



“One Caribbean Sustainable Academia”.

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The Caribbean region embraces both fragmentation and unity, both difference and sameness; it is a limbo space where cultural subjectivities and languages constantly evolve beyond national borders. The Caribbean experience is complex through its very creolized nature: African, Amerindian, Indian, Syrian, Chinese, European, all of these are part of Caribbean heritages. The contemporary Caribbean subject often has to teeter between diverse cultural spaces, between Africa and Europe, between here and there, between past and present.

Within the specific context of the Caribbean, the term « root » loses its very meaning, it is no longer conceived in terms of singleness and purity but rather in terms of multiplicity and multirootedness. In Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the rhizome is depicted as a “means of propagation which operates underground, without hierarchies, connecting multiple points, places and identities” (1980: 36)¹. Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant applied this concept of the rhizome to Caribbean identities and developed “Creolisation” as the most adapted concept of identity for the Caribbean, one that is fluid and multi-rooted (1997: 11)². The Caribbean is certainly one of the first regions in the world to have experienced this creolisation³ and arguably one of the richest areas of cultural

hybridization. The product of colonization and slavery, hybridity also marks the political culture of the region⁴. Caribbean cultures can transcend national borders and whether they live in sovereign nations or in non-sovereign European territories, Caribbean communities all share this genuine “poetics of relation”⁵ defying root identities and facilitating transnational and meta-national cooperation.

As the recently rebranded organization of Caribbean Universities and Research Institutes, Universities Caribbean (formerly UNICA) is at the centre of this meta-national discourse as it aims to foster cooperation within a network constituted of the finest universities of the Wider Caribbean region. The organization defines the Caribbean as the geographical area comprising islands of the Antilles and coastal zones of countries surrounding the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico, including Central America and the northern region of South America and the Guianas, thereby acknowledging the transnational, translingual and transcultural forces of the region. Besides its transversal nature, the strength of the association lies in the fact that all its executive and affiliated members are the highest-ranking officials, rectors and presidents of Higher Education institutions in the Wider Caribbean region, hence decision making is fast and effective. *Universities Caribbean* is the only Higher Education organization serving such a diverse knowledge community beyond language barriers, beyond national

1 Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (1980). Trans. B. Massumi. New York: Continuum 2004.

2 Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. B. Wing. Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

3 Moïse, Myriam and Fred Réno (eds). *Border Transgression and Reconfiguration of Caribbean Spaces*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020.

4 Puri, Shalini. *The Caribbean Postcolonial, Social Equality, Post/Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

5 Glissant, Edouard. *Ibid.*



boundaries, and allowing bi-regional and trans-regional cooperation among Caribbean nation states, including European universities of the Caribbean such as member universities based in the French Antilles and in the Dutch Antilles.

The Executive committee of the association is very representative of this diversity as it is presided over by Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, with the collaboration of the Rectors of the Université des Antilles, the University of Curacao, the PUCMM in Santo Domingo, the University of Puerto Rico, and the University of Venezuela. Universities of the Wider Caribbean region have the duty to serve their communities and are able to make contributions to the priority research areas of sustainable development at all levels.

The organising principle guiding all academic initiatives is "ONE CARIBBEAN", with two signature events coordinated by *Universities Caribbean: A biannual "One Caribbean Solutions" symposium* to create opportunities for academics to engage with practitioners and build strategies to develop practical solutions to challenges faced by the Caribbean and Latin American region; An annual "One Caribbean Youth Forum" (#OCYF) to boost new entrepreneurship and create awareness among Caribbean youth of their roles as future leaders of the sustainable development of their region. Youth representatives who attended the OCYF 2019 originated mainly from the Wider Caribbean and France as the forum was coordinated by the Political Science students of the University of the French Antilles. All the students in attendance were encouraged to build a collaborative network across Europe and the Wider Caribbean.

The youth also attended the "One Caribbean Solutions" symposium in Martinique, an event which has played a significant role in identifying new fruitful collaborative paths between European and non-European academic partners. The main objective of this bi-annual symposium is to underline the fundamental role that universities play in putting in place concrete solutions to address the specific problems faced by Caribbean territories. This third edition was hosted by Université des Antilles (UA), an Executive member of *Universities Caribbean*; among the partners of this symposium were the Interreg ELAN programme (Linguistic Exchanges and Innovative Learning

through mobility), financed by the European Development Funds, the EU-LAC Focus (a Horizon 2020 EU-funded program), and the EU-LAC Foundation. All of these entities or programs continuously facilitate the implementation of collaborative actions between the EU and LAC regions.

The symposium was an opportunity to bring together European, Latin American and Caribbean Rectors, Presidents of universities, Directors of research institutes, as well as experts, and researchers specializing in Environmental Studies to develop a regional and global policy dialogue on ecological challenges, technological advances, and the link between the academic and industrial worlds. The scientific events organized by *Universities Caribbean* seek to offer a platform for international exchanges with leaders from the Caribbean and other parts of the world to discuss their role in the economic growth and the sustainable futures of their region. While the specificities of the Caribbean space are constantly emphasized through the concept "One Caribbean", priority topics for the region are discussed taking into account the significance of bilateral relations between the Wider Caribbean and Europe, and the development of strategic international partnerships. "One Caribbean" events create opportunities for academics to engage with experts in the field, and build strategies to develop unique solutions to important regional and global issues.

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic that is currently affecting the world, including our region, the most recent initiative of *Universities Caribbean* consists of a general survey conducted among its membership so as to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the university sector. Like all other sectors, the Higher Education sector is severely impacted by wide scale institution closures across the region in an effort to help Caribbean countries contain the spread of this virus. A virtual forum will be organized to present the results of this survey and start post-crisis dialogues; this event will feature international experts and university leaders who will share best practices and initiatives in such a challenging context. As the Caribbean region is characterized by a lack of resources, now, more than ever, *Universities Caribbean* aims to assist its members with finding "One Caribbean" solutions for the longer-term resilience of education systems in the region.

Another project for which *Universities Caribbean* is currently



seeking funding proves to be even more essential in light of the current sanitary crisis: the development of a “One Caribbean” digital platform which will connect the knowledge community of the Caribbean. This new “One Caribbean” initiative will allow students from all over the world to enrol in a programme offering opportunities to learn from academics and experts specialized in Caribbean Studies. Ultimately, this platform will facilitate bi-regional clusters of researchers that will focus on the challenges of the region such as tropical diseases, global warming, environmental refugees, gender equity, among others.

This virtual platform will also offer diverse opportunities to bridge the gaps between academia and Caribbean communities, between academia and industry, and ultimately between the Caribbean and the world. The objective is to boost Caribbean integration, and facilitate EU-LAC cooperation through joint initiatives and social mobility across the region and globally. Universities Caribbean wishes to be instrumental to the development of avant-garde collaborative research, programmes of excellence and bi-regional research consortiums that would allow academics, practitioners and students in the Wider Caribbean, in Europe and in other parts of the world to communicate and learn from each other. The aim is that each “One Caribbean” consortium would associate European and non-European partners so they would all contribute to building and strengthening a more sustainable “One Caribbean” academia, one which would be representative of the diverse Caribbean rhizomic identities and one which would see bi-lateral collaboration as enhancing global sustainable development. Through its international profile and the unique diversity of its members, Universities Caribbean encourages collaborative projects and partnerships across Europe and the Americas so as to serve the development of the Wider Caribbean region, its academic communities, and its people overall.