Introduction: North American In Question

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Introduction: North America in Question

Recent discussions of the North American region have had an air of skepticism, or even gloom. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), once heralded by governments and economists in Canada, the United States, and Mexico as the key to the economic prosperity of the region, appears to have run its course. The ongoing global financial crisis, born in the United States, has hit the region hard, with profound implications for the future of continental economic integration and more broadly for what limited sense of regional community may have existed. Mexico, which was supposed to be the main beneficiary of NAFTA, has entered a period of crisis characterized by severe economic, political, and security challenges. The United States appears increasingly unsure of itself and adrift, beset by a dysfunctional political system and a public uncharacteristically lacking in confidence of its economic future and global role. Meanwhile, while Canada appears less destabilized by the economic crisis, the country nonetheless seems afflicted by ineffective minority government with no interest in deepening the trilateral relationship.

Additionally, the mechanisms for political governance of the region are in doubt. NAFTA created very few regional institutions, most of which have little relevance (see Clarkson 2008; Ayres and Macdonald 2006). The labour and environmental side agreements, which attracted some attention and excitement in the mid-1990s as potential mechanisms for civil society engagement, have been largely deemed inconsequential. In 2005, the three governments created the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), as a means of extending the benefits of continental integration after most

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elements of the NAFTA agreement had been implemented, and after the attacks of 9/11 had re-shaped continental relationships and threatened cross-border trading relationships. The proponents of the SPP had hoped to deepen regional integration with broad-based regulatory harmonization through bureaucratic negotiations designed to bypass the various political obstacles and protectionist impulses of the legislative arenas. However, at some point during 2009, the three governments quietly pulled the plug on the SPP, without any fanfare or public announcement. As a result, the framework for political governance of North America was left in question, and pressures to abandon the trilateral model have grown stronger, recently captured in the title of a recent Economist article, “Canada and NAFTA: No Mariachis Please” (2009).

In this context, North America faces an existential dilemma: does it exist at all as a meaningful political entity, economic region, cultural idea or community in the midst of the global economic crisis and changing and unpredictable political re-alignments? Clearly, with hindsight, even before the global financial crisis erupted in late 2008, questions were being raised about the substance and future of the North American region. One of the most important recent academic evaluations of North America, by Stephen Clarkson, is titled provocatively Does North America Exist?, and questions whether North America “exists in any way similar to the EU, with its increasing political, economic, sociological, and cultural integration” (2008: 15). A 2007 edited collection by Isabel Studer and Carol Wise titled Requiem or Revival? suggests further uncertainty. Although the book’s subtitle, “The Promise of North American Integration” appears somewhat optimistic about the prospects for deeper integration, many of the book’s contributors highlight the limitations of NAFTA and the obstacles to deeper integration.
and strengthening of a sense of community across the continent. Finally, a more recent volume, *Contentious Politics in North America: National Protest and Transnational Collaboration Under Continental Integration* (Ayres and Macdonald 2009), highlighted the long and still evolving pattern of opposition to integration undertaken by continental civil society groups. While earlier civil society mobilizations and cross-border exchanges sought to develop a more coherent social democratic and environmentally-sustainable alternative to NAFTA, more recent protests have included right-wing, xenophobic impulses condemning any efforts at cross-border cooperation.

This book brings together leading analysts from the three North American countries to reflect on the region’s immediate challenges, including the recent financial crisis, which has only intensified the political and economic challenges across the region. One of our central preoccupation is assessing whether North American integration has reached a plateau, and question whether continued integration is inevitable or is a disintegration of the project of a deeper North American community more likely? Contributors to the volume consider the impact that the current financial instability, deep and prolonged economic recession, mounting political uncertainty and mushrooming cross-border problems across the three states are having on the North American project. Will the current impulses towards bilateralism further destabilize the North American region? In the face of rising protectionist pressures and nationalist passions, can a more transparent, inclusive form of regional governance be developed to respond to the burgeoning array of transborder problems involving drugs, migrants, a deteriorating environment, energy concerns, terrorist threats and economic decline? What about the perceived democratic deficit across the region, and could the inclusion of a wider array of
civil society stakeholders inject future discussions on North America with a greater sense of legitimacy and wider public acceptance?

In addition to providing a timely appraisal of current economic crisis and its impact on the various dimensions of North American integration, we hope to develop a fresh theoretical approach to understanding North American issues. Three conceptual perspectives are considered variously throughout the book to help understand the recent evolution of the North American region, and consider trends towards convergence or divergence. First, we invite interpretations from the “new regionalism” school, which include an emphasis on developments in the broader global economic environment, a concern for the diversity of actors involved in integration processes, and an interest in informal or illicit dimensions to continental integration that are frequently overlooked in mainstream integration theory. Second, we consider insights from the literature on the “democratic deficit,” and the potential democratizing impact on processes of regional governance through the participation of a wider array of stakeholders across the civil society of the continent. Finally, we are interested in ideational aspects of North America, encouraging more consideration of the role played by ideas, norms and identities on the construction (or destruction) of a North American community.

Overall, we argue, North America in its multiple dimensions has existed, and will continue to exist. Despite its problems, high levels of economic integration already exist, which create shared problems for which some degree of conscious cooperation and public governance are required. Nevertheless, the prevailing economic model upon which economic integration in North America was based, which, arguably more than any other world region, assumed that free trade and liberalized markets would deliver higher
standards of living for all residents, has been subject to fundamental criticism. Moreover, the political model of shallow governance (Ayres and Macdonald 2006) characterized by limited regional institutions and entrenched state sovereignty, and lack of democratic participation by citizens in defining the future of the region, has also failed, as witnessed by the demise of the SPP. The so-called bicycle theory of multilateral trade liberalization (Bergsten and Cline 1982: 71), posits that multilateral trade talks must move forward toward higher levels of liberalization, or else they will collapse. If the same is true of regional integration, then the North American project is in deep trouble.²

_**Impact of the Financial Crisis on the North American Model**_

The financial crisis has had a dramatic impact on the economies of the three North American states in the short term, and raises important questions about the future of the economic model upon which North American integration was based. While both Canada and the United States are facing economic problems not seen for decades, the economic crisis is much deeper in Mexico, which was already facing significant economic challenges. In 2008, economic growth was sluggish, reaching only 0.4 per cent in Canada, 0.4 per cent in the United States and 1.3 per cent in Mexico. Based on a late 2009 analysis, the IMF predicted a decline of 2.5 per cent in the Canadian GDP in 2009, a decline of 2.7 per cent in the United States and a dismal decline of 7.3 per cent in Mexico (source International Monetary Fund 2009) (INSERT TABLE 1).

Even though Canada, and to a lesser extent Mexico, had maintained significant autonomy from the U.S. financial system, both countries’ economies are seriously

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² Of course the European Union has gone through periods of progress, to be followed by phases in which regional integration stalled. The EU possesses, however, strong regional institutions, that can maintain the regional ideal even while political progress is stalled, and then revive it when more propitious circumstances emerge. Europe also possesses a stronger sense of itself as a region and regional identity is much more deeply engrained than in North America.
affected in the medium-term by the downturn of the economy of their major trading partner, the United States. Mexico is also hard-hit by the effect of the recession on migrants’ remittances. While U.S. border control policies have had little effect on reducing the flow of migrants, the recession seems to have reduced migration, at least temporarily. Mexico’s statistical agency, INEGI, reports that migration has declined by over 50 percent from August 2007 to August 2008, from 455,000 to 204,000 people (Littlefield, COHA). Since remittances have represented a significant element of Mexico’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), even though their exact size is difficult to calculate, a decline in remittances has serious implications for the country’s economy.

While leaders that embrace largely the parameters of neoliberalism currently remain in place in Canada and Mexico, the recession has brought about a dramatic shift in U.S. leadership. The election of Barack Obama, who during his election campaign called for a renegotiation of NAFTA, signals a popular disenchantment with free trade in the political system of the region’s hegemon, rising protectionist pressures and a temporary revival of Keynesianism. All three countries have adopted stimulus packages and deficit-spending strategies to counter the recession. The United States’ policies to control its borders after 9/11, and the more recent “Buy American” provision of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act adopted by the Obama administration to counter the threat to American jobs, also has been perceived by Canadian business and government as representing unfair restrictions on Canada’s access to the U.S. economy that NAFTA was designed to guarantee.

Most concerning for advocates of greater integration is the prospect that the effects of the current recession are not limited to the short- to-medium term, but that we
may be seeing a long-term structural evolution of the North American economy that affects intra-regional trade. NAFTA was undertaken as part of an economic strategy that envisioned ever-higher levels of integrated cross-border production based on the “just-in-time” principle. A just in time production strategy is designed around the idea that instead of stockpiling large quantities of finished goods and spare parts, producers would contract suppliers to provide needed parts within hours when required, a strategy that often depended upon rapid transportation across the Canada-U.S. and U.S-Mexico land borders. After the adoption of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) and NAFTA, we saw a dramatic increase in cross-border trade and investment levels, and intra-firm trade. Intra-regional trade rose some 200 per cent in the first years after NAFTA was implemented, much higher than the rise in trade with the rest of the world.

However, the recent crises in the automobile and steel sectors, which were perhaps the most integrated industries in this North American economy, call into question this model of North American economic development. These problems are not just related to the 2009 crisis, although they were certainly aggravated by it. A 2007 Conference Board of Canada briefing report stated that U.S. border controls means that Canadian exporters had changed their approach to trade since 9/11, adopting less efficient practices of stockpiling goods in warehouses that prevailed before the adoption of just-in-time: “These responses may indicate an erosion of some of the advantages of greater U.S. market access gained under the free trade agreement and its successor, [NAFTA]. This, in turn, could make it less attractive to buy Canadian inputs or locate production in Canada, ultimately diminishing Canadian living standards.” (Conference Board of Canada, June 2007: 2). A more recent Conference Board report, authored by Danielle
Goldfarb and Doris Chu, argues that a rapid increase in Canadian firms’ integration into global and regional supply chains that occurred in the 1990s reached a plateau after 2000, largely reflecting decreased Canada-U.S. trade in inputs. This report argues that the post 9/11 security environment is not to blame for the slowdown in trade volumes, but instead targets remaining non-tariff barriers, such as regulatory differences, between Canada, the United States and Mexico (Goldfarb and Chu: 2008). Another factor may be increased competition from China and other emerging markets (Goldfarb, Carleton University, January 15, 2009).

Mexico faces particularly serious problems in the current environment. Mexico has been the slowest-growing country in the Latin America region, in contrast to countries like Brazil, Chile and Argentina, which were registering high levels of growth through the 1990s and early 2000s. The low-value-added economic model adopted by Mexico after the debt crisis, designed to attract industry to the maquiladora region based on its low wage levels, was strongly challenged by China’s entry into the WTO in 2001. Mexico’s failure to diversify its economy into more high-value-added sectors has resulted in low growth levels and persistent high levels of poverty. The crisis of peasant agriculture after the Salinas government’s rapid and unilateral liberalization of agriculture prior to NAFTA have devastasted the rural areas and fuelled high levels of migration. Mexico’s competitiveness has also been adversely affected by the drug cartels’ relocation of drug transshipments from Colombia to Mexican territory. This development has led to high levels of drug-related violence, particularly in the border areas that were earlier benefiting from the NAFTA strategy, that have driven away investment.
Overall, levels of intra-regional trade appear to be declining significantly in the North American region, and have been affected more than other world regions [Insert Table 2]. Cross-border travel has also declined dramatically in the post-9-11 period. U.S. resident cross-border travel to Canada has declined from a level of 38,743,000 crossings in 2000 to 17,784,000 in 2008 (Canadian crossings remained more or less stable). U.S. resident cross border travel to Mexico declined over the same period from 94,140,000 to 73,987,000.\footnote{US travel to Canada was undoubtedly affected by the rise in the Canadian dollar in addition to new travel restrictions.} The future of North American integration thus appears unclear. These patterns are magnified by the economic crisis, and presumably interaction among the three countries will increase again once economic recovery occurs, but it is not clear whether they will return to pre-crisis levels.

*Theories of Regionalism – Where does North America Fit?*

One of the objectives of this volume is to evaluate the usefulness of dominant theories of regionalism to explain the North American case. The North American pattern of a rapid increase in levels of integration followed by stagnation and (at least short-term) decline is not easily explained using dominant theories, based upon the European model, that predict inevitable and irreversible progress toward ever-higher levels of integration. The most influential theories of regionalism, functionalism and neo-functionalism, emerged from the context of post-war integration in Europe. Functionalism, associated with advocates of European integration like David Mitrany, was highly technocratic, predicting that the promotion of increased cooperation in technical “low politics” areas by enlightened, rational elites would gradually and inevitably lead to higher levels of integration. In reaction to the apolitical character of this approach, neofunctionalist
theorists like Haas placed greater emphasis on the role of non-governmental actors who would, they believe, gradually gain an interest in greater cross-border cooperation, and push for higher levels of integration. They believed that the formation of a regional bloc, and the rapid expansion of trade and investment linkages that followed, would generate problems that would lead to higher levels of institutionalization and cooperation. New transnational institutions would address technical problems, and once progress was made in a specific area, a process of spillover would automatically generate cooperation in ever more areas (O’Brien 1995: 696.). Neo-functionalists also emphasized the important role played by supranational institutions that would promote higher levels of cooperation and to which states would eventually cede elements of their sovereignty.

The authors of the integration project in North America explicitly rejected the European model of integration advocated by the functionalists and neo-functionalists. The United States in particular, but also Mexico and Canada, jealously protected state sovereignty, and were skeptical of international institutions. As a result, North America has few institutions, and those that exist are extremely weak. Moreover, a prominent feature of the North American integration process has been the opposition it has generated from non-state actors other than business, in contrast with the pro-integrationist role neo-functionalists expected civil society to play (see Ayres and Macdonald 2009). And, as discussed in this volume, the process of integration has not been automatic. Theories of North American regionalism thus must remain open to the role of contingency and agency in the evolution of continental relationships.

We suggest in this volume that alternative theoretical models and conceptual approaches provide more insight into the dynamics of regionalism in the North American
context. Theories of the new regionalism emerged in the 1990s in response to a new wave of regional integration schemes, including CUSFTA and NAFTA, but also including new regional blocs in Asia, Africa and the Americas. While European approaches focused primarily on intra-regional dynamics as instigating and promoting integration, the theorists of the new regionalism placed significant emphasis on the role of the broader global economy. In the case of North America, such international factors as the growth of regionalism in Europe, the decline of U.S. international hegemony and the rise of U.S. protectionism, as well as the general process of globalization played an important role in the decision of North American state actors to pursue a regionalist strategy. As well, we argue, in the current environment, the global financial crisis plays an important role in the current crisis of the regional project, as well as the rise of other important global competitors like China.

Another important contribution of the new regionalism approach is its promotion of a more pluralistic understanding of the nature of regionalism, and of the actors involved in the process. In contrast to the rather statist orientation of much of the European literature, theorists of the new regionalism emphasize the importance of non-state actors. As we will explore in this volume, both business and non-business civil society actors play an important role in the evolution of the North American region. Business leaders were important advocates of CUSFTA and NAFTA, and during the SPP were taken on board as official advisors of the heads of state. The leaders even created a North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), composed of representatives of big business in the three countries, to advise them on how to increase the competitiveness of the North American region.
Non-business civil society actors were, on the other hand, extremely critical of what they viewed as the secretive and exclusionary model of decision-making adopted in the adoption of both the NAFTA and the SPP. While they failed to derail the CUSFTA and NAFTA, civil society opposition did provoke President Clinton to adopt the side agreements on labour and environment, in an attempt to satisfy important elements of the constituency of the Democratic Party. The anticipation of civil society opposition also played an important role in shaping the nature of the SPP. Fearing popular opposition to more ambitious integration projects, the architects of the SPP adopted a low-profile model of bureaucratic cooperation and consultation across borders that would, they had hoped, result in regulatory convergence without requiring parliamentary or congressional approval. Nonetheless, the SPP generated significant public skepticism and opposition. True to its below-the-radar style, the SPP was quietly dropped by the three North American governments, without public announcement or consultation. Civil society leaders have claimed victory in its demise. Clearly, both business and non-business civil society actors have played an important role in the ongoing evolution of the North American region. The “new regionalism’s” focus on the role of diverse actors also involves, to some extent, a greater emphasis on the role of agency in the construction of new regions.

Finally, in addition to recognizing the diversity of the actors involved in the integration process, theorists of the new regionalism tend to adopt a more holistic and pluralistic understanding of the nature of the process of regionalization itself. While mainstream integration theories tend to focus on the more obvious elements of regionalization that are explicit objectives of the architects of integration (such as new
regional institutions or increased trade and investment flows), theories of the new regionalism include an emphasis on unintended or even unwanted dimensions of the integration process. These may include “illicit” activities such as the trade in drugs or weapons, or undocumented migration, or widespread devastation of small-scale Mexican farmers unable to compete with subsidized U.S. agricultural exports. As we will see in this volume, perhaps because the initial objectives of North American integration were so limited (essentially just the increase in economic linkages with little attention to the social and political dimensions of integration), the unintended consequences are many, and the mechanisms to deal with these problems in a cooperative fashion are extremely limited. These unintended or informal elements of the regionalization process may have important consequences for the formal dimensions.

As well, theories of the new regionalism, which often focus on regions in the Global South, also pay more attention to the development implications of these regional arrangements. The case of North America, the first world region to include both a developing country (Mexico) as well as two of the world’s wealthiest countries (Canada and the United States), has potentially important lessons for other developing countries. Mexico’s failure to achieve significantly improved living standards despite its access to these two affluent markets, and its accelerating political-security crisis, has presented a significant challenge to the broader integration project, and may help explain the region’s weak level of cohesion and legitimacy. Again, many unintended consequences of integration are relevant to this developmental focus, including changing immigration flows across the U.S.-Mexican border, continental labour market restructuring, the fate of women’s rights and pressures to privatize Mexico’s energy resources.
Ideas Matter: Restructuring North American Politics

While theories of the new regionalism provide significant insights into the political economy of regionalization in the context of globalization, other important perspectives can be drawn from constructivist approaches. Mainstream integration theories tend to take interests as given, and view ideas as epiphenomenal. Constructivists do not deny the importance of interests, but contend that there is no such thing as a “real” interest independent from the discursive context in which they emerge (Diez, 2001: 86). Moreover it is how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region and notions of “regionness” that is critical: all regions are socially constructed and hence politically contested (Hurrell 1995:38-39). In recent years, constructivist approaches have become increasingly influential in the study of the European Union (Diez and Wiener 2004: 9; Rosamond 2001). As well, as Larner and Walters note, some of the “new regionalists” have begun to engage with constructivism and have placed greater attention on the “inventedness” of regions, but most “remain wedded to the notion that regions, the objects of `new regionalism,’ exist prior to discourses about them” (2002: 393).

In the context of North America, most of the early literature relied heavily upon interest-based approaches. Both neoliberal advocates of integration, and neo-Marxist critics, tended to approach the birth and evolution of the North American region as the outcome of the pursuit of rational self-interest by state and business actors. More recently, however, and particularly since 9/11, some authors have emphasized the importance of ideas and processes of identity construction. The “idea” of North America has certainly been debated and constructed throughout many different continental civil society venues, from social activist groups on the U.S.-Mexican border, to labour and
environmental groups engaged in cross-border collaboration, to academics circles. The post-NAFTA proliferation of conferences, civil society networks and the rapid cross-border diffusion of information via the Internet has encouraged a process of learning about the “continental other” that has challenged the elite-driven conception of North America as a model of trade and investment liberalization in an otherwise social vacuum. “Inventing” or “envisioning” North America conferences have been held in major research universities across Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, including Duke University, Carleton University and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where academics with little previous contact have grappled with visions of an emergent North American community.

Thus, we feel ideational or constructivist accounts are particularly useful in explaining the recent stalling of the seemingly intractable integration process. Emily Gilbert argues that a discourse of inevitability has surrounded discussions of North American integration since the 9/11 attacks: this language of inevitability, she argues, harnesses facts and figures, institutions, and practices in such a way as to legitimate particular kinds of neoliberal proposals in the name of national sovereignty while, at the same time, limiting the options that can be placed on the table for discussion. It is this fatalism that has infused the proposals with their greatest potency (2005: 204).

Despite this apparent inevitability of integration, she argues, a Foucauldian perspective emphasizes the potential for contestation of dominant discourses: “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1980, cited in Gilbert 2005: 216). As she
comments, the rise of protectionism in the United States and “generally lukewarm interest in the proposals [for deeper integration] also indicate that the inevitability of deeper North American economic integration is shaky at best” (Gilbert 2005: 216).

Stephanie Golob presents another constructivist reading of Canada-U.S. border politics after 9/11 in the North American context. As she argues, constructivist accounts help to account for a variety of state behaviors that might otherwise be viewed as unlikely or irrational: “States . . . delineate and judge their options for international action based upon criteria that may advance symbolic or identity-inscribed values as opposed to material interests” (2002: 8). She notes that constructivist scholars view state identity as consisting of both “a subjective self-schema, or the story one tells to oneself about what makes the self unique, and an inter-subjective assessment of the meaning of the self and its role in a society of states based upon how one is viewed by others” (Golob 2002). The project of North American integration, and its discourse of inevitability, has thus been troubled by ambivalence among the participating states regarding “mutual identification”, based upon the historical asymmetry of the region and historical sensitivities over sovereignty.

Thus a teleological version of “the story of ‘North America’ is punctuated by the intrusion of ideological and identity-inscribed borders erected by the two national governments and defended via foreign policy rhetoric, ostensibly to protect ‘the nation’ from the neighbor’s designs on its sovereignty, security, and identity” (Golob 2002). If successful region-building projects are based on a process of gradual identification of all participating states as “us” and identification of outsiders as “them,” the architects of North American regionalism have been woefully unsuccessful. If this is true even for the
Canada-US relationship discussed in this article by Golob, it is even more applicable to the U.S.-Mexican relationship, which has been gradually submerged below a protectionist and xenophobic tide in U.S. public opinion.\(^4\) Subjective identification between Canadians and Mexicans remains very weak, and Mexicans’ normally rather benign view of Canada has been aggravated by Canada’s recent imposition of a visa requirement on Mexican visitors. The disappearance or demise of the SPP, despite official state support from the three member states (until the election of Obama), and from the corporate sector in all three countries, is a sign of the contingency of regional projects. This collection contributes to our understanding of the role of identity construction and the social construction of interests in the process of regional integration or disintegration.

*Citizenship and the North American Democratic Deficit*

Another important contribution of this collection is the authors’ consideration of the implications of recent events for democracy and citizenship in the North American region. As previously noted, civil society actors have again played a major role in shaping the debate over North American integration since the divisive debates and negotiations over the Canada–U.S. Free Trade Agreement in the mid-1980s. Since that time, much of the ongoing debate—including some of the previous discussion—over continental integration has revolved around the socio-economic costs and benefits of potentially deepening the relationship between the Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Accelerated manufacturing job losses, increased conflicts over drugs and illegal immigration, devastated small farmers, unequal distribution of productivity gains—these

\(^4\) For other references to the usefulness of constructivist explanations of North American regionalism see Duina 2006; Spitz 2009; Mace 2007 and Capling and Nossal 2009.
are but some of the ongoing concerns that have motivated civil society groups across the continental to engage in frequent acts of protest and transnational collaboration (see Ayres and Macdonald 2009). However, North American integration and its limited governance structures can also be criticized on normative grounds, and found to suffer from democratic deficits that arguably have further compromised the project of building a North American community.

In fact, the question of North America’s future can not be disentangled from concerns over democracy and citizenship, and this volume brings discussions over democratic deficits—both in terms of institutions and actors—into conceptualizations of the trends and turbulence afflicting the region. Our concern lies with what appear to be anti-democratic outcomes evolving from attempts to deepen North American integration—particularly through the failed SPP and anything that might seek to replicate that process—efforts which do not invite a close examination by elected representatives or more widely public scrutiny. We hope to raise and respond to a number of questions about democracy and citizenship including: 1) whether democratic reforms to North American governance including enhancing and broadening the participation of civil society actors in regional policy-making might help to enhance the legitimacy of the concept of a North American community; and 2) how has the failure to ensure full participation of civil society actors hobbled the project of North American cooperation and governance and encouraged not only a rise in contentious political opposition but a virulent streak of fear-mongering, xenophobia and conspiracy-theorizing from an increasingly restless and unpredictable populist right-wing in the United States.
The literature on global governance and democratic deficits has become voluminous and has been applied to conceptualize defects in a wide variety of regional and global institutions (Held 1995; Nye 2001; Scholte 2002; Glenn 2008; Steffek, Kissling and Nanz 2008). While it has been used perhaps more frequently to support the concerns of Euroskeptics critical of the pace and direction of European integration, the concept of a democratic deficit more generally can be understood as “the perceived loss of control over their own political destinies experienced by many citizens in an age of rapid globalization” (Tanguay 2009: 223). Applied more generally to global governance, the concept of democratic deficit directs attention to the failure of representation in these institutions, as Van Rooy argues, “either in their own governance, or in the cumulative failures of their member governments or shareholders” (Van Rooy 2004: 128). Scholte (2001) highlights in particular characteristics—the lack of control, consultation, global representation and central oversight—which contribute to this sense, while Van Rooy describes it of citizens’ perceptions of “have much say in what goes on globally” (Van Rooy 2004: 129). Thus, critics of the democratic deficit in global governance point to the need for both input and output legitimacy (Scharpf 1999), where the problem-solving effectiveness of international institutions is matched by processes of decision-making that become more democratic by enhancing participation, accountability and transparency for civil society actors (Bexell, Tallberg and Uhlin 2008).

Throughout the 1990s, proponents of North American integration looked favorably on the NAFTA agreement’s output legitimacy, commenting favorably on the increase in cross-border trade flows and investment across the region. However, critics have consistently condemned North American input legitimacy, noting the toothless and
ineffective record of NAFTA’s labour and environmental side-agreements as well as the elitist, non-transparent and exclusionary character of the SPP process (Ackelson and Kastner 2006; Anderson and Sands 2007). Ayres and Macdonald have previously described the “shallow governance” in place in the North American region (Ayres and Macdonald 2006), that has both failed to address adequately the civil society concerns of representation and accountability while failing to develop adequately to respond usefully to the growing number of trans-sovereign problems challenging the continents three partners. In fact, North America’s limited efforts at governance have betrayed a preference for an older, top-down stakeholder model, eschewing moves in other forums of global and regional governance over the years towards a “new multilateralism” (O’Brien et al. 2000) that evolves from the bottom up and encourages more participation from a wide variety of civil society groups and whose agenda increasingly is open to more social issues.

If the widely shared concerns over the legitimacy and democratic character of North American governance (as well as the criticisms over the negative socio-economic outcomes) have contributed to a long-running pattern of civil society protest, these actors themselves interestingly enough have come under less scrutiny than is perhaps warranted for their own democratic credentials. While we are intrigued by the literature that again suggests the democratic character of global governance can be enhanced by the increased participation of civil society actors (McGrew 2002; Scholte 2005; Bexel, Tallberg and Uhlin 2008), we understand that in the North American context, as elsewhere, the diversity of actors around such debates can reflect a complex and sometimes bewildering array of democratic and progressive or reactionary and regressive perspectives (Ahrne
1998; Soderbaum 2007). Again, Scholte’s caution on the global governance-civil society nexus warrants highlighting for its applicability to today’s protests against North American integration, where groups on the political left and right have mobilized in often contradictory campaigns. Where social activist groups across Canadian, U.S. and Mexican civil society have more often than not aligned on the left of the political spectrum through engagement in progressive causes, right-wing populist, anti-immigrant and xenophobic groups more recently played a highly public role in campaigning against the SPP in the U.S., raising fears about a potential loss of U.S. sovereignty that attracted significant state and national political attention (Bow and Santa Cruz 2009).

In short, we feel discussions about the future of the North American region as well as the potential for renewing efforts towards transnational collaboration in response to the continent’s mounting trans-sovereign problems, demands that we pay more attention to the “legitimacy game” (Van Rooy 2004). The current lack of clarity regarding the future of North America seems partly rooted in the questionable democratic credentials of the shallow governance structures developed as well as the elitist character of actors involved primarily in promoting the trajectory of North American integration. How can the rules of “representivity,” expertise and moral authority—rules Van Rooy argues help confer greater legitimacy on civil society activists engaging with global and regional governance [add reference to Van Rooy] —be considered in future discussions of the North American region? How might we envision a new model for civil society engagement in debates about the future of North America, and what model might we adopt that responds to the concerns of citizenship and democracy across the region by promoting a broader model of citizen engagement? Has North America in fact reached a
plateau, beyond which efforts to creatively responded transnationally to problems of mutual concern across the continent will be ill-fated unless we move beyond a neoliberal elitist model and consider the ideas and voices of multiple stakeholders, what in the literature is oftentimes referred to as conferring legitimacy on “discursive representation?” (Keck 2004: 45).

Plan of the Book

TABLES

Table 1: Gross Domestic Product, annual percentage change, selected years

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<td>4.4</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


e = IMF estimate

Table 2: North American (NAFTA) intra- and inter-regional merchandise trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$US millions</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$US millions</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$US millions</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-NAFTA exports</td>
<td>680,438</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>739,094</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>1,013,216</td>
<td>49.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAFTA exports to world</td>
<td>544,482</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>580,523</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>1,022,419</td>
<td>50.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,224,920</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,319,617</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2,035,635</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-NAFTA imports</td>
<td>670,810</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>717,750</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>967,688</td>
<td>33.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAFTA imports from world</td>
<td>1,015,978</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>1,293,920</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>1,943,261</td>
<td>66.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,686,788</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,011,670</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,910,949</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Studer, Isabel and Carol Wise (eds). Requiem or Revival? The Promise of North American Integration. Washington D.C.: Johns Hopkins,


Van Rooy, Alison (2004) The Global Legitimacy Game: Civil Society, Globalization and
