Caribbean Studies

Module 1 – Caribbean Society and Culture
Location and Definition of the Caribbean Region and its Diaspora

(a) Geographical location:
(i) names of territories;
(ii) sub-regions, for example, Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, Bahamas; and,
(iii) position of territories in relation to the Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean and the continental land masses.

(b) Definitions of the Caribbean Region:
1 geographical;
2 geological;
A map of the Caribbean
(a) Geographical location:
(i) names of territories;
(ii) sub-regions, for example, Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, Bahamas.

Let’s look and listen.

https://youtu.be/SU3VMAhWqtc
What are the names of some of the Islands?
What are the names of the Caribbean territories?

- Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico
- Grenada, St Martin, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis, Barbados, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Antigua and Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands, the US Virgin Islands
- Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Grenada
- St Martin, St Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, the Virgin Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Dominica
- Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao
- The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands
- Belize, Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana (Cayenne)
Geographically, the Caribbean can be defined as the area that is ‘washed’ by the Caribbean sea. It is often described as the Caribbean Basin – Thompson, et al 2017.

Also defined in terms of lines of latitude/longitude – between 60 degrees and 90 degrees West longitude and between 5 degrees North and 30 degrees North latitude.

Also defined in terms of surrounding land masses – North, Central and South America.

Also defined in terms of surrounding bodies of water – Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico.
Geographical sub regions of the Caribbean
What are some sub regions identified in the map?

- The Greater Antilles
- The Lesser Antilles
- The Leeward Islands
- The Windward Islands
Geographical sub regions of the Caribbean

- **The Greater Antilles** Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico
- **The Lesser Antilles** Grenada, St Martin, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis, Barbados, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Antigua and Barbuda,
  the British Virgin Islands, the US Virgin Islands
- **The Windward Islands** Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Grenada
- **The Leeward Islands** St Martin, St Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, the Virgin Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, Guadeloupe.
- **The Leeward Antilles (formerly called Netherlands Antilles)** Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao
- The Northern Caribbean Islands – The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands
- **The Mainland Territories** Belize, Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana (Cayenne)

- Most Caribbean islands/territories are located to the East of the Caribbean Sea
- The Atlantic Ocean is to the East – North East of the Caribbean
- The Caribbean is located to the south of North America, to the east of Central America and to the north of south America.
https://youtu.be/SU3VMAhWqtc
Let’s review:

- Geographical definition of the Caribbean:
  - Geographically, the Caribbean can be defined as the area that is ‘washed’ by the Caribbean sea.
  - It is often described as the Caribbean Basin – Thompson, et al 2017.
  - Also defined in terms of lines of latitude/longitude – between 50 degrees and 85 degrees West longitude and between 5 degrees North and 30 degrees North latitude.
  - Also defined in terms of surrounding land masses – North, Central and South America.
  - Also defined in terms of surrounding bodies of water – Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico.
The geographical boundaries of the Caribbean

According to Thompson, et al (2017), the boundaries of the geographical Caribbean include:

- North – Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Puerto Rico
- South – The coast of Columbia, Venezuela, Panama
- East – The Lesser Antilles chain of islands
- West – Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua.
Limitations of the geographical definition

1. Mohammed (2007) argues that the geographical delimitation of the Caribbean region is not fixed; also the location in terms of coordinates of latitude and longitude are interpreted subjectively.

2. Using the geographical definition of the Caribbean as the islands ‘washed’ by the Caribbean Sea, this definition excludes many territories which are considered to be a part of the Caribbean such as ..........................
A map of the Caribbean
Territories not ‘washed’ by the Caribbean Sea but considered to be part of the Caribbean:

- Barbados
- Guyana
- The Bahamas
- Turks and Caicos, etc.
Geological Definition

- Image of the layers of the Earth.
- On the outermost layer or the crust exists tectonic plates.
The Caribbean is situated in a geologic feature known as the Caribbean Plate which has boundaries or margins with other plates nearby. A plate is a large piece of crust (on which there may be both land and ocean) and it moves in relation to other plates. On the whole the earth is made up of six or seven plates and many smaller ones. The Caribbean Plate is a small plate.
The Geological Definition of the Caribbean
The geological Caribbean refers to the area defined by the Caribbean Plate that shares similar seismic, tectonic and volcanic features (Thompson, et al, 2017).

The territories of most of the eastern Caribbean have been formed by the impact of plate tectonics.

The Caribbean Plate interacts with the Nazca and Cocos plates to the west and the North American Plate to the east and north and the South American plate to the south.
The island of Montserrat was formed because of plate tectonics – the destructive plate boundary between the North American plate and the Caribbean plate in a west–south–westerly direction led to the emergence of that volcanic island (Thompson, et al 2017)?
Also

- The lesser Antilles lie along the eastern boundary of the Caribbean Plate where its most distinctive feature is the volcanic arc. The islands there are volcanic in origin (Thompson, et al, 2017).
Limitations of the Geological definition:

- It excludes territories such as Cuba, Turks and Caicos, The Bahamas, Venezuela, Guyana which are considered to be part of the Caribbean
- It includes areas not traditionally considered as Caribbean – e.g. Columbia.
Questions?
Home work

- Research the Historical, Political and Diasporic definitions of the Caribbean.
According to Thompson, et al (2017), the historical Caribbean refers to the countries that have shared experiences of European colonization, slavery, indentureship and the plantation system.

The main European powers to colonize the region include: Spain, Holland, France and Britain.
Historically, the Caribbean region is a socio-economic and historical area characterized by migration, ‘discovery’, colonialism, European rivalry, enslavement, capitalism, plantation systems and indentureship.

The region has experienced genocides, oppression, responses to oppression and revolutions such as the Haitian Revolution and various Maroon wars and slave uprisings.

The migration of various groups into the region created a rich, multifaceted society and culture found nowhere else in the world.

Source: (Sammy, Johnson, Valentine 2018)
The shared experiences include:

- Large-scale agricultural production on plantations
- Imported labour
- Near extinction of their indigenous populations
- Individual territories retained close ties to their colonial power – such as their language and religion.
- The Europeans used colonization, the encomienda system, slavery and the plantation system to sustain their motherland. These systems shaped the shared history of the Caribbean nations.

(Thompson, et al, 2017)
According to Moniquette (2003), although the historical events which occurred in the Caribbean were similar to those which occurred in other areas in the Western Hemisphere like the USA, South America and Central America, the events in the Caribbean reflect a different legacy and so that makes us unique.
Limitations of the historical definition

- There have been no major criticisms of the historical definition, this definition includes all the territories which are generally considered ‘Caribbean’.
Questions?
Politically, the Caribbean region is described as an area comprising territories of diverse political status, at differing stages of achieving political autonomy from colonial powers (Mohammed, 2007). These countries adopt varying forms of governance also (e.g., Cuba – Communism, Guyana – Socialism; Parliamentary democracy – Barbados, Republic – Trinidad and Tobago.)

Thus Mohammed (2007) argues that the Caribbean cannot be described as a single political entity – this, she argues, is an ideal that visionaries in the regional integration camp yearn for.

There are also several political blocs that have formed the Caribbean’s political landscape, for example the West Indies Federation, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) (Sammy, et al 2018)
Sammy, et al (2018) describes the region as having political pluralism, with countries moving away from colonial rule toward legislative independence.

Thus, according to Sammy, et al (2018), in the region, there are independent states, republic states, associated states and dependency states.
Visual approach to political definition of Caribbean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Caribbean Politically:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Associated states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial dependencies/dependent territories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The political status of Caribbean countries fall into one of 3 categories:

1. Independent states
2. Associates/associated states
3. Colonial dependencies/dependent territories
1. **Independent states**: Countries which were once colonies but are now self-governed. They are also known as sovereign states (Thompson, et al 2017).

- These are: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines.
2. **Associates/associated states:**

Former British colonies in the Eastern Caribbean that enjoyed a semi-independent political status from 1967; their defense and external affairs was still handled by Britain, they maintained control over their own constitution.

Over time, they became independent states.

- These include: Antigua, Grenada, Dominica, St Vincent, St Lucia and St Christopher– Nevis –Anguilla.

There are no associated states in the Caribbean today – all of these sought independence, except Anguilla, who chose to be a British Colonial dependency. (Thompson, et al 2018).
Political Definition

3. **Colonial dependencies/dependent territories:**
   These are countries that are not independent, so they enjoy the rights and privileges of the country that governs them. They include:
   
   (a) **Territories of Great Britain** (now called British Overseas territories) – Montserrat, British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos, Bermuda (not mentioned by Thompson).

   (b) **Territories of the Netherlands** – Netherland Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, Saint Eustatius, St Martin, Tortola).

   (c) **Territories of the United States** – Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands,

   (d) **Territories of France** – Guadeloupe, Saint Martin, Martinique, St Barthelemy.

(Thompson, et al 2017)
Political Definition

POINTS TO NOTE:

- **Territories of Great Britain** (now called British Overseas territories) – according to Mohammed (2017) are still colonies of Britain. The British Crown Colonies to be exact are Turks and Caicos, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat. The people there are British citizens.

  **Anglophone** – English–speaking, especially in a country where more than 2 languages are spoken.

- **Departments of France** – the French possessions in the Caribbean are not colonies, they actually are part of France, (just overseas). The citizens are French citizens, they may not even have an official flag (such as Martinique).

  **Francophone** – French speaking.
## Political Definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial power</th>
<th>Caribbean territories colonised at various times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The Spanish empire initially claimed all of the Caribbean and most of Latin America. The influence of Spanish culture is most strongly felt in Cuba, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, Bermuda, St Kitts, The Bahamas, British Guiana, British Honduras, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent, Tortola, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, the Virgin Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Dominica, Guadeloupe and Martinique, Haiti, St Barthélemy, St Kitts, St Lucia, St Martin (northern half), St Vincent, Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>The Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St Eustatius, and St Martin (southern half)), Tortola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (US colonisation came later than European)</td>
<td>Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Cuba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commonwealth – called the ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ or the ‘British Commonwealth’, this refers to a world organisation of independent states and dependent territories that were once (or still are) colonies of Great Britain.

These member countries benefit through trade and other economic agreements as well as general cooperation in various areas.
Limitations of this definition

- It is very complex because of the unique political history and status of these countries.
- Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana are not considered part of the political Caribbean, they are departments of France, making them officially French territory, even though they are geographically and physically located in the Caribbean region.
- The same can be said about the provinces of Netherlands
Questions/comments?
Diasporic Definition

- Diaspora – the forced scattering of a people away from their homeland (Mohammed 2007).

- Caribbean diaspora – the people of the Caribbean who, even though they have established themselves outside of the region by migrating to other countries (mainly the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada), still retain strong familial, emotional, cultural and economic ties to the region. (Thompson, et al 2017)
Other definitions exclude the population of Caribbean people who may not live within the geographical confines of the traditional idea of the Caribbean, but make efforts to maintain their ‘Caribbeaness’ and consider themselves to be part of Caribbean society.
The Caribbean has a long-enduring history of migration through periods of colonialism, enslavement, indentureship and post-independence.

The Caribbean diaspora relates to the movement of people from the Caribbean to metropolitan regions in countries such as the US, the UK and Canada, where they established Caribbean communities. The people nevertheless still practise their culture, which may have an indelible impact on the extra-regional society in which they now live.
Diasporic definition

- The Caribbean itself is a diasporic community formed out of the migration of people into the region, starting with the Amerindians followed by the Europeans, Africans, East Indians, Chinese, etc.
- Thus the Caribbean is made up of persons from various diaspora
The Caribbean is a diverse and complex place, with the term ‘Caribbean’ itself understood in many ways by researchers. Explain FOUR ways in which the concept of Caribbean is defined by researchers. 20 marks

Q5. “The ideal way to describe the Caribbean is by using political and historical definitions.” With the use of examples, discuss the extent to which you agree with the statement. 30 marks