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## **Caribbean Leaders in the Transnational Struggle for Slavery Reparations**

In 2014, heads of Caribbean governments of the CARICOM states (Caribbean Community and Common Market), a regional association mainly comprised of the Anglophone countries which were British colonies, adopted a ten-point action plan entitled 'Reparatory Justice Framework' (CARICOM 2014a). This program was designed and presented by the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC), a regional organization of community activists, academics, and lawyers from different Caribbean countries founded in 2013.<sup>1</sup> The CRC claims reparations for the long-term damage caused by the enslavement of dozens of millions of Africans during the transatlantic trade. The CRC seeks in particular to engage European governments, as descendants of former colonial powers which actively participated in the slave trade (such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark), in a dialogue on reparatory justice.

This article deals with the agenda of the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC), focusing on the arguments raised by Caribbean leaders and their transnational mobilizations on behalf of slavery reparations. Emphasizing the pivotal role of Jamaicans in both the historical and the present struggle in the Caribbean, I first reconstruct the national as well as international domain within which the Jamaican National Commission on Reparations (NCR) actively advocates for reparations, and address first of all British reactions and policies. I then elaborate on the transnational networks of activism established between the CRC and the US-based National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), arguing that the Caribbean claims might be conceived as a model for global reparation approaches. The observations here generally rely on the self-representation of the respective reparation groups based on analyses of their websites, declarations, and reports. I also include empirical data from preliminary research in Jamaica in 2014, where I conducted interviews with different members of the NCR; conversations with its chair, Verene

1 See the detailed plan at the following site: <https://ibw21.org/commentary/caricom-reparations-ten-point-plan/>.

Shepherd, will be of particular interest here. While this article only focuses on the globally visible leaders of the Caribbean movement, in my research I also pay attention to the more heterogeneous social actors, including community activists and their particular positions and narratives in relation to reparations.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 ‘Reparatory Justice Framework’ for the Caribbean

In a broader sense, the Reparatory Justice Framework of the CRC appeals to the ‘righting of a wrong’ by implementing measures of compensation at different levels, in order to address the living legacies of the crimes committed against indigenous populations and enslaved Africans and their descendants. In particular, the CRC calls on European states to officially apologize for slavery and to undertake measures to repair its long-term damage. This agenda relies to a great extent on the famous Durban declaration, a document resulting from the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. The conference’s final declaration condemned slavery as a crime against humanity and called on the former European colonizing countries for an official acknowledgement and an apology ([United Nations 2001](#)). For the first time, it was recognized on a global, international level that slavery has caused structural marginalization and racial discrimination that persists to this day and directly affect the lives of Africans and people of African descent. According to Caribbean activists, however, the Durban agenda has not been sufficiently adopted by European governments: these activists see the new CRC initiative as a kind of renewal of Durban principles, but with a stronger emphasis on the aspect of reparatory justice.

As a key issue, the CRC attributes present fundamental development problems in Caribbean societies to the long-term patterns of inequality caused by centuries of slavery, colonial exploitation, ongoing resource extraction, and the colonial-racialized social orders established during the slavery period. All these structural constraints have significantly affected the economic, social, and cultural developments of many Caribbean countries, and, as reparationists argue, have led to persistent structural damage. Consequently, the CRC’s ten-point action plan envisions reparations not as individual compensation for the

<sup>2</sup> I would particularly like to express my gratitude to Verene Shepherd, who took time for an interview. She has not only shared her insights with me, but has substantially inspired my reflection on the topic, as other activists inside and outside the NCR have done. For a stronger empirical engagement with their arguments in favor of reparations, cf. [Rauhut, 2017](#). More empirical insights will be explored in my current research project on transregional entanglements in Caribbean activism for slavery reparations.

descendants of the victims of the slave trade, but rather as collective measures for the whole of society. The CRC therefore calls for investment in education, health, work, culture and further requires debt cancellation in order to fight structural poverty, social and economic disadvantage, and racial discrimination of the Afro-Caribbean majority population (CARICOM 2013). Reparations are clearly envisioned as collective measures for coming to terms with the still unresolved legacies of slavery.

The current claims are unthinkable without the historical, longstanding reparations struggle involving numerous individual and collective calls for slavery reparations in different periods. Studies of the reparations issue have increased in the last 20 years and include examples from the US, Africa, Europe and South America as well from the English-, Spanish-, French- und Dutch-speaking Caribbean. While being strongly aware of the different experiences and approaches to reparations, this article focuses on the Jamaican case and further reflects on its current relation to some US American organizations.<sup>3</sup>

The CRC's recent call has however achieved a new level of public and political recognition, as it is supported for the first time not only by community activists, human rights advocates and academics, but also by national governments and international organizations. In addition, it has spread globally through a tremendous media presence and its reception by other international reparation groups. A considerable degree of this success is due to Hilary Beckles, who has chaired the CARICOM Reparations Commission since 2013. He is probably the most prominent and charismatic voice of the current Caribbean reparations movement. Beckles is a professor of history (and current Vice-Chancellor) at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados, and is known for his important work on the history of slavery and abolition in the Caribbean and on the resistance against colonization, enslavement and slavery. In his widely quoted book *Britain's Black Debt. Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide* (2013), he offers an overview of the global reparations movement, focusing on Caribbean protagonists from a historical perspective.

3 Some reparation approaches in the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean and in Latin America use the term Afro-Reparaciones, cf. for instance Mosquera Rosero-Labbé/Barcelos 2007, cf. especially the contribution of Lao-Montes. For the official avoidance of talks on slavery reparation in France in relation to its former Caribbean colonies, especially in politics and public memory discourse cf. Forsdick 2015. With regard to the Dutch Speaking Caribbean, Suriname, a member state of CARICOM, has established a National Reparation Commission in 2013, cf. <http://www.loopsuriname.com/tags/national-reparation-commission-suriname>.

A short overview on activism and debates on slavery reparations in Africa is provided by Howard-Hassmann/Lombardo 2008, and with regard to Great Britain by Barkan 2001. The example of the US is going to be examined in this article.

Beckles' book immediately became a sort of guidebook and political manifesto for the current CARICOM claims. He has promoted his ideas on numerous lecture tours, not only in the Caribbean but also at different public institutions, mainly universities, in the USA, Canada, and Europe. Based on a variety of empirical data, he reconstructs in detail the self-enrichment of British royal families, churches, merchants, and intellectual elites through the system of slavery. He relies on a thesis first presented in the 1940s by Trinidadian historian Eric Williams: Europe's wealth and hegemony is rooted in slavery, as the unpaid forced labor of millions of enslaved Africans in highly efficient plantation economies in the Caribbean, and the profits gained by exporting sugar and other raw materials, became the basis of the industrialization process in Europe, mainly in Britain (Williams 1944). As this analytical argument is central to the reparations approach, Beckles pays tribute to Eric Williams and many other Caribbean intellectual and activist leaders in the reparation struggle, past and present (Beckles 2013: 4).

## 2 Jamaica within the Caribbean Reparation Movement

Jamaicans have played a key role in the historical struggle for reparations, not only in the Caribbean region but also at a global level. The government's establishment of a National Commission on Reparation (NCR) in 2009 was unprecedented in the region. Since 2012, the commission has been chaired by Verene Shepherd, historian and director of the Institute for Gender & Development Studies at University of the West Indies at Mona (UWI) and Jamaican delegate at the CARICOM Reparations Commission. Before analyzing some of her central arguments, I will briefly summarize the historical dimensions of the long-standing reparation activism in Jamaica. This analysis is based on activists' personal accounts, the Report of the Jamaican National Commission on Reparation (2013), and diverse academic publications.

Before the government became involved, there had been a long history of activism for reparations in civil society. Here, Jamaica's Rastafarians were always at the forefront. This group view themselves as continuing the time-honored tradition of resistance against slavery and colonial domination, exemplified since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the whole Caribbean and other parts of the American continent by the maroon rebellions. The maroons were enslaved Africans who escaped from plantations and mines and successfully resisted Europeans during the colonial period. Today, in Jamaica (and other Caribbean nations), some communities declare themselves to be descendants of maroons. In Jamaica in the 1930s, some of these self-declared descendants were the first people of African descent to ask the Jamaican government for compensation

for the violence and dislocation they experienced during slavery. Specifically, they asked for land where they could settle their communities (Blake Hannah 2006: 122).<sup>4</sup> Under leader Leonard Howell, the Rastafarians founded their group in the early 1930s as a particular cultural-religious community in Pinnacle, a rural village 20 miles from Kingston. Their practice of ‘reasoning’ (talking together and exchanging ideas in a non-hierarchical way, often accompanied by spiritual drumming and smoking ganja) contains narratives of anti-colonial struggle, resisting mental slavery, and rejecting the colonialization of thought (Chevannes 1994; Zips 2006). Furthermore, the use of proper language, clothes, religion, crafts, and forms of education and production, as well as the revaluation of African practices are considered decolonial practices which are supposed “to replace those of the Western world system, labelled ‘Babylon.’” (Andwele 2006: 15) The Rastafarians have always pointed to the need to talk about slavery through the lens of reparatory justice. Since the 1960s, some Rastafari elders have repeatedly petitioned the British Queen to facilitate their repatriation to Africa as a form of reparation (Shepherd 2008: 25). Both the current NCR and CARICOM’s calls for reparation pay tribute to the pivotal role of Rastafari by including repatriation to Africa (for those who desire it) as the second demand in their ten-point action plan (CARICOM 2013). In the 1990s, Jamaican Rastafari leaders started to work on a broader and more organized reparation agenda that went beyond African repatriation. In 1990, the first committee for reparation founded by George Nelson (a.k.a. Ras Makonnen) participated in the first World Conference on Reparation in Lagos, Nigeria. Nelson subsequently planned to host an International Conference on reparation in Jamaica, before suddenly passing away in 1992 (Report on the Work of NCR 2013: 24). In 1993, Abuja, Nigeria hosted the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations for African Enslavement, Colonisation and Neo-Colonisation, where Jamaicans participated with a small delegation. The final Abuja proclamation called for a stronger exchange within the global reparation struggle between Africa and the African diaspora and appealed to the

Heads of States and Governments in Africa and the Diaspora itself to set up National Committees for the purpose of studying the damaged Black experience, disseminating information and encouraging educational courses on the impact of Enslavement, colonisation and neo-colonialism on present-day Africa and its Diaspora. (The Abuja Proclamation 1993)

Today, the Caribbean – a central region of the African diaspora – is the only region in the world where national commissions for reparation have been found-

<sup>4</sup> For extensive literature on *maroonage* and many other practices of resistance in the Americas, cf. Agorsah 1994; Thompson 2006; Zips 1999.

ded with the support of governments (even if this came 15–20 years after Abuja). Abuja is generally considered a precursor to the Durban conference in 2001. According to Beckles, it was particularly due to the Jamaican delegation, headed by the Rastafarian Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah and other Caribbean activists, that the topic of reparations was debated, even if not in the substantive way they would have desired. Although a consensus could not be reached between the African, European, and Caribbean delegates with regard to legal grounds for reparation, Beckles nonetheless considers the Durban declaration of immense importance, as it laid the groundwork for strengthening the contemporary Caribbean movement. Especially academics, human rights activists, national governments, and international organizations became more involved, making common cause with the long tradition of activism in civil society (Beckles 2013: 191).<sup>5</sup>

Returning to Jamaica, Blake Hannah officially founded the Jamaican Reparation Movement in 2002. It raised considerable public awareness through activities, speeches, debates, and disputes around the celebrations of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007, which took place throughout the region as well as in Britain. The Jamaica National Bicentenary Committee, chaired by Verene Shepherd, has repeatedly criticized the hegemonic way of remembering and honoring exclusively the British abolition movement and their role in ending the slave trade. Such a circumscribed history effectively erases from the public memory the preceding 300 years of enrichment by means of a brutal system of exploitation of Africans, as well as the active role of the enslaved people themselves in fighting slavery from the public memory (Shepherd/Reid/Cavell 2012: 14–15; Shepherd 2008: 26–27). Highly offended by the “no apology strategy” of Great Britain, the Bicentenary Committee started to systematize (based on historical documentation and activists’ voices) the arguments for slavery reparations in order to reinstate a debate in Jamaica (Shepherd/Reid/Cavell 2012). The committee also lobbied for the establishment of a National Commission on Reparation (NCR), which was finally set up by the Jamaican government in 2009, first chaired by anthropologist Barry Chevannes, and from 2012 onwards by Verene Shepherd. Due to Shepherd’s broad engagement as a scholar, activist, and public voice in local, national, and transnational arenas, the case for reparations has gained a lot of attention and public interest in Jamaica and globally. Together with a coalition of other academics, lawyers, human-rights activists, and representatives of Rastafari groups within the NCR, she has systematically worked on the issue. Not only has she (and her

5 For more on the issue of reparation as discussed in Durban, see also the works of Mazrui 2002 and Howard-Hassmann/Lombardo 2008, which in particular deal with an African perspective on reparations, a view that cannot be elaborated here.

team) prepared a detailed report for the government, but she has brought the topic to national and international institutions and media. All the same, in our interview (which took place in February 2014 in her office at the UWI), she mentioned that the case for reparations is still not sufficiently known to the population – not for lack of interest, but because of systematic disinformation within the education system as well as in the general public discourse. For a long time, according to Shepherd, very little attention has been paid to the memory of slavery. For this reason, the NCR campaigns all over the country in order to raise greater awareness of the reparations agenda and, in particular, to reach people outside of academic and activist contexts. For instance, they have produced a radio jingle, organized several public lectures in the Emancipation Park in Kingston, arranged workshops in schools and colleges as well as in work centers, and convened various youth forums on reparations in cooperation with the African Caribbean Heritage Institute of Jamaica. Education and the spread of knowledge are the focus of ongoing activities and have, according to Shepherd, already achieved considerable resonance among the Jamaican population.

### **3 States Talking to States**

The Jamaican government's support in providing the resources to build a national commission in 2009 is considered as an extremely important achievement by my interlocutors. This is the case for two major reasons: firstly, they feel that their voices were heard and that their claims were discussed seriously among the broader public and in politics. This wider dialogue also helped the movement to grow outside of Rastafarian and academic contexts. Secondly, the national government's support meant that the matter could be discussed between states. In order to transcend a bilateral or unilateral approach (e.g. Jamaica addressing Great Britain only), Shepherd and her colleagues at the CRC envision a regional approach. The CRC is therefore working to encourage the establishment of other national commissions across the region and to facilitate dialog and exchange between them. Shepherd and the chairs of the now 15 existing national commissions meet regularly in order to investigate the particular cases for reparation in each country and to advance a common agenda on how to appeal to European governments.

So we are happy that CARICOM is on board, because this fight is going to require the support of heads of government. States talking to states, right? This approach is critical because all of the strategies we were using in the past have not worked. So, here is another chance. Let's see where it goes. (Shepherd 2014)

Here, Shepherd indirectly refers to the longstanding initiatives from Rastafarians, community activists, human rights advocates, and academics that had never been responded to by either the Jamaican or the British governments. Thus, while the call for reparations is not entirely new, the fact that the call is now coming from a broader civil coalition and is finally supported by the Caribbean states is truly a watershed. For activists, it means obtaining political backing and recognition of their claims within their local and national contexts. It also opens up new perspectives for negotiations with new actors and within new global networks and arenas. Indeed, it is widely due to the pioneering work of the CARICOM Reparations Commission that many prime ministers of Caribbean states finally signed the commission's ten-point action plan in 2014 and thereby signaled governmental support for the case for reparations.

As to what parties will be addressed, both the NCR and the CRC are quite clear. In the report of the NCR, for instance, it is argued that rather than addressing private persons, banks, or companies, the most appropriate institutions to pursue are governments themselves. They are viewed as representing the successor states of those colonial powers that created the legal, political, economic, and cultural-racial framework in which the organized crime of slavery was made possible: “TTA [Transatlantic Trade in Africans] was a state-sponsored enterprise, made legal in the colonies by the British colonial regime.” (*Report on the Work of NCR 2013: 58*). Shepherd also underlines the state's role, remarking: “[...] our position is that African enslavement was a state-sponsored system and so our claim must be against the state. If other companies or churches wish to apologize (and some have), that is fine, but our case is against the state.” (*Shepherd 2014*). Therefore, the Jamaican Reparations Commission as well as the CARICOM Reparations Commission encourage dialogue between the Caribbean and European states and motivate regional governments to bring cases against European governments (‘states against states’) – above all against Britain, the strongest former colonial power in the region.

#### **4 Mobilizing in the International Arena**

Not only the states themselves, but also international organizations like the UN are considered as important global arenas. Activists strategically consult with them or are themselves active in the UN because such involvement results in visible international support. Again, Verene Shepherd is highly engaged on that level. As a former chair (2009–2012) and member of the ‘UN-Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent’ (until 2015), she has actively worked towards placing the issue of reparations on the agenda of the UN decade for ‘People of African descent: recognition, justice and development.’<sup>6</sup> Over the

course of this decade (2015–2024), the UN will provide funding for educational and social programs and measures directed towards improving the living conditions of people of African descent across the continent and towards fighting racism and the structural inequalities they face on different levels. According to Shepherd, it was only after lengthy and complicated negotiations, especially with regard to the inclusion of reparations for slavery, that the UN decade finally began in 2015:

There is some resistance to some aspects of the Program of Action, articulated for instance by the EU. The call for reparations is a part of it [of the resistance, CR]. But I don't see how we can eliminate reparations as a part of it [the program of action, CR] because it is really the movement for the 21st century. So we will have to see. There is a draft program of action, but it has not been implemented. The implementation has to start at the level of states. But in terms of the working group, the theme that we are proposing for the decade is recognition, justice, and development. (Shepherd 2014)

Shepherd underlines that the UN decade's programmatic outline of recognition and justice is unthinkable without addressing the issue of reparations. In order to raise this topic, she has constantly leveraged her simultaneous engagement as a delegate in the CRC and as member of the UN-Working Group. The program of activities for the decade delivered on December 1, 2014 still remains quite vague. It is noticeably defensive with regard to options that might be pursued in favor of reparations. Hence, it only insists in a very general way that nation-states apologize for the crimes of slavery and, further, that the states in question “find some way to contribute to the restoration of the dignity of victims.” (United Nation General Assembly 2014: 7 § [i]). Finally, it appeals to international and regional organizations to “use the decade as an opportunity to engage with people of African descent on appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of slavery [...]” (United Nation General Assembly 2014: 7 § [d]). At the level of United Nations, UNESCO begins to focus more on the topic of reparations. In 2015, they held an international conference in St. Kitts and Nevis on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of the UNESCO International Scientific Slave Route Project. By coopting Hilary Beckles as the current vice president of the International Task Force and designating him as key note speaker, the UNESCO Slave Route Project sent a clear signal that it will explore the issue of reparations

6 The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGAD) was established by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner in 2002 with a mandate to study and report on racial discrimination faced by people of African descent and to propose measures for its elimination. Cf. OHCHR 2014

within its international work on the memory of slavery and the remembering of its victims (CARICOM Today 2015).

Beckles and Shepherd are colleagues, both at the UWI and in the CARICOM Reparations Commission and collaborate closely. They are active in local, national, and international scenes and are frequently requested by national and international media and many civil and state organizations for interviews. This is especially true for Beckles, who, as the spokesperson of the CRC, has been invited to nearly every country in the Caribbean and to universities in Europe and the US to give lectures and lay out the Caribbean case for reparations. Beckles constantly refers to other instances of reparations for colonial injustices in order to emphasize the global relevance of reparations, as well as its possibility and legitimacy. In his speech in the House of Commons on July 16, 2014, he strategically located the Caribbean agenda in a global context while presenting a programmatic target: “This 21st century will be the century of global reparatory justice.” (CARICOM 2014b). It is largely due to Beckles’ and Shepherd’s intensive engagement that the matter of reparations has had such a tremendous impact and that public and political attention has finally been achieved at the level of states and international organizations like UN and UNESCO. The way through the institutions and procedures of international organizations may very well be difficult and exhausting. However, the international arena at the level of nation-states is considered indispensable for obtaining official recognition, eliciting global awareness, and applying a certain amount of political pressure in relation to the issue of reparations.

A subsequent question would be how arguments, people, resources, and indeed the social dynamics of activism itself might be conflictual, especially when it comes to issues of representation (who speaks for whom?), knowledge circulation, and the mediation between local, national, and international arenas.

## **5 Building Transnational Networks with US Activists and Organizations**

The agenda of the CRC has been enthusiastically received not only by regional governments and international organizations, but also by numerous civil society organizations throughout the Americas and Europe. In particular, it has been echoed strongly by activists and organized groups in the USA – a country with a long history of struggle and intense debate over reparations. Historians, political scientists, lawyers, economists, and journalists have broadly documented the chronology of the movement and analyzed the arguments for and against reparations. They cite the numerous individuals and groups who have demanded reparations for slavery at different times. A few examples may be

mentioned here: the formerly enslaved people themselves after they achieved their freedom; the Union troop leader General Tecumseh Sherman who, when slavery ended in 1865, implemented the granting of land and provisions to former slaves who had fought under him ('40 acres and a mule') (Barkan 2001: 284); the United Negro Improvement Association and the Pan-African-Movement of the 1920s; the Civil Rights Congress of the 1950s; the Black Power movement in their manifesto from 1968; the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) in 1987; US Congressmen John Conyers and his bill H.R. 40 Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act;<sup>7</sup> the Congressional Black Caucus (founded in 1989) via the TransAfrica Forum in 2000, and so on.<sup>8</sup> The extent to which these US-based groups were influenced by Caribbean activists and debates (and vice versa), and the actual routes of the transnational circulation of knowledge and practices in relation to the issue of reparations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century remain to be investigated. A more organized cooperation has only recently begun. Immediately after the CRC announced and circulated its ten-point action plan in 2014, Beckles and other Caribbean leaders were invited to various meetings organized by reparation groups in the USA, such as the 'National/International Reparations Summit,' which took place in New York City in April 2015. Along with Beckles, the delegates from different National Commissions of Caribbean countries entered into a dialog with participants from Europe, and North, Central, and South America.

The summit was convened by Ron Daniels, director of the Institute of the Black World and convener of the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC).<sup>9</sup> The NAARC views itself as an umbrella organization for group leaders from several civil organizations such as N'COBRA, Congressional Black Caucus, or John Conyers. The main objectives of the summit were not only to provide a forum for exchange, but also to reorganize the already

7 John Conyers first introduced the bill 'H.R. 40' in 1989 and has reintroduced it several times. It has always been rejected by US congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/40/all-info>.

8 I am not able at this point to explore in more detail the complexity of the activists, groups, claims, and lawsuits in relation to reparations for slavery in the US. [Martin/Yaquinto \(2007\)](#) give a good overview of the different organizations that claimed reparations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reproduce numerous original statements and manifestos. For further academic readings engaging in favor of reparations in the US, cf. [Darity 2008](#); [Munford 1996](#); [Robinson 2001](#).

9 The IBW is a proactive institution which mainly supports the issue of reparations by circulating related audio materials, speeches, maps, academic readings, and announcements on its website, where the speeches and materials of the reparation summit are also available. <http://ibw21.org/reparations/>.

existing activism in the United States and, finally, to revive the famous bill H.R.40 Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, repeatedly introduced to US congress by John Conyers since 1989 and still considered to be the strongest initiative to date. It proposes reparations as a national (not an individual) concern that needs to be studied within a congressional commission and discussed at the governmental level. Since the US Congress never accepted H.R.40, the NAARC is currently looking into new strategies for reworking and reintroducing the bill. The Final Communiqué of the New York summit therefore honors John Conyers “as a champion of the reparations movement” (point 7) (IBW 2015). It also declared a “Decade for Reparations and in that context, applauded the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Declaration of 2015–2024 as the Decade for People of African descent which should advance the demand for reparations” (point 8) (IBW 2015). The Communiqué finally agreed that the “CRC [...] will support the National African-American Reparations Commission (NAARC) by encouraging and facilitating Caribbean political leaders, artists, civil society activists and scholars to participate in various NAARC educational and mobilizing/organizing initiatives [...]” (point 2) (IBW 2015).

Inspired by the example of CARICOM, the NAARC calls for the establishment of a national commission in the US similar to the CRC. It further proposes developing a reparations program like the ‘Reparatory Justice Framework’ presented in the CRC’s ten-point action plan.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Caribbean and US-activists affirmed that the summit was a “tremendous success” and “will provide a huge momentum to the growing global reparations movement,” as the Jamaican daily press *Jamaica Observer* reported on the event quoting Don Rojas, Director of Communications and International Relations at the IBW (*Jamaica Observer* 2015).

## 6 The Caribbean Reparation Claims as a Model?

For the first time in the history of the US reparation movement, Caribbean leaders are asked to assist US organizations and activities. What can be learned from the Caribbean case? The CRC has clearly spurred the revitalization of the US reparations movement at the level of organization and by the articulation of precise claims against the states in question, and has fortified the transregional networks of activism. The manifold activities in the local, national, and global contexts described in this contribution highlight the Caribbean as a core center

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://www.caribbean360.com/news/major-us-black-group-host-caricom-reparations-summit#ixzz3sX9BLYWB>.

for contemporary activism for reparations. Verene Shepherd, accordingly, states:

[...] we are planning a huge global conference in the Caribbean, because right now most of the conversation on reparation is taking place in the Caribbean. Other people now are looking to us, while before the US was leading [...]. (Shepherd 2014)

To shift the attention toward Caribbean leadership, as Shepherd suggests, might impact the arguments and organizational dynamics of different agendas across the region, including the United States. I argue that it might also open up new approaches in the wider academic debate. For a long time, public and academic discussions regarding reparations for slavery generally looked to the US as a reference and thereby established a US-centered approach. The respective discourses were thus homogenized through the lens of the particular experiences and dynamics within the US – not because other regional experiences and activism did not exist but rather because their voices were ignored to a great extent within the US-dominated debate. It is only recently that the pivotal historical and contemporary role of Caribbean leaders and experiences in the struggle for reparations has become more recognized and visible, at least at the level of activism. The Caribbean example offers a new approach to the issue of reparations in terms of the actors involved, potential beneficiaries, targeted institutions, the sites of negotiation, and the orientation of concrete collective goals.

The inherent strength of the CRC agenda, and what distinguishes it from the claims coming from the US, is that it does not particularly address private people, companies, insurances or banks but European governments. It thus aims to persuade regional governments to deal with reparations as a national concern and to directly negotiate with European political leaders. This strategy was immediately adopted by the NAARC, which (even more than before) has pushed for a national conversation on reparations in appealing to their own government in the US. Caribbean leaders are contacted by groups from around the globe, not only by those fighting for reparations but also by academic and political institutions. We might even argue that a new dialogue has been initiated on a more level playing field, resulting in a kind of knowledge transfer from south to north. The topic of reparations might therefore be discussed beyond the lens of US experience and expanded by means of alternative, innovative, and complementary approaches. Highlighting the Caribbean claims might finally contribute to overcoming the marginalization of the Caribbean in terms of political activism and in the social sciences. Paying more attention to the region and its impact on critical knowledge production might inspire both global activism and academic research on reparatory justice.

Of course, it is impossible and not the goal of activists to standardize a common agenda between different Caribbean and US reparation groups. The Caribbean region itself is shaped by different forms of slavery, colonial histories, languages, cultures, and politics and hence different approaches to reparation. Indeed, there is a risk of overlooking many other regional, historical, and political perspectives on reparations within the region due to the current international focus on the CRC call and the Anglophone-Caribbean approach. With regard to the French-, Spanish- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, there is a relevant, individual, and organized activism debating the legacies of slavery, forms of activism that could not be included here.<sup>11</sup> Related projects might not always apply the term ‘reparation,’ but nevertheless address similar issues, e.g. fighting structural inequalities and racial discrimination. Demands for reparations are not to be considered as belonging to the exclusive purview of CARICOM or the Anglophone Caribbean but are part of a much broader and longstanding struggle across the whole region, where border-crossing networks of people, practices, and ideas selectively influence each other. Even if they do not always transcend barriers in communication, mobility, and political status (which, again, can be interpreted as the result of the colonial divide in the region), activists are nonetheless transnationally connected to different degrees because of language, opportunities for mobility, and political systems. This is also true for the United States. The current activism for slavery reparations in the Caribbean and in the US should therefore be empirically investigated and analyzed; we should regard it not as a singular national phenomenon but from the standpoint of transregional entanglements. An analysis must take into account the different perspectives within the Caribbean itself and in the context of the region’s transatlantic interrelations to reparation discourses and activists in the US, Europe, and Africa. Reparation activists in their concrete localities deliberately establish transnational connections to other activists and debates in order to strengthen their respective claims. While they do not have a common or uniform agenda, they are all motivated by the shared concern of confronting the legacies of slavery and colonial exploitation through a framework of reparatory justice.

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11 With regard to the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean some examples are mentioned in Mosquera Rosero-Labbé/Barcelos 2007; for the French Speaking Caribbean cf. Forsdick 2015.

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