of the Caribbean as a ‘community of culture’ that one experiences on these occasions, stands in curious contrast with the difficulties that have been encountered in configuring the Caribbean as an economic and political community. Can we therefore not propose the establishment of a Caribbean Cultural Community?

Were Dr Múnera to be here I am sure he would be telling you of crucial initiatives in the field of culture in the ACS that have been initiated or facilitated under his watch. One such is a network of Caribbean Carnivals, under which member countries would have present in their Carnivals, representative Carnival band or Carnival characters from other participating countries—an initiative launched recently in Cartagena. Another which he tells me involves our own UWI, is a Caribbean network of scientific research and researchers on subject areas of common interest.

Years ago some of us were involved in developing a project for multilingual, multidisciplinary Master’s degree in Caribbean Studies in which several Caribbean universities would participate. I am not sure where that project has reached, but several academic centres are now offering Master’s degrees in Caribbean Studies; notably in Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. The creation of a cadre of young Caribbeans grounded in the rich history, literature, culture and politics of the region, and able to communicate in two or more regional languages, is the single most important contribution we as academics could make towards fostering the project of the

Greater Caribbean as a vibrant part of the hemispheric and global community.

Conclusion

I as we move towards the other keynotes and Panels in the two days to come; the words that keep coming back to me are those of two great Caribbean writers. The first come from Derek Walcott in his Nobel acceptance lecture,

“Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. . . . Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.”

The second is from George Lamming in his book of essays, *Coming, Coming, Coming Home*

“I do not think there has been anything in human history quite like the meeting of Africa, Asia, and Europe in this American archipelago we call the Caribbean. It is so recent since we assumed responsibility for our own destiny, that the antagonistic weight of the past is felt as an inhibiting menace. The most urgent task and the greatest intellectual challenge: How to control the burden of this history and incorporate it into our collective sense of the future”

Thank you for your kind attention.

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