

## *Psychology bridge building in the Caribbean: A proposal*

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### Abstract

Psychology, in its essence, might be delineated as a science that deals with the mind and mental processes in relations to human (and animal) behaviors and emotional experiences. The discipline is indeed wide and varied in scope and is, in fact, special in its capacity to understand the impact of particular physical and social environmental forces on peoples' behavior. The environment to which this discussion is aimed is the Caribbean and the present mission is to interface this region with the discipline of psychology and to propose these two elements as a bridge upon which a unique people might grow and flourish.

*Keywords:* Psychology, Caribbean

### La construcción de puentes de psicología en el Caribe: una propuesta Resumen

Psicología, en su esencia, podría ser delineado como una ciencia que se ocupa de la mente y los procesos mentales en las relaciones con los comportamientos humanos (y animales) y las experiencias emocionales. La disciplina es amplia y variada en su alcance y es, de hecho, especial en su capacidad para comprender el impacto de determinadas fuerzas del entorno físico y social en el comportamiento de las personas. El ambiente al que esta discusión esta dirigida tiene como objetivo el Caribe y la misión presente es interconectar la región con la disciplina de la psicología y de proponer estos dos elementos como un puente sobre la cual un pueblo único podría crecer y florecer.

*Palabras claves:* psicología, Caribe

The Caribbean is a geographical region of approximately one million square miles situated in the western hemisphere and south of the North American continent. The region is generally not well defined, however. Three approaches have often been adopted in delineating the region (Girvan, 2000). One approach speaks to the *Geographical Caribbean*. This is the physical zone washed by the Caribbean Sea, the so called Caribbean Basin. In this space one will find the bigger islands such as Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic) all combined to be known as the Greater Antilles. In addition there is the Lesser Antilles comprising the comparatively smaller islands of the Eastern Caribbean (Trinidad, Barbados, St. Lucia, Antigua etc). This Caribbean (sub region) is further extended by the large mainland territories of Central America and Northern South America with countries such as Columbia and Venezuela.

The region is also sometimes defined as the *Geological Caribbean* for reasons of a shared structural geology upon which much of the physical nation states are situated. This Caribbean plate finds com-

monality in what had become to be identified as similar seismic, tectonic and volcanic processes and features (Girvan, 2000).

The third, and perhaps most poignant and purposeful delineation of the region, is the *Historical Caribbean* (Girvan, 2000). In this context the Caribbean is seen as those nation states, which experienced the impact of slavery, European colonization, a plantation system and indentureship. More specifically, this Caribbean, historically and culturally, came under the influences of the Spanish, Dutch, English and French expansionism at various intervals over historical time.

The Caribbean culture, not unlike others elsewhere, is a product of geography, history and political systems. Twenty five percent of its people are English speakers, 22 percent French, one percent Dutch and an overwhelming 52 percent Spanish speaking (Paul, 2009). Each language grouping, as might be expected, has its own unique cultural aspects and, indeed attendant cultural challenges. This is born out, for example, in the distinct cuisines, music, religions and other traditions much of which emerged by way of the practices of native inhabitants then becoming intermingled with the influences of external settlers. It is here being further contended that this confluence of unique socio – cultural forces would, not unexpectedly, make for challenges

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such as social stratification within grouping even as, in its distillation, it might well have served to produce an overarching distinct Caribbean ethos.

Differentiated as it is by English, Spanish, French and Dutch languages and cultures, the presumption would be that the Caribbean's inherent diversity will be sufficiently stark as to render the region a socio-cultural fabric defiant of any attempt to be stitched into a unified mosaic. Indeed, on the socio-economic and political fronts, the challenge of a cohesive and meaningful process of Caribbean bonding has, across decades, not only stretched the imagination of the economic and political leaderships, but has proven elusive, if not futile. A long standing and ongoing struggle towards a model for a Caribbean Economic Common Market (CARICOM), a Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to replace judicial appeal to the British Privy Council, and the free movements of labor in the region are all further examples of this pervasive dilemma. Indeed, as reflected in works of Daniel and Lambie (2008), Ward (2007) and Thomas (1971) well predating these contemporary efforts, one might recall the energies of Cuba's Jose Marti and fellow travelers like Puerto Rico's Eugenio Maria de Hostos and Ramon Emeterio Betances who, as early as the 1800s, called for a united Antilles that would transcend language borders and barriers.

While one considers the challenges of the Caribbean from a broad macro geopolitical perspective, it also bears prudence that the region be further seen from the standpoint of intra territory dynamics as well. In this respect internal cultural diversity as reflected in subcultures within a greater culture must be borne in mind. In tandem with this feature is the co-occurrence of social stratification and social mobility, which will influence the location of individuals or groups relative to the locus of status, power and prestige within the society. In all this, as is the case with the transnational scenario, there will be the struggle for cultural retentions when there is a perceived threat of extinction. This factor, no doubt, could pose a challenge, and has implications for the individual and group psychology of the people and the ease with which a greater Caribbean psychology might be forged.

Nonetheless, with twenty-three autonomous and semi-autonomous nation states and an approximate total population of forty two million (United Nations, 2012) this geo-political space has a shared heritage that should transcend a colonial history and an experience of metropolitan imperialism. This shared heritage has the potential to become overtly manifest as can be seen, for example, in the English speaking Caribbean's sustained unified presence in a single international sporting cricket team and a very notable regional university, the University of the West Indies (UWI). In

addition, notwithstanding this feature, development, from the stand point of standards of living, education, availability of goods and services and health care, in the Caribbean region continues to be fragmentary even among those states sharing a common language and close proximity. There is an almost universal presumption that unity of purpose and development is a desirable goal in just about any situation. As such, the fragmentary and diverse nature of the Caribbean profile might beg the question; wither the role of the discipline of Psychology in facilitating the growth and development of the Caribbean.

This conceptual paper, therefore, in its focus argues that through the discipline of psychology, wide and varied the discipline that it is, there can be a transect that, promulgated and exploited in its essence, will serve the greater good of the Caribbean people. The paper will seek to advocate a philosophy and psychology of 'Pan Caribbeanism' that goes beyond the barriers of language and geography and history. It will advance, by way of recommendations and proposals, an agenda for integration and cohesion within the context of the discipline of psychology such that it will bridge the existing plurality and historical discordance within the region.

The approach to be taken by this brief conceptual essay should contribute in filling a gap in the discourse surrounding the challenges and movement forward for the Caribbean region and the continued growth and development of its people. Consequently, the paper lends the promises of furthering the refinement of a theoretical and methodological frame of reference for a better understanding of human behaviors and thought processes in the Caribbean region relative to the wider global social order. This, hopefully, will ultimately serve to the greater benefit of the most vulnerable in the region. In moving forward, it must be reiterated that this expose is not a data driven piece but mainly conceptual in nature, the personal perspective of the author, albeit influenced, in part, by the literature and academic and non-academic discussions with others. In addressing the matter of psychology as bridge building in the Caribbean, Jamaica and the English speaking territories will serve as useful points of reference for the purpose of relevant examples and illustrations of pertinent issues. In this regard the claim is being made that the issues and circumstances relevant to this sub-grouping do apply to the Caribbean as a whole peculiar local variations notwithstanding. By way of organization, this discussion will commence with a reflection on the arguments of history that has been advanced in an effort to understand the social and socio-cultural dynamics of the region. This will be followed by an assessment of the perceived current

and persistent stumbling blocks that might be argued by some as hampering greater cohesion and development in the Caribbean region. A perspective on what, if anything, is being done to address the concerns is then advanced to be segued into views on what else can, and should, be done.

Finally, the discussion will then seek to summarize the issues at hand and propose, by way of recommendations, an agenda that might be innovative in practice, rather than replicating in concept, of what, apparently, has not been effective thus far. The design in organizing the ideas is to be seen as an attempt at not only portraying the circumstances of the region but also as a potential guide to overcome the obstacles to bridge building in the Caribbean, with psychology as a central pillar.

Next Before proceeding further, however, some theoretical constructs and principles within which the essential focus of this discussion can be situated must be offered. In achieving this one is mindful of the thoughts of Ignacio Martin-Baró, who in the 1970s and beyond, with Latin America as his primary arena, advocated for what has come to be referred to as a psychology of liberation or, as some would term it, liberation psychology of the people. In summary Martin-Baró (1994) insisted that psychology, as a discipline, should develop within the historical context of the social conditions and aspirations of the people. He advocated that the student (and practitioner) of psychology should learn to analyze human behavior within the setting of their practice and that this should be predicated upon the criteria outlined for that setting. In this sense Martin-Baro opposed the notion of a universal impartial psychological paradigm. Instead, he insisted upon the view that psychology must be critically committed with the struggles for alternative societies obtaining in Latin America. In extending his thesis Martin-Baro went on to surmise that psychopathology and mental health problems in societies were coupled with people's experience of oppression. He contends, thereby, that the psychical situation of individuals could either be an abnormal reaction to normal circumstances, or a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances. Martin-Baro therefore challenged that psychologist (and the processes of psychology no doubt) cannot ignore the people's plight).

Not inconsistent with Martin-Baro, around 1970 Paulo Freire articulated a pedagogy of the oppressed (2000) in which he claimed that education is never neutral. This agent of socialization, he would have us understand, is a fulcrum upon which two diametrically opposite forces namely, the oppressor and the oppressed are pivoted. Freire sees the prevailing education system as essentially congruent with the worldviews and interest of a privilege oppressor class to the negation

of the aspiration and creative spirits of the disadvantaged oppressed class. In this arrangement students are viewed as empty accounts to be taught by the teacher who invariably represents the status quo at the expense of the underprivileged. He calls for a rethinking of this arrangement on all fronts as a way towards balancing the scale and promoting a more equitable environment.

In the final analysis, both Ignacio Martin-Baro and Paulo Freire are serving as architects of empowerment of the people. In this vein, the strategy is being aimed at a principle whereby people in their communities, will come to own, and freely control, their own psychology and enjoy the right to amalgamate and integrate at the individual or group level as they so desire.

### The Arguments of History

There, no doubt, will be a general consensus that the world in which we live today is a far cry from that which existed in the colonial era of conquest, domination and expansionism. Through the international conduits of the League of Nations and its successor the United Nations, complimented by several other humanitarian organizations such as the International Federation of the Red Cross, many national and international liberation struggles have been won, sustained and are being respected today (Africa and the Caribbean) even as others, such as in the Middle East, are still in process. Yet, there can also be a contention that such gains have been essentially at the level of political independence mainly, as there is a glaring deficit in the arena of economics and international commerce being experienced by the newly emerged states. Indeed, a parallel school of thought might even insist that the perceived deficit component is located not just in material and trade imbalances, but, more critically, rooted in the individual and collective thought processes and behavioral patterns of the liberated post colonial people relative to the former colonizers. In this sense, a provocative mind might even equivocate, that the mental and intellectual frame of reference of the people is often times contingent upon, and articulated to, their prevailing circumstances. It is to this latter perspective that the focus of this section is now turned in the effort to address the matter of "psychology as bridge building in the Caribbean".

Caribbean liberation scholars such as Williams (1994), Manley (1974, 1982, 1983), Beckford (1972) Beckford and Witter (1982), Munroe (1972) and Hickling (2008) have long carried the line that political independence did not translate into the independence of thought at the level of political leadership in the Caribbean and, to a measurable degree, likewise among sections of the populace. In fact, it is argued that such was not by accident but by strategic and systematic design

as was orchestrated in the setting up of rival political factions as well as religions and ethnic strife along with conflicts of class, race and color and the rivalry in relative access to material wealth and social power.

Hickling (2008), for example, makes the point that psychopathological conditions such as social stress triggered schizophrenia, was less likely among those relocating from the metropole to the Caribbean when compared to the incidents that occur among Caribbean people migrating to the metropole where the psychological protective mechanism was virtually nonexistent for them. He is also wont to insist that the process of adaptation, cultural retentions, resilience and migratory tendencies of Caribbean people at home and in the Diaspora must not go unrecognized. Like Martin-Baro, Hickling is further of the view that the chronicle of this development must be placed in the context of the historical realities of the development of psychology and psychiatry in the region. Advancing this position Ward and Hickling (2004) recall that Caribbean nations such as Cuba, Guadelope and Martinique as well as Haiti have had a comparatively earlier start in utilizing the processes of psychology than did the English Caribbean. In this context it has been noted that in the English-speaking Caribbean psychology has only gained real prominence in the educational tapestry in recent times. Hickling cites the development of postgraduate training programs in clinical psychology at the UWI campuses in both Jamaica and in Trinidad since 2003 as well as in other local and regional universities. He maintains that this development, along with a virtual explosion in undergraduate interest in the discipline, is a glaring signal of Caribbean peoples' quest to understand what makes us think, feel and behave how we do. Nonetheless, one could further well argue that psychology, as a process, is not exactly a recent phenomenon to the Caribbean.

Psychology has, historically, as least insidiously so, been practiced in the region long before the regulations of formal academia and predates the grand theoretical constructs that often accompany academic scholarship. In this sense psychology, in its essence, in fact did well, vitally, serve a subjugated people in mentally managing the stressors of their oppressed circumstances. In illustrating the attentiveness to psychology in the more contemporary period Edwards (1990), for example, as a Caribbean clinical psychologist working in the context of developmental psychopathology, prior to 2003 also noted an irony in employing metropolitan standardized psychological measures to evaluate Caribbean people who have evolved within a different historical paradigm.

Manley, in his 'The Politics of Change' (1973), 'Struggle in the Periphery' (1982) and 'Up the Down

Escalator' (1983) strenuously, over time, lamented the trade imbalances between Caribbean countries such as Jamaica and the powerful centers of the north such as the United States and Britain. Manley's chagrin had been that the price rewards earned by the Caribbean for its commodities, which were often time primary goods such as agricultural produce and bauxite, were always dictated by the metropole in its own favor. This is in contrast to exorbitant charges Caribbean countries are obliged to remit to the metropolitan nations for their products such as machineries and administrative consultations Manley argued. He further intimated that there would be dire consequences to be meted out to the region for any protest or resistance to the anomalies faced by the Caribbean.

Similar to Manley, Beckford (1972), and Beckford and Witter (1982) identified the arrangements of the plantation economies of the Caribbean as a catalyst for the region's own circular underdevelopment and potential stagnation, bordering on inevitable self destruction in light of the inferior trading arrangements with Britain, Europe and North America. Williams (1994) and Munroe (1972) also examined the historical process of coming to independence in the Caribbean and concluded that the mechanisms employed in a period of resource scarcity, and the associated rising expectations and declining satisfaction of the people, meant that at the end of the day the people, as a collective, were left at a net disadvantage.

As a counter claim to this particular thesis from the left, however, is an argument that is often espoused by colonial apologist on the right, suggesting that colonialism (and imperialism) did leave to the colonized, a tangible legacy on which to build. The claim is here made that the institutions of religion – usually Christianity-, schools and education, commerce and western medicine were all endowed to the people. This argument is even further sharpened by an invective, which proclaims that the system of slavery and colonialism, in fact, did also save Africa from itself, portending that the continent was in a mired state of malaise. In a very stout rebuff of this notion, however, the Caribbean scholar Walter Rodney (1981) has sought to illustrate 'how Europe underdeveloped Africa' pointing to Africa as a continent with a history of robust internal, and indeed external, trade and development before the interruption by the transatlantic slave trade.

Imbedded in all of this historical perspective is a social paradigm that is reflective of a Caribbean region wherein the material, mental and intellectual processes, by-and-large, did not concretely redound to the lasting advantage of the majority of the populace who remained marginalized. Against this background, the issue at hand, at this time, is to assess the current

circumstances and to appraise the perceived stumbling blocks confronting the Caribbean as a space and a practice for the future.

### Perception on Current Stumbling Blocks

Within the boundaries of respective Caribbean countries there are, indeed, elements of stratification that straddle the dimensions of gender, religion and religious denominations, social class and race and color, as well as diverse ethnic subcultures and language variations.

Beyond the dimensions of the internal demographics however, there are issues of the psychological perception of the region and how the region is portrayed in the international global sphere. For one, there is a long-standing and pervasive portrayal of the Caribbean as an outpost primarily for leisure and romance. The people are always happy and dancing, the notion is, wearing colorful tropical regalia, sipping native alcoholic beverages and smoking potent cannabis with no care in the world. Certainly, in a setting such as this, the Caribbean would not a place be, to be taken seriously in the grand scheme of world event.

This prevailing sun, sand and sea perception of the region, however, might have become stymied somewhat in more recent times. This check in perception is probably partly to do with the Caribbean's international eloquent oppositional voice on events such as apartheid in South Africa and the regions general resistance to international warfare and advocacy for fairness in world trade. However, there is the risk of this dulling of the romanticism being replaced with a growing stereotype of the region being the enclave of human superior track and field athletic sprinters (led by Jamaica and the Bahamas), and other sporting power houses (led by Jamaica, Trinidad and Central America in football with Barbados added for cricket and, indeed, the might of Puerto Rico and Cuba in baseball). In addition, the genre of music and partying aficionados (led by Jamaica with its reggae, Trinidad with its steel drums, and the hypnotic rhythm of the Spanish beat) continue to shape the region's image.

While this much is all well and good, and might even be contributing toward a positive Caribbean psychological identity of sorts, it is still to be bemoaned that the region is hardly identified and characterized for its products and accomplishments in the arts and sciences, medicine and innovations in tropical agriculture and animal husbandry. On the contrary, it is not unknown for such accomplishments to be faced with international tariff and trade barriers as well as pressures to surrender patents and copyrights when attempts are made for such accomplishments to enter the international market place. To compound this dilemma is an existing thought that even within the region itself, the populace

might not be sufficiently cognizant and appreciative of its own merit and impact nationally, regionally and globally. As such, the intrinsic esteem and pride that should exist as Caribbean people could be less than is warranted and that should obtain.

There is work to be done and the work will have to conceptualize, methodize and executed by the Caribbean people themselves. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that this will not, and in fact should not, be done otherwise by external interests. Take, for example, a February 2008 claim by the world known Economist Magazine, of the Caribbean region being the most violent in the world. Further, there is a corresponding allegation of Jamaica having the world's fourth highest homicide rate but hardly ever a mention of Jamaica's, by world comparison, extremely low suicide rate as could engender a study in coping and resilience. The question to be asked in such instances is, 'whose criteria and statistics and whose methodology determines such assessments and reportage? Is it that of the Caribbean people themselves or is it orchestrated and propagandized extra regionally?

Another case in point is the global epidemic on HIV/AIDS. Again the Caribbean is often highlighted as having the world's highest incident and prevalence of the disease save for sub-Saharan Africa. What might be even more startling in these instances is that, to the extent that such claimers might be true - and they could be true - there appears to be a loud international silence when there are improvements in circumstances such as a marked reduced crime rate in Jamaica and decline in mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission and per capita AIDS related mortality. Surely, any geopolitical advantage to be gained - such as international aid assistance - in not equally vigorously proclaiming the positive developments cannot supersede the long term psychological benefits to be accrued with the Caribbean people not being exposed to negative stigmatization.

Against this background, another, perhaps bold question to be asked, is "should there be compensation paid, and by whom, for assessed damages to the region, - such as in tourism and foreign direct investments-, when negative aspersions are cast on the region, and by extension its people?" Even more pointedly, should the discipline of psychology, and certainly 'Caribbean Psychology', be more attentive, and responsive, to the international image of the region in the global arena? Personally the answer is a resounding "yes". Why so, to me, is pretty clear. How so, might be a matter of methodology yet to be worked out and designed by the people of the Caribbean, in tandem with the international community? In this vein the January 2010 devastating earthquake in the Caribbean territory of Haiti might have been an occasion for a Caribbean

psychology to stamp an indelible image in its post impact presence in that country. As it unfolded, the international face of that response appear to have taken the form of Hollywood and the political reflections of North America much more than it did the Caribbean which, through Jamaica and CARICOM, were among the very first responders to that natural disaster in the region.

In carrying further the perspective on the place and role of psychology in the Caribbean, or Caribbean Psychology for that matter, it is also to be borne in mind that as a migrating people there is a Caribbean Diaspora residing abroad which is umbilically tied to the region and whose circumstances are interwoven with the region. Again, the issue of how much should the psychology be concerned with, and attentive to, the physical and psychological status of those abroad must be invoked. Would, for example, Caribbean psychologists, (and psychiatrist) continue to be concerned about matters of mental health, schooling and economic circumstances of its citizens and offsprings in faraway lands, and how will that sense of psychological bonding to, and identification with the region be preserved over future time.

Also, could Caribbean psychology have a position on the desire of some in the Diaspora for a right to vote in national elections where such a privilege does not yet exist, as in the case of Jamaica? How would Caribbean psychology contribute to, and manage this process should the issue evolve in a concrete manner? In all this, could there be opportunities for the designing of a methodology that might shape the direction in addressing the region's image internationally? Similarly, for the English Caribbean, should not Caribbean psychology have a central consultative role in matters involving processes such as the Caribbean Court of Justice and the proposed free movements of labor across the region? At the very minimum, studied and equipped as they are with the capacity to understand human thought patterns and behaviors, Caribbean psychologists and the processes of psychology in the region could, and should, be germane and in fact central, in advising and guiding the political bureaucracy in these undertakings.

### Perspective on What is Being Done

Any exploration of the current Caribbean regional environment will be hard pressed to identify a tangible and pervasive sense of a Caribbean psychology in practice. For the most part, to the extent that the nation states of the region have shown any unity of purpose this has been largely of geopolitics and regional commerce in nature and not necessarily as an ideological process outcome of psychology or behavioral psychology. As such a failed attempt at a Caribbean Federation in the 1960s

and a present oscillating Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM) might well underscore this absence of a Caribbean psychological mindedness.

An attempt at forming a unified West Indian and Caribbean common commercial zone similar to that obtaining in other regions of the world should be construed as consistent with a sense of oneness among people of the region and would be expected to have consequential psychological cohesive effect. The situation, from many indicators, has been, regrettably, fraught with difficulties. If expressed public sentiments Mason (2013) is to be acknowledged - as Martin-Baró would require - there has been reported intractable problems of trade imbalances between and among regional nations. In addition while some nation states of the region have been fully signed on to the concept and the practice, others have been prepared to only partially, or not at all, do likewise. In addition, while this CARICOM arrangement has been largely centered on the English speaking countries, the Spanish and French are yet to become sufficiently absorbed into the process.

Not unlike the experiment of a common economic commercial zone in the region is the feature of an attempt at a unified legal judicial appellate system. While the Spanish, French and Dutch legal systems historically influenced their Caribbean colonies; a large number of the Caribbean nations also inherited their legal structures from the British. By and large the English territories have retained the British model of jurisprudence and the ultimate and final recourse to adjudication is reposed in its (British) Privy Council well beyond the ascension of Caribbean independence.

There is, however, the nationalist perspective that full emancipation (including the minds of the people) will remain an illusion until all vestiges of colonial control is removed. To this end, the attempt of setting up a Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to, among other responsibilities, replace the British Privy Council has had its birth. This birth and development, however, has not been without various spectacular abortive episodes within and among the nations of the region. Within several nations, such as Jamaica, there is a fractious debate about separating or retaining the British Privy Council and with regards to the methodology to be employed should a separation be agreed upon. On the wider regional scale as well the challenge is also played out with some nations either signing on fully, only partially or none at all to the concept of a Caribbean Court of Justice. The point of relevance in these scenarios is that a unified commercial environment, accompanied by a shared judicial process, if effectively managed, could go a far way in facilitating bridge building in the Caribbean. Effectively executed, the people of the region would, at least potentially, enjoy a growing

psychological sense of a common identity, which is perhaps insufficiently existing and fostered at this time.

Before the coming of the CARICOM and CCJ in the English Caribbean it might be recalled that a scheduled regional expo, the Caribbean Regional Festival of the Arts (CARIFESTA) also attempted to bind the regions peoples and hence it should be evident that a desire towards bridge building is, in fact, not a new one but one that has been in the thought and minds of the region's people over an extended period of time.

To underscore this historical desire for a unified region (and an associated psychology) one could, for emphasis, again further recall multi-territorial institutions such as the UWI and a West Indian Cricket Team. More recently, the role of Cuba in the provision of educational and sporting developmental opportunities to the nations of the region must also be underscored. The Central American and Pan-American and the more recent North and Central America and Caribbean Games and the Caribbean Football Union might also be deemed as other testimonies to the effect. Arguably, these institutions might be seen generally as encounters of rivalry with some potential risk of fragmentation in the region. Nonetheless, such regional shared activities do provide a sense of regionalism and, if managed judiciously and sustained by the powers that be, can make for positive bridge building. The process of psychology with its capacity to interpret and manage human thoughts and behavior could provide the glue for this endeavor.

#### What else can and should be done

Operating on the premise that there is a case to be made for bridge building in the Caribbean and so with psychology as a central pillar, there is now the onus of addressing the matter as to what can, and should be done towards this end. The following therefore are some ideas and these might be grouped according to the four interrelated domains of ideological, shared resources, academia and future directions.

On the *ideological* front, to be centrally addressed are the issues of what is the Caribbean identity, if there is or can be one, and who is this exceptional Caribbean person. More recently Morgan and O'Garra (2008) have tried to grapple with this quandary from the standpoint of Caribbean family structures. They recall Higman's (1975) observation that sociologists as having fractured, unstable, family lives and structures resulting from slavery and the plantation system have defined all the Caribbean communities of Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. A somewhat similar observation might also be ascribed to other societies of the greater Caribbean that would have also experienced slavery and indentureship. Against this background

must also be considerations surrounding the ideology of features such as religious plurality, class and color and gender discrimination. To the extent that these are issues that, in the present state of affairs, are less than ideal in shaping the psychologically healthy human thought processes and behavioral patterns in the region, then, indeed, there is work to be done. Just how this work is to be undertaken and accomplished remains a burden for the Caribbean region in any quest towards a commonality of identity.

In turning the spotlight on the business of *academic scholarship* the observation is to be made that at the level of tertiary education there might still be a paucity of suitable institutions in the region. This claim is probably more so in the English Caribbean where affordable tertiary educational opportunities are considered to be trailing well behind population and socio-economic developmental needs. In this gap situation, a number of metropolitan based colleges and universities, in more recent times, have found the region fertile ground to set up their own operations. This has been in direct competition with existing local institutions as well as newly emerging home-inspired ones that are striving for a viable space in the regional academic arena.

Indeed, one concern has been that these externally based institutions, while perhaps fulfilling a prevailing need, at least in some instances, might not be of the highest caliber in their own home country and, perhaps more pertinently, are inclined to have lower matriculation standards for their Caribbean student clientele. In addition some metropolitan faculties assigned to their overseas Caribbean academic enterprises are at times suspected to be less than rigorous in their personal scholarship and pedagogy capacity. Accordingly, in all this there could be the risk of a new supply of Caribbean personnel insufficiently trained and prepared (by some of the external institutions) to adequately fulfill the ongoing needs of the national and greater Caribbean development. Surely, a radical take on the situation could argue that this is tantamount of a new imperialism of underdevelopment disguised in the form of academia. This position could then be further bolstered by an attendant claim that the external academic enterprises are very seldom mindful of the strategic developmental needs of the Caribbean host country/region even as financial gains are eagerly repatriated. What then must be the response? In responding to this challenge a Consortium / Coalition of Caribbean Universities that transcends language barriers should be set up and made effectively operational. While the UWI with campuses and centers in several Caribbean islands might be a model to this effect, in bridging the Caribbean divide such a consortium would, as of necessity, encompass the Spanish, French and Dutch Caribbean in an equal

and indispensable partnership. To the extent that any such entity might be presently in existence it should become (more) visible and be made to adopt, as a central mandate, the effective bridge building and development of the Caribbean as a regional whole.

In this consortium, with the necessary mechanisms in place, accreditation and matriculation standards would be set for extra regional academic institutions seeking to do business in the area. In this context such extra regional institutions would be required to be attentive to addressing identified Caribbean developmental needs through the processes of the proposed educational deliverables. This could therefore mean that any extra regional academic program would not only be unique in content, but would also be particularly necessary to the growth and development of the host country / region and not obtaining in direct competition with (such) locally existing programs. Further, in order to preserve the integrity of indigenous scholarship and psychological cultures it might also be a requirement that the external academic enterprise, as far as feasibly possible, employ and otherwise engage an agreed percentage of qualified academic and other personnel from the local population.

However, even as focus is placed on the matter of extra regional academic scholarship due attention is also warranted to the academic happenings intra-regionally. In this setting the interplay of academic scholarship is perhaps far too slight, as it currently exists. This dilemma is even more pronounced if one were to inspect the situation along the parameters of language differences in the region. In other words, there appear to be too great a gulf obtaining whereby there is not sufficiently shared scholarship in the schooling among the peoples of this multi-lingual region. As such the awareness and sharing of cultures, ideas, thoughts and behavioral patterns of people in the region tend to be isolated and circumscribed. It therefore might be left to the processes of psychology as the discipline best suited to open up this silo and serve as bridge building in facilitating that Caribbean identity that will be transformative for the greater good of all the people. In this respect the point being made, again, regarding the processes of psychology as a conduit, is that this discipline is inherently capable of accommodating the cross currents of world views and social nuances that a people might bring to bear upon the striving for mutual understanding.

How then should this be achieved within the crucible of intra-regional academia? Again, that Consortium of Caribbean Universities could be the vehicle for the purpose. This is especially so if the mandate is sufficiently wide to encompass the pre-tertiary as well tertiary and post tertiary educational experiences.

Not in any order of priority then, the following agenda items encompassing academia and shared resources should be duly considered. Where any of the suggestions might pre-exist then it is the view that there is a need for reinforcement and a vigorously energized strategy for advancement and promotion of the principles and practice:

1. **Academic programs reviews** – while this practice currently exists across campuses and programs within a given institution such as the UWI it is being proposed that this become a region wide undertaking among tertiary institutions as far as possible. This approach would then harmonize the content of program offerings in the service of a Caribbean identity, growth and development even without jeopardizing the uniqueness necessary for local peculiarities.
2. **Shared matriculation** – with a harmonized program offering there should be shared matriculation criteria and standards within the region's universities and colleges.
3. **Students' enrolment expansion** – here a deliberate policy and strategy should be executed in order to increase the numbers of tertiary level student matriculation across the region even without the sacrificing of matriculation standards. This, in itself, will have implications for the pre-tertiary academic processes that prepare students for advance education. In achieving this, over time more and more Caribbean students could well become more and more sensitized to the prospect and advantages of a Caribbean nationhood.
4. **Free movements of students** – with a harmonization of programs regionally matriculated students should enjoy the freedom of transferring across the nations of the region and gain academic entry to the region's institutions without undue resistance. One obvious spin off benefit of this would be the cross fertilization of Caribbean thinking and, indeed, the opportunity to share in different languages with the attendant cultural exchanges and psychology that automatically goes with this experience.
5. **Shared graduate programs** – consistent with the provision of shared matriculation standards and free movements of students must be consideration for special programs that are currently in demand but not sufficiently available and which, in many instances, are difficult to access abroad. Among these would be programs in neuropsychology, clinical psychology, forensic sciences and others that can be identified. Shared graduate programs in such instances will further the Caribbean identity. This, at a minimum, will also show that the region, as a whole, is facilitative of the intellectual and

- professional growth and development of its people, young and old alike.
6. **Shared on line databases** – this will provide the remote access that will further academic and intellectual exchanges within the greater Caribbean region as an extension of the human interpersonal contacts.
  7. **Shared academic supervisions** – in this regard it will be facilitative for faculties of different national universities and colleges to collaborate and cross-fertilize ideas in the supervision of graduate students. Such students would then come away with a much broader perspective on the substantive subject matter, as shared by an international regional supervisor, and might therefore better inform the scholarship of Caribbean theory and practice.
  8. **Shared practicum sites** – like in the case of shared graduate supervision, the provision of suitable clinical and other practicum sites in different regional countries that can be available to the regions graduate students should become a given expectation and not merely an incidental occasional feature. Through this experience the Caribbean graduate student should come to better appreciate the prevailing resource differences and similarities between and among nations and hopefully will be able to foster a sense of regional bonding.
  9. **Faculty exchanges** – similar to that of student exchanges there should be the provision of faculty exchanges as an expected norm. While this will have the obvious advantage of faculty scholastic growth, it will simultaneously subtly signal to emerging scholars that, in addition to the historically benefits of metropolitan scholarship, it is also ok to achieve this within the Caribbean as well.
  10. **Shared standards in psychological testing and assessment** – this agenda item should be particularly central being as psychological testing and assessment forms one of the essential ingredients that defines psychology as a discipline. To date a great many of the testing instruments employed in the region have been norm and standardized elsewhere and thereby bringing into question the validity of usage in the Caribbean. It might be that an *Academy of Caribbean Psychologists* should be created with responsibility to address this and other related issues. Standardization of instruments would then reflect a sampling from across the Caribbean such as to encompass the various nuances of cultures and languages. Given the significant financial cost that goes along with such an enterprise there is also the added economic advantage to be gained by such collaboration.
  11. **Shared professional standards** - An Academy of Caribbean Psychologists would also have responsibility of determining the professional credentialing of psychologists in the region as determined by the region and not externally prescribed. The academy would determine the regional professional ethical standards including regional licensure and regional sub-discipline accreditations and board memberships. In this regard, the Caribbean standards and criteria need not be identical to those currently prescribed from elsewhere but might be an adaptation and be more embracing of local values and attitudes.
  12. **Collaborative research** – as research is always indispensable in shaping policy direction and guiding program monitoring and evaluation, there should be more concerted regional collaborative effort in this respect. Such collaborations would transcend psychology but would also encompass all enterprises and strategies that will foster regional growth and development. Indeed, to achieve this, the principles of psychological science with its capacity to understand and manage human thoughts and behaviors would be an undergirding factor.
  13. **Caribbean psychological theory building** – over time, many of the grand theories upon which much of psychology and the associated psychopathology and psychotherapy principles have been built were constructed outside of the region. This, as in the case of psychological testing and assessment, has brought into question the effective utility of some of the theoretical concepts from elsewhere when employed in the region. Caribbean research must therefore more assiduously seek to provide indigenous theoretical frames of reference to guide and validate the practice of psychology in the region. It should be of interest for Caribbean psychologist to research and formulate theoretical constructs that would seek to understand, for example, the comparatively low suicide rate in the region when compared to elsewhere. Caribbean theoretical principles (and research) would also want to address other issues like crime and violence, HIV/AIDS and general social development within the paradigm of its own theoretical constructs.
  14. **Caribbean psychological conferences** – the bringing together of the minds such as the 2011 Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology (Nassau, Bahamas), 2010 Round Table Seminar (University of Puerto Rico) and the annual Psychology Conference (University of the West Indies, Mona) are most laudable achievements. However, such events must be regular and sustained over an

extended period. In addition, major grand occasions should also be complimented and reinforced by even more frequent sectional gatherings that might target particular matters germane to the Caribbean cause of identity formation and bridge building. A research and scientific as well as a conceptual component structure to the conferences should continue to obtain. In addition, however, such conferences should make the effort to have strands that are aimed at further understanding, and treating with, psycho-cultural variables, such as gender and class features, in the region. This will serve to reinforce a sense of psychology bridge building if even at the confined level of academia only, with the hope of osmosis to the wider society.

15. **Psychology journals** - consistent with shared online databases recommendation for more regionally produced journals in psychology appears necessary and warranted. The very notable Journal of Inter-American Psychology and a fledging Caribbean Journal of Psychology (at the UWI), in addition to others that might be in circulation, appear, at this time, unable to effectively compete with the plethora of external originating psychology journals permeating the region. Invariably, such external sources of psychology information are not directly reflective of Caribbean realities.
16. **Shared literature and news** - the situation of insufficient Caribbean psychology journals becomes even more untenable when it is observed that, within the respective national public social space, there is a striking absence of general literature emerging from other Caribbean territories. Cross-territory print, audio and audio-visual materials are hardly to be found in public bookstores and libraries. If even to a lesser extent, the same might be true for the region's colleges and universities. While a claim of language barriers could be made in some instances, the effort must be made to have intra regional shared transmission and dissemination of information on the peoples' day-to-day experiences. Again, psychology and psychologists could provide the contextual frame for this to obtain and to be obtained not only when the news is spectacularly negative, but also when it is normal and spectacularly positive.
17. **Persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups** - as psychology is perhaps the discipline at the forefront championing the cause of persons with disabilities and the most vulnerable of the population, it is mandatory that there be no relenting in this position. In this sense a regional alliance should be declared and maintained. The mission of this effort would be to ensure that all develop-

mental considerations that are geared towards the able-bodied population be equally incorporated for the benefit of the physical, cognitive, emotional and otherwise alternatively able members. This thrust will doubtlessly broaden the scope of the processes of psychology serving towards bridge building in the Caribbean and further underscore the region as humanely caring beyond the sun, sand and seas.

18. **Cross-territory assessment and therapy** - one perhaps potentially complicated proposal for consideration is that of cross-territory personal psychological interventions. While there is some amount of cross territory psychological assessments that presently occur, usually with personnel from the larger more psychologically resourced territories being providers, this has been without sufficient systematic and structured guide lines. A concomitant concern is a matter of service provider-service users' confidentiality and inters personal sensibilities of some citizens of some Caribbean territories where population sizes and geographical space are comparatively small. In this context individuals with psychological intervention needs could be apprehensive about accessing service because of a fear of real, or imagined, unauthorized disclosure of personal information. The free movements of psychologists (and indeed people of the region) could assist in alleviating this dilemma.
19. **Free movements of labor** - while political discussions are taking place around the business of the free movements of labor within the Caribbean such discussions have centered on skilled personnel within the English speaking Caribbean (CARICOM) territories. The suggestion is here being made that mechanisms be found that such freedom of movements be opened up to all people of the greater region. In this arrangement, indeed early privilege should be accorded 'borderless psychologist' who would greatly assist in cultivating that atmosphere of Caribbean bridge building.
20. **Shared sporting and cultural talents** - as previously indicated, the region abounds with some special and specific sporting talents. A generous and constructive cross-national sharing of such talents should be encouraged. It might therefore not be too difficult to conceptualize high school level student exchanges within the region for the purpose of academics as well as sporting and cultural development and capacity building.
21. **Multi-lingual communication in the region** - but for the probably exception of Puerto Rico most territories of the region are dominantly mono-lingual when it comes on to spoken and

written expressive and receptive communication. A purposeful drive to make the populations of the region competent in its various languages should be a desired goal. To-date efforts at bi / multi lingual experience have been tame at best, and seem more focused for the benefit of metropolitan commerce and less so for integrating the Caribbean. As language is a major conduit through which people share cultures and ideas then, for the targeted purpose of bridge building in the Caribbean this must be a primary goal.

While the above proposals will, if carefully crafted and executed, foster a sense of Caribbean regionalism, this should, in no way, negate the shared sense of a greater global internationalism where historical traditional partners and partnerships, of necessity, must continue to be preserved. How, then, could this be designed might be the question. A brief practical construct for the purpose is provided next.

#### Towards a Practical Caribbean Bridge Building Agenda

In leveraging a practical Caribbean bridge building agenda an outline could be as follows:

A broad regionalist, as against a strict nationalist approach to growth and development in the Caribbean should be adopted. As a matter of necessity, however, this, in practice, is to be achieved without sacrificing traditional international relationships that have proven beneficial to the region in the past and that lends the promise of continuing to be so. This would, of necessity, require the regional Caribbean political leadership to harmonize and strengthen a political will towards an alliance. Such a demonstration would be a signal to the populace in the direction of a commonality of psychological and material purpose. By way of this token, then, would be the further shaping of a Caribbean psychology and bridge building.

A concept of Caribbean identity should be engendered and made crystallized and fostered in the schools among children at an early age. This could well begin with the cultivation of multilingualism and exposure to the literature and cultures of the region.

Restructuring any sense of negative competitive intra-regional rivalry among nation states and have this replaced with a sense of shared values and common destiny. Again, here the regional political leadership should lead. However, community based organizations could, and should, play a pivotal role such as could happen in the cross-national twinning of organizations and associations across the region.

Projecting the region as a place for the future, a place of peace and harmony to live, work and raise families.

A drive such as this would go beyond that which currently obtains in tourism travel brochures and magazine programs about the region.

Developint shared media communication strategies with a multi-lingual orientation. Here issues of copy rights and intellectual property rights would be aligned in a fashion to enhance mutual capacity building instead of negative competitiveness.

#### Final Remark

While it might be over ambitious, apparently seemingly simplistic even, perhaps even fallacious to presume and hope for a Unitary Caribbean Psychology in an increasingly competitively multi-polar world with competing sectarian interests, at a minimum it should be anticipated that there is survival and strength in unity. This must be so if even at a basic level of a Caribbean Psychological Identity that will recognize that mutual cooperation in common purpose is not the same as sameness in being. The Caribbean person, while individually unique, as a collective will harbor a shared world view which, for reason of a peculiar and discrete historical sociology and psychology, will interpret the world perhaps differently from many others.

The region of the Caribbean, and certainly the Anglo Caribbean, has, for the longest post colonial while, not experienced any overt hostile and aggressive external enmity. As such, shaped by the shared force of a Caribbean Psychological Identity, in the grand scheme of things, the region could, for example, be an essential pivot in the psychology of international conflict mediation and resolution and the resultant atmosphere of world peace. Should such become an accomplishment, such a development could well redound to the reduction of world hunger, the mitigation of natural and manmade disasters and the ultimate cessation of global human suffering.

It would appear, indeed, that there is a critical space, and place, for Psychology Bridge Building in the Caribbean. Psychology it is, as a science, an art, a discipline and a culture, perhaps more than any other vocation that has that capacity of viewing and interpreting the world, with its varied and complex machinations, from a non-idiosyncratic perch but through the organic prism of the greater human condition. Can there be the socio-economic platform, the operational methodologies, and, perhaps most importantly, the political will to accommodate the processes of psychology in filling the existing vacuum and bridging the gap? Further, if, as it should be hoped, there can be an atmosphere of consensus developed around this agenda, then what time frame would be considered plausible...a decade

from this point forward? Or in a generation to come?... and how might this be initiated, orchestrated and driven given the preexisting complexities such as nationalism, local cultures and issues of language variability? All these are some questions that must be ultimately pondered in the discussion around Caribbean identity and psychology as a bridge. As Ignacio Martin-Baro and Paulo Freire are still waiting a further discourse to this end is urgent and is certainly worthwhile for the future and the hope of a concrete realization of the promise.

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Received 01/08/2013

Accepted 03/04/2013

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