**Commentary: Co-Producing Caribbean Geographies of In/Security**

Ahead of the 2012 RGS conference, Chris Philo ([2012](#_ENREF_23)), that year’s chair, used the Boundary Crossing format to set out the relevance of security as a theme for Geography. The article did the important preliminary work of unfixing the meanings of security to allow it to be used flexibly by a wide range of geographers during what was a very successful conference. In particular the article introduced a fertile heuristic distinction within security, a distinction that nonetheless assumes a range of interlinkages: the distinction between big-S and small-s security. Despite the fact that Philo ([2012, 2](#_ENREF_23)) introduces this as a distinction between the “human-scale…[ and] the scale of, say, nation-states waging war”, the S/s distinction need not be understood as simply scalar. Seen in relation to similar interlinked distinctions within feminist geography and more specifically within feminist geopolitics, such as ”P/politics” or “drones and the day to day” ([Koopman 2011, 275](#_ENREF_14)), as well as in relation to Philo’s ([2012, 3](#_ENREF_23)) parallel reference to the more familiar Geography/geography distinction, the big-S/small-s security distinction can be understood as a blurred boundary line separating more and less intense shades of professionalism, formality or bureaucracy from more and less intense shades of the private, the informal and the everyday. To put it another way, the large-scale and small-scale activities of security professionals and institutions - from international military movements to localised checkpoint searches and biometric technologies (see for example [Adey 2009](#_ENREF_1), [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2011](#_ENREF_9)) - need to be understood as both separate and interlinked with both large-scale and small-scale security concerns and activities of people in their everyday lives - from organised transnational anti-war movements to psychic and corporeal trauma experienced by individuals in their homes and in their neighbourhoods ([Fluri 2010](#_ENREF_5)). This article seeks to bring this complex notion of the big-S/small-S distinction into relationship with this year’s (2014) RGS conference theme, the co-production of knowledge, through a located focus on the co-production of Caribbean big-S and small-s securities.

The focus on Caribbean securities and insecurities comes out of an interdisciplinary and international network that has been developing for the past year. Bringing together Caribbean and British academics in Geography, History, Dance Studies, Theology, Dispute Resolution and Literature, the network explores the effects of relocating the centre of security knowledges to the Caribbean. The network’s preliminary workshop, held at the University of Sheffield last year, found that a focus on security in the Caribbean unsettles the new-millennial, US-centric quality of post-9/11 security preoccupations, and forces both a longer historical perspective and a wider global perspective. This commentary briefly interrogates three areas of co-production that are highlighted by a focus on Caribbean in/securities: first, the historical co-production of the region *with* the profound insecurities of slavery and colonialism; second, the banal international co-production of in/security in the region as a crossroads of globalisation; and finally, the implications of recent discursive constructions of co-production for the everyday in/security of the region’s precariat. Each of these co-productions in turn illustrates the co-production of big-S and small-S security, and the commentary ends with a plea for engagement with the concepts produced by Caribbean theorists and other from the global South in relation to the insecurities of co-production.

**Historical co-production of the Caribbean region: slavery as in/security**

To acknowledge a longer history of in/security, taking in the genocide, slavery and colonialism that produced the Caribbean as a region, is to move beyond discrete events of terror towards forms of systemic violence, into which the everyday lives of thousands of embodied individuals were structured over five centuries. This recognises the violence of occupations, of plantation clearances, and of large-scale forced transatlantic movements of millions of bodies as both producing and produced by the intimate corporeal violence of murder, rape and disfigurement that went into disciplining enslaved people, as well as the psychological violence of voiding and reinvestment of those black bodies with racialised meaning, a process of literal denigration. The legacies of both of these co-produced in/securities, big S and small s, are still experienced within the region (cf. CARICOM reparations).

The concept of co-production is also helpful in understanding the securitised politics of struggle within slavery. Slavery was a system dominated by the logic of capital ([Williams 1994](#_ENREF_31)), but in its everyday systems it was co-produced by the resistances of enslaved people, in terms of their use of their own skills to improve their own situation ([Beckles 1989](#_ENREF_2)) and in terms of their slow attrition of the system through struggle, including violent struggles that frequently induced terror amongst slave owners ([Lambert 2005](#_ENREF_15)). Moreover, the mercantile systems within which slavery was lucrative were also produced through and productive of assemblages and networks that were characterised as much by politicised struggle as they were by processes of exploitation and appropriation ([Featherstone 2011](#_ENREF_4)). So slavery was both produced by and productive of violence and insecurity – slavery and insecurity co-produced each other in the history of the Caribbean.

**Living with the international co-production of in/security**

In a time of global flows, the Caribbean has been produced as a region with a dense network of international connections – it is a global ‘crossroads’ ([Nettleford 1994](#_ENREF_20)). In fact, similar to war-torn central Africa, the region could be said to have an ‘excess’ of global connections ([Sidaway 2003](#_ENREF_27)) that co-produce its insecurities. Most obviously, the region’s geopolitical significance as the US’s ‘backyard’ has made it a recurring focus for western anxieties (not only during Cold War conflicts such as the Cuban missile crisis but also in more current concerns about the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay) ([Lievesley 2006](#_ENREF_17)). Moreover the region is also vulnerable to environmental and climatic changes of global significance ([Rhiney forthcoming](#_ENREF_25)), and its exposure to global flows of illegal drugs and illegal arms exacerbate the region’s battles with violent criminality ([Griffith 2004](#_ENREF_7)).

This international co-production of Caribbean security, in which a range of international actors struggle to produce and reduce both big-S and small-s insecurities, is the background to a range of Caribbean actors’ everyday deployment and negotiation of a range of in/securities. In the context of armed criminality in urban areas, some groups have economic and political stakes in strategically maintaining the violence, contributing to the durability of disorder ([Goodhand 2003](#_ENREF_6), [Clarke 2006](#_ENREF_3)). However, in creative arenas like dance, music, and literature, the instability of meaning produced by forms of chronic insecurity can be productive of new insights or subversive messages. Calypsonians can use the instability of word meanings to negotiate against violence ([Phillips 2006](#_ENREF_22)), whilst in Jamaican dancehall the unpredictable failure of female dancers’ clothing to avoid exposure and the instability of meaning attached to this exposure is part of the element of risk that is consumed in dancehall spaces ([Patten 2014](#_ENREF_21)).

The insecurity of meaning is often discussed in the region’s literature as a feature of the colonial and postcolonial co-production of Caribbean culture. Many, like CLR James ([Hogsbjerg 2012](#_ENREF_8))and Patrick Chamoiseau ([Johnson 2013](#_ENREF_10)), express the ambivalence that comes from the combination of a mature political recognition of the violence and insecurity of a colonial upbringing (in which one’s own ideas and experiences in the Caribbean are devalued in favour of those of the metropolis), with the affection and nostalgia that one nonetheless feels for concepts and experiences that are profoundly formative. The imposed, often violent, but nonetheless longstanding and therefore profound co-production of knowledge and culture can create potent mixtures of desire and antipathy for psychically and physically damaging colonial experiences and educations that people had to struggle to survive – what Chamoiseau describes as “envie et survie” (desire and survival) ([Johnson 2013](#_ENREF_10)). Nobel prize-winning poet Derek Walcott ([1998, p. 24](#_ENREF_30))has wryly expressed in the figure of a kind of echo, another aspect of the difficult co-production of postcolonial culture, in which this co-produced Caribbean culture is itself appropriated and returned: “It was always the fate of the West Indian to meet himself coming back, and he would discover the power of simplicity, the graces of his open society, only after others had embraced it as a style.” So in/security in the Caribbean is co-produced by a range of global flows and is re-negotiated creatively in the region, though not without an often painful ambivalence.

**Constructions of co-production and the claims of precarious life**

Many of the poorest people in the Caribbean region are subject to transnational processes of precaritisation ([Butler, in Puar et al. 2012, 169](#_ENREF_24)), making insecurity a condition that has characterised their livelihoods and living conditions since well before the word ‘precariat’ was recently coined ([Munck 2013](#_ENREF_19)). These processes are themselves co-produced internationally, as processes of capital formation that are produced: “out of diverse projects, strategies and experiments which are co-constitutive, and through on-going encounters, engagements, contingencies, outcomes and the active working of agents” ([Lewis, Larner and Le Heron 2008, p. 44](#_ENREF_16)). Consequently, Wendy Knepper ([2012](#_ENREF_12)) marks an awareness of this chronic precarity as an established theme in Caribbean literature, with an often explicit concern for “the claims of precarious life” ([Knepper 2013, 170](#_ENREF_13)).

An area that highlights the co-production of insecure livelihoods is that of remittances from those who have migrated out of the Caribbean. The region has well-documented patterns of out-migration, and many of the islands have substantial numbers of households who rely on flows of income from the diaspora ([Thomas-Hope 2002](#_ENREF_28), [Trotz and Mullings 2013](#_ENREF_29)). Despite the risk of dependency, remittances can be an informal but reliable guard against social insecurity for the poorest households, guaranteed by familial bonds rather than state entitlements ([Joseph and Hamilton 2014](#_ENREF_11)). However, when remittances come overwhelmingly from those whose immigration status is insecure ([Sampson and Branch-Vital 2013](#_ENREF_26)), livelihood insecurity can be co-produced transnationally, with no guarantees either for sender or for recipient.

Allison Trotz and Beverley Mullings’ ([2013](#_ENREF_29)) recent critiques of attempts by Caribbean governments to encourage increased investment from diaspora groups point to neoliberal constructions of co-production as potential sources of increased precarity for the poorest in the region. Mullings’ ([2012, 420-1](#_ENREF_18)) analysis of a diaspora conference organised by the Jamaican government demonstrates that diasporic groups can fail to challenge the market priorities of invitations to invest and, more particularly, can fail to address the human rights abuses and narrow punitive focus of official security forces’ responses to criminality, whilst ignoring the structural inequalities and transnational flows that produce it. Where co-production is constructed mainly to serve the market, it can ignore the claims of precarious lives, and increase their insecurities.

**Conclusion**

Each of these three aspects of the co-production of insecurity highlights aspects of co-production. First, the histories of co-production of slavery and insecurity in the region, highlight that, to use a well-worn phrase, place matters in co-production: histories of places provide the contexts and relationships out of which co-produced knowledge arises. Second, the constant negotiation of the international co-production of insecurity, both in terms of its violence and in terms of postcolonial culture, highlight the fact that co-production is a contested terrain that has to be negotiated, not just celebrated. Finally, neoliberal constructions of co-production can increase insecurity for the most precarious lives.

This last point leads to our final plea. Co-production is a fertile concept, promising the kind of listening and recognition of mutuality of knowledge production that postcolonial theorists have been demanding for many years. However it is a concept that is itself insecure – it is by no means fixed in its construction and demands critique as much as celebration. The wide range of concepts and theories produced by Caribbean intellectuals and other postcolonial theorists to describe co-production as a lived postcolonial condition would be an excellent critical starting point for discussions in the 2014 conference.

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