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Canada in the North America Region: Implications of the Trump Presidency

Laura Macdonald* 

Department of Political Science and Institute of Political Economy, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, B640 Loeb Building, Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6

*Corresponding author. Email: laura.macdonald@carleton.ca

Abstract

The election of Donald Trump and his decision to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represented a shock to the Canadian and Mexican governments and business elites. Drawing on the New Regionalism(s) Approach (NRA), this article reviews the response of the Canadian state to the crisis in the North American regional project. I argue that this newer theoretical approach better explains the dynamics of regionalization or regional decomposition than mainstream theories by integrating the role played by uneven globalization, normative and ideational dimensions, and civil society in processes of regional integration and/or decomposition.

Résumé

L'élection de Donald Trump et sa décision de renégocier l'ALENA ont représenté un choc pour les gouvernements et les élites commerciales du Canada et du Mexique. S'inspirant de la nouvelle approche régionaliste (ARN), cet article examine la réponse de l'État canadien à la crise qui a frappé le projet régional nord-américain. Je soutiens que cette approche théorique plus récente rend mieux compte de la dynamique de la régionalisation ou de la décomposition régionale que les théories classiques en intégrant le rôle joué par la mondialisation inégale, les dimensions normatives et conceptuelles et la société civile dans les processus d'intégration et/ou de décomposition régionale.

Keywords: NAFTA; USMCA; regionalism; Trump; trade

Mots-clés : ALENA; ACEUM; régionalisme; Trump; commerce

Even before the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the state of the North American region was complicated and uncertain. On the one hand, there seemed to exist wide consensus among economists, Canadian political and economic elites and (to a lesser extent) the general public that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had delivered impressive economic benefits. Global Affairs Canada points out on its website that total merchandise trade among the three partners (Canada, the United States and Mexico) has tripled since 1993, the year before

NAFTA entered into effect (Global Affairs Canada, n.d.). The agreement had transformed the economies of the three countries by fostering the development of cross-border value chains. Despite the heated opposition of both the Liberal and New Democratic parties to the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA), which preceded NAFTA, all of the Canadian political parties had tacitly accepted NAFTA for many years.¹ At the same time, the North American region had failed to follow the path of deeper integration and institutionalization that theories of regionalism often predict. And lurking in the background was the fact that the benefits of the agreement were not evenly distributed and that the painful impact of integration on some sectors and individuals had not been adequately addressed (*Economist*, 2016).

The election of US president Donald Trump, who stated during his campaign that NAFTA was the worst trade deal ever signed and who threatened multiple times to cancel the agreement, represented a shock to the Canadian and Mexican governments and business elites. His decision to launch a renegotiation of the agreement resulted in a desperate search by political and corporate leaders for solutions to his threats. After considerable delay, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)² was signed in November 2018 by the leaders of the three countries and has been ratified by all three countries. These events—as well as the decline in external investment to Canada and Mexico caused by the uncertainty engendered by the negotiations; the imposition of quotas on steel and aluminum, and Trump's threat to impose quotas on automobiles; the threat to build a wall at the US-Mexico border; and the incivility of the US leader in his dealings with his Canadian and Mexican counterparts—represented perhaps the most serious crisis the North American region has faced.

This article examines the nature of the crisis of the North American regional project and how the Canadian state has responded to these contradictory and tumultuous events. I argue that the current crisis points to the need to rethink our understanding of regionalism. Dominant theories focus primarily on the origins of regions and on their reproduction once in place, but most of the theories share a teleological assumption that levels of regionalization will increase over the long term and have little to say about regional decline or existential crisis (Dosenrode, 2015; Macdonald, 2011). Dominant approaches to the “old regionalism”—federalism, functionalism, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism—see regional integration as led primarily by states and elites. In contrast, the New Regionalism(s) Approach (NRA) tends to look at pressures from below—both in favour of, and opposed to, formal integration processes. And explanations for crisis undoubtedly lie on both terrains and within the tensions between them. This article begins with an overview of theoretical approaches to regionalism and of the insights that can be drawn from the NRA. The second part of the article focusses on three aspects of the NRA—uneven globalization, normative and ideational dimensions and the role of civil society—that can help explain the situation Canada faces in the evolving North American region, as well as the Canadian government's response. I argue that the complexities of the processes of regionalization in North America are best understood by the NRA because of its attention to the role of external changes in the global political economy, to the role of discursive

practices in processes of regional ascent and crisis (and possible demise) and to the role of non-state actors in these processes.

Revisiting Theories of Regionalism and the North American Case

Theories of regionalism have undergone several waves, responding to changes in the number and nature of regional experiments and how they have interacted with the global political economy. The recent crises in several regional groupings in Europe, North America and Latin America suggest the need to rethink existing approaches to understanding regionalization. This article contributes to a re-evaluation of existing approaches in response to such factors as the decline of US hegemony and emergence of a multipolar world and the rise of populism and identity-based rejection of globalist and regionalist projects. This does not mean that regionalism, including North American regionalism, is irrevocably in decline, but it may suggest that regions are more unstable than previously thought. While almost all theories of regionalism focus on the dynamics behind the establishment and extension of regional groupings—reflecting the explosion of various forms of regionalism all over the world in the 1980s (Söderbaum, 2003: 1)—the current historical moment calls for an examination of forces leading to crisis and possible decline of specific regions.

Early theoretical approaches to the study of world regions were explicitly centred on the European experience, and this origin continues to influence debates in the field. As noted by Tanja Börzel (2016), dominant theories of regionalism have a bias toward the idea that states are the main actors in regional formation, and they tend to focus on the establishment of formal institutions of regional governance as the main indicator of the existence of regionalism. These two assumptions, based in the European experience, are mutually reinforcing since by definition formal institutions are established by states. In the North American context, this has led to a tendency to reject the idea that North America is a region at all (see, for example, Stephen Clarkson's book titled *Does North America Exist?* [Clarkson, 2008]). There is also a bias in the literature toward rationalist theoretical accounts.

Debates between neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism have dominated much academic literature on regionalism since the 1960s. Neofunctionalists sought to explain the rapidity of the emergence of regional integration in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. The initial steps toward integration were driven by transnational interest groups who believed that the establishment of supranational authority was necessary to achieve their economic objectives and that, once established, the process of integration was largely self-reinforcing since progress in one area would lead to demand for integration in other areas, in a process of policy spillover (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; see also Haas, 1958; Schmitter, 1970; Hoffmann, 1966).

Intergovernmentalists responded to this account by arguing that national governments remained the dominant actors in the process of integration and that states had supported European integration and policy making in order to protect their strategic interests and the economic interests of their citizens (Börzel, 2016). This approach has much in common with neorealist theories that emphasize the importance of a hegemonic actor willing to pay the costs associated with regional integration and to act as a mediator and leader in the case of disputes (Mattli, 1999; Gilpin,

1987). However, the neorealist focus is more on the international system than on domestic governments, as well as on the role of institutionalization. With his theory of liberal intergovernmentalism, Andrew Moravcsik (1998) incorporated insights from liberal political economy. He rejected realism's assumption that security interests are always paramount but maintained the assumption of the unity and coherence of state action and concurred with all the rationalist assumptions of other approaches.

The intergovernmental (and liberal intergovernmental) approach would appear to be more appropriate than neofunctionalism for studying the nature of the Trump challenge to the North American region, since the focus on the agency of national governments (in contrast to the more impersonal character of the forces driving integration in neofunctionalist accounts) provides greater space for explaining the potential agency of individual leaders in decisions to withdraw from regional bodies or to demand a better bargain. Its affinity with neorealism draws attention to the importance of a hegemon in regional cohesion, particularly in the North American context, as recent events clearly demonstrate. Nevertheless, despite the importance of these insights, this approach has serious weaknesses. First, the focus remains upon formal institutions of regional integration, rather than the informal dimensions, commonly referred to as "regionalization," that connect societies and economies within regional spaces. Related to this, the focus in all of these approaches is on states and political elites. Further, as argued below, the rationalist assumptions underlying this approach, as well as other classic theories of regionalism, are insufficient for accounting for the current crisis of North America. Finally, intergovernmentalism fails to engage seriously with exogenous explanations of regionalism, including changes in the global political economy.

This type of theoretical concern, as well as a critique of these theories' Eurocentric assumptions and the spread of diverse forms of regional agreements around the world beginning in the late 1980s, led to the emergence of the NRA. As a response to the diversity of regional forms it responded to and attempted to explain, the NRA represents an attempt to broaden earlier approaches to understanding regionalism, rather than presenting a parsimonious example of theory-building (Acharya, 2012: 8). As such, it tends to assume a rather messy character, bringing together diverse attributes and causal factors involved in the phenomenon. According to Andrew Hurrell (1995: 332), the "new regionalism" is characterized by four characteristics that differentiate it from earlier (European) regionalism: the frequent inclusion of members from both the Global North and Global South; a wide variation in levels of institutionalization, with the definition of "regionness" not necessarily requiring the level of institutionalization seen in the EU; its multidimensional character; and its emphasis on the importance of inter-subjective dimensions of regionalization and public perceptions of the region. Warleigh-Lack (2006: 753) adds to this list the observation that the new regionalism does not depend on spillover for its survival, is global in scope and is "shaped voluntarily by actors from the bottom-up rather than imposed by foreign powers or cultivated by actors at the new centre." "New regionalisms" theory thus challenges dominant approaches and turns away from the European model and Eurocentrism, insisting on the heterogeneous character of contemporary regionalism (Shaw et al., 2011; Marchand et al., 1999; Söderbaum, 2013).

In addition, in contrast to more state-centric theories of regionalism, the NRA provides tools to examine the role of civil society actors in the current political crisis. Shaw et al. (2011) thus argue that civil society actors are a significant factor, even sometimes a catalyst, in these processes. This claim is reinforced by empirical studies that detail the complex relationship between diverse civil society actors and both formal and informal integration processes (Söderbaum, 2007; Serbin, 2012).

One important element of recent International Relations (IR) theory that converges with the NRA is the frequent adoption of social constructivist methodology and epistemology to understand the nature of these processes. Many Europeanists, for example, have now adopted this approach, which “emphasizes the mutual constitutiveness of structure and agency, and pays particular attention to the role of ideas, values, norms and identities in the social construction of Europe, which in turn draws away attention from the formality and particularities of the EU” (Söderbaum, 2013: 5). Although this approach was applied initially to the European case, it represents a move away from earlier European parochialism and provides greater potential for comparison across regions (see also Christiansen et al., 2001; Checkel, 2007).

Acharya (2012: 9) argues that constructivism is not distinct from, but overlaps with, the “new regionalist” approaches and that it also incorporates non-state actors. Söderbaum also points to the connection between a constructivist approach and a broader understanding of regionalism, moving away from a focus on states and formal regional institutions toward a “societal understanding of regional space.” He argues that the concept of “regionness”

means that a region can be a region “more or less”, and the level of regionness can both increase and decrease. The socially constructed nature of regions implies that they are politically contested, and there are nearly always a multitude of strategies and ideas about a particular region, which merge, mingle and clash. Furthermore, since regions are political and social projects, devised by human (state and non-state) actors in order to protect or transform existing structures, they may, just like other social projects, fail. Hence regions can be disrupted from within and from without, sometimes by the same forces that build them up. (Söderbaum, 2013: 6)

Schneider and Hurrelmann argue that the early stages of regional formation in Europe and elsewhere benefited from a “permissive consensus,” and thus processes of regionalism were largely seen as the domain of technocratic elites. Later processes of regionalism both in Europe and elsewhere in the world lacked this context and were increasingly politicized (2015: 2). By combining an examination of agency and contestation within the region with an analysis of structural changes in the global economy, the NRA helps explain these later forms of integration and helps account for regional crisis and/or decline.

Interpreting the North American Crisis and the Canadian Response

In this section, I lay out the contributions of the NRA to understanding the nature of regionalism and the crisis in the North American region during the Trump presidency, as well as the Canadian response. Drawing on the insights of NRA theory, I

focus on three different dimensions of these processes and events: the crisis as a reflection of uneven globalization; normative and ideational elements of the crisis and the Canadian response; and the active involvement of civil society, particularly labour, in challenging the regionalist enterprise.

Uneven globalization

The NRA's emphasis on the new regionalism as a response to uneven globalization is apposite for understanding both the genesis of the North American region (when it became what could be considered the first of the "new" regions) and the current crisis. Robert O'Brien argues that the move toward NAFTA resulted from the economic shock created in both the Canadian and Mexican economies from the global recession of the early 1980s and increasing moves toward protectionism by the US government. Policy makers in both countries sought to ensure preferential market access to the US economy through free trade agreements (O'Brien, 1995: 705–6). As suggested by the constructivist reading of new regionalism, however, the decision to pursue a free trade agreement (FTA) was not an inevitable response to structural conditions but, rather, one that reflected the capacity of a strong epistemic community of economists, trade policy decision makers, corporations and right-wing think tanks, and conservative politicians, to seize on the crisis as an opportunity to pursue and lock in neoliberal policies (O'Brien, 1995; Bow, 2012; Golob, 2003). NAFTA was thus a response to global economic crisis, one that included the protectionist reaction of the hegemon in the region to that crisis; the rise of new economic ideas; and defensive manoeuvres by the subordinate partners in the region, both of which responded by seeking out a free trade agreement that would guarantee their preferential access to the US market.

Changes in the global and regional economic context also help us interpret the current crisis. The growing confrontation between the United States and China provides the context for the posture of the US administration, which perceives China as a rising threat and has retaliated against it with unilateral trade actions, including a 10 per cent tariff on US\$250 billion of Chinese imports (a tariff that was increased to 25 per cent on May 10, 2019, after bilateral talks failed to achieve a resolution of the standoff between the two countries) (Pham, 2019). The day after the USMCA deal was announced, Trump's National Economic Council director, Larry Kudlow, depicted the deal as forging a North American alliance against China: "The continent as a whole now stands united against what I'm going to call unfair trading practices. . . . There is a trade coalition of the willing that is going to fix a lot of broke areas of international trade [by] getting on the same page and co-operating. And that coalition will stand up to China" (quoted in McGregor, 2018).

It is also important to understand the roots of the current crisis in the impact of neoliberal policies promoted as part of the Washington consensus policies of the 1980s in North America. This economic model exacerbated inequalities in the global economy and failed to promote an inclusive form of economic development in any of the member states. In Mexico, the unilateral decision of the Salinas government, based on neoliberal assumptions, to rapidly liberalize agriculture well in advance of the schedule imposed by NAFTA drove millions of peasants from their land (Zepeda et al., 2009). This displacement of small producers fuelled the

rise of undocumented migration to the United States, which in turn generated a xenophobic response in that country. And in the US, both mechanization and competition for jobs from Mexico deprived white blue-collar workers of their traditional livelihoods. Without domestic or transnational mechanisms to distribute the wealth generated by regionalization and globalization, resentment heightened, and NAFTA came to symbolize these issues. The political contest around the future of North America thus played out in the tension between formal dimensions of the North American region (embodied in NAFTA) and the informal processes of regionalization.

Constructivist approaches to understanding the crisis

In addition to their emphasis on the role of external forces, newer approaches to theories of regionalism also frequently challenge the rationalist biases of earlier theories and incorporate insights from constructivist approaches. Constructivism is an approach to social science that maintains that “*the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world*” (Adler, 1997: 322, emphasis in original). From this perspective, while changes in the global political economy may contribute to regionalist and counter-regionalist processes, these factors should be understood as mediated through the way in which human actors reflect on and attach meaning to those forces, not as objective forces operating independently of human consciousness. Inglehart et al. (1996) argued early on, based on data from the World Values Survey, that values among the citizens of the three North American countries were converging toward common postmaterialist standards (with Canada in the lead and Mexico quickly catching up). This type of analysis seemed to presage inevitable and uneventful progress toward higher levels of integration in the region. Authors who have examined citizen attitudes toward NAFTA have provided greater evidence for caution in these optimistic predictions. For example, Frederick Mayer argues that the first NAFTA negotiations can be seen as “a contest of ideas at several levels” (1998: 21). While the decision of the three states to negotiate the agreement can be seen as representing the triumph in the short term of neoliberal ideas, the strong wave of opposition to NAFTA coming from both the left and right of the political spectrum can also be seen as a response to the symbolic value attached to it by a wide range of groups in all three countries, but particularly in the United States.

Brian Bow has argued that moments of crisis in the North American region have created opportunities for political actors to “rally support by framing the crisis in ways that resonate with policy makers” (Bow, 2012: 55). Earlier crises in North America created windows of opportunity that permitted actors to frame the crisis in a way to rally support for further regional integration. However, moments of crisis can also do the reverse: discursive constructions of crisis can help explain the “stalling” of North American regionalization in recent years; as I have argued elsewhere, “new discursive and ideational patterns, and their interpretation of emerging events, may result in the decomposition of the region, or at least some aspects of it” (2011: 115).

The advent of the Trump presidency confirms earlier constructivist explanations of North American regionalism (see Ayres and Macdonald, 2012a, 2015; Bow, 2012; Bow and Santa Cruz, 2012; Duina, 2006; Spitz, 2009). The roots of Trump's attack on NAFTA were planted in the powerful discourses of Lou Dobbs, Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly, who all attacked various manifestations of the North American regional project. As Bow argues, even more moderate conservatives portrayed North America as facing an opposition between an "us" made up of an "ill-defined silent majority of ordinary Americans," and a "them," referring to a "hodge-podge of foreign invaders (for example, terrorists, drug-smugglers, illegal migrants) **and** the complicit or incompetent US policy makers / 'elites' that fail to keep them out" (2009: 9, emphasis in original). Actors on the political left also picked up on some of the same themes regarding the threat of trade agreements like NAFTA to national sovereignty. There were important differences in the ways in which left and right articulated these concerns, however, with the right focussing on globalist elites and immigrants as the source of the threat and with the left focussing on corporations' threats to the working class. Bow conceptualizes these concerns with the legitimacy of regionalist practices as the "glue" that holds left and right together" (2015: 44), a phenomenon that has fuelled Trump's capacity to appeal to some voters (especially white voters) who traditionally backed the Democratic party.

The circumstances surrounding the NAFTA renegotiations pose even more of a challenge to regionalist theories based on rationalist assumptions. Trump's tweets and public pronouncements build on and exacerbate the discursive construction of Mexicans as threats. In the early stages of the Trump presidency, Mexico was the target of his venom. In the speech he made announcing his presidential bid on June 15, 2015, he stated: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best . . . they're sending people that have a lot of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (*Washington Post*, 2015).

Canadian leaders were blindsided, however, when Trump appeared to turn his vitriol to Canada. When prime minister Justin Trudeau stated during the G7 Summit in June 2018 that Canada would not be "pushed around" by Trump's imposition of tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum exports, Trump responded by saying that Trudeau appeared very "meek and mild" in their meetings but that he was really "very dishonest and weak" (MacCharles, 2018). Trump's top trade adviser, Peter Navarro, said on Fox News Sunday: "There's a special place in hell for any foreign leader that engages in bad-faith diplomacy with President Donald J. Trump and then tries to stab him in the back on the way out the door" (Dale et al., 2018).

Underlying Trump's bombast and mendacity, whether directed against Canada or Mexico, is a relatively coherent worldview and understanding of the United States' position in the world, as developed by some of Trump's advisers such as Peter Navarro and Robert E. Lighthizer. Trump's emphasis on building walls, abandoning NAFTA and rejecting his country's traditional strong ties with Canada reflects this worldview. A constructivist analysis also draws attention to the strong normative and ideological components of the Trudeau government's responses to Trump. Colin Robertson (2017: 3) writes that at the first cabinet meeting after

the Trump election, half of the cabinet was in denial or “suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder,” but another group “saw this as a political opportunity to position the Trudeau Liberals as the champions of progressive liberalism . . . and become the counterpoint to Mr. Trump, relying on the anti-American DNA embedded in every Canadian.” Foreign minister Chrystia Freeland’s June 6, 2017, speech to the House of Commons countered Trump’s protectionism with a passionate endorsement of the small “l” liberal values, including a ringing defence of free trade:

Let’s be clear on this point: it is wrong to view the woes of our middle class as the result of fiendish behaviour by foreigners. The truth is that the nature of work has changed because of profound, and generally benign, global economic innovation. This transformation, driven primarily by automation and the digital revolution, is broadly positive. Managed fairly, it has the potential to increase prosperity for all—not just the global one percent.

She stated further: “The fact that our friend and ally has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership, puts into sharper focus the need for the rest of us to set our own clear and sovereign course. For Canada that course must be the renewal, indeed the strengthening, of the postwar multilateral order” (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). The Trudeau government thus invoked a strong liberal internationalist frame in opposition to Trump’s protectionist rhetoric and attempted to position itself as one of the leading defenders of those norms, values and institutions in an increasingly hostile global order.

In addition to the rhetorical opposition to Trump’s protectionist and nationalist rhetoric, the Liberal government’s approach to the NAFTA renegotiations and trade policy in general contains a strong normative commitment to what it initially called a “progressive trade agenda” (PTA) (now renamed an “inclusive approach to trade”). In introducing this approach, Freeland (2016), who was at the time Canadian trade minister, stated that progressive trade was necessary to address a protectionist wave emerging in Europe and the United States. This agenda was first developed in response to opposition the Canadian government encountered in Europe to its positions in the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). The main elements of the inclusive approach to trade are:

- “ensuring that our trade policy positions are informed before and during negotiations by thorough consultations and ongoing dialogue, including with traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women, SMEs and Indigenous peoples
- improving transparency throughout negotiation processes and related activities
- communicating the benefits of trade and investment, including through public events in Canada
- enhancing links, where appropriate, between trade and domestic socio-economic policy objectives that support middle-class job creation and growth that benefits everyone” (Government of Canada, 2020).

As part of this “inclusive” policy, the government promised to improve labour and environmental protections and to include provisions that extend the benefits of trade to traditionally excluded groups, such as women and Indigenous peoples. An example is the chapter on trade and gender in the modernized Canada-Chile FTA, as well as similar chapters on gender, on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and on Indigenous peoples—all of which the government claimed it would seek to include in the renegotiated NAFTA (Thomson, 2018).

With these commitments, the Canadian government is attempting to project a strong narrative regarding its commitment to progressive or inclusive values, again countering both the Trump administration’s rhetoric and that of the previous Canadian government of Stephen Harper. A constructivist approach emphasizes the importance of such ideational dimensions of regionalism and trade negotiations. Trump’s posturing reflects his understanding of the power of symbols and stereotypes in mobilizing political support. And the Trudeau government clearly recognized that the NAFTA renegotiations were not just about horse-trading between established interests but also represented a contest over the construction of the region and of interests within it, as argued by constructivist approaches to the new regionalism.

Civil society and regionalism

Finally, as discussed above, the NRA helps highlight the importance of civil society actors in the battle over the future of the North American region, a dimension that is less prominent in earlier theories of regionalism, which concentrated on its top-down character. Even if corporate actors were the main forces pushing toward regional integration early on in North America, civil society has continuously played a role in both constructing and undermining the region. The Canadian model of consultation on trade policy has evolved over the years in response to demands from both the private sector and non-business civil society actors. After the 1985 announcement of the CUSFTA, the Canadian government announced the creation of an International Trade Advisory Committee (ITAC), to focus on the macro-economic environment, and of 15 Sectoral Advisory Groups on International Trade (SAGITs), to focus on sector-specific concerns. All of these committees reported directly to the Trade Negotiator’s Office. The membership of the committees consisted overwhelmingly of representatives of Canadian corporate actors, along with a few representatives of small business, other interests and academics. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was vehemently opposed to the CUSFTA and refused to participate, so ultimately only a few labour unions were represented. Helen Moroz called this model “elite tripartism,” with the three parties being the state, business and the provinces, with virtually no representation of non-elite actors (cited in Macdonald, 2002: 202).

A similar model prevailed during the original NAFTA negotiations. The agreement was negotiated under the Republican administration of George H. W. Bush, but it was not ratified before the November 1992 elections brought Democratic president Bill Clinton to power. The Clinton administration developed labour and side accords to appeal to this base. Cameron and Tomlin quote one of the US negotiators of the side agreements: “NAFTA was frightening to Clinton’s

core constituency. People felt they were working longer for less. The idea was to change the symbolic meaning of NAFTA, to recast NAFTA not as a low wage strategy but as part of a high wage, high skill strategy” (2000: 188). This comment reflects the symbolic and emotional response of citizens to the agreement, as well as the US government’s attempt to respond to popular anxieties and concerns. Nonetheless, US labour (like its Canadian brothers and sisters) remained resolutely opposed to NAFTA and refused to participate in strengthening the agreement. Under the labour side accord, civil society groups can take complaints about any state’s failure to uphold its own legislative standards regarding labour rights to a National Administrative Office in one of the other two states, but only a few labour rights are enforceable through sanctions, and these do not include such fundamental rights as freedom of association and collective bargaining. The Commission for Labour Cooperation that was established lacked political support and funding, and it eventually disappeared. In contrast, a number of the larger US environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came on side and participated in drafting the agreement; the resulting Commission for Environmental Cooperation was established as an autonomous body to monitor environmental standards across the region (Cameron and Tomlin, 2000: 199). While it does not have the power to punish violators or enforce environmental cooperation, particularly on such sensitive issues as climate change, it is able to initiate fact-finding reports about complaints and publish them, and it can conduct reports on its own initiative (Aspinwall, 2017).

State parties to the NAFTA responded to the politicization of regional integration with attempts to fly below the public radar in subsequent efforts at trilateral (and binational) cooperation. In response to the intense politicization that occurred during the debates on NAFTA, the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), established in 2005, attempted to depoliticize the region by pursuing a broad-ranging package of reforms to promote border management and security cooperation and regulatory harmonization in the region. The initiative bypassed federal legislatures (and states and provinces) and tasked a series of working groups made up of public servants from the three countries to promote harmonization in an ad hoc, technocratic and decentralized fashion (Ayres and Macdonald, 2012b; Bow, 2015). Additionally, the governments established a North American Competitiveness Council made up of representatives of big businesses from the three countries to advise the governments regarding the competitiveness agenda and gave it privileged access to government decision makers at the annual summits. As I argue with Jeffrey Ayres (2012b: 336): “The glaring exclusivity and secrecy that characterized SPP decision-making . . . further inflamed legislative political opposition as well as civil society outrage over the sense of having become ‘imaginary citizens’ (Council of Canadians, 2006) who had been deprived of the ability to provide input into deep integration discussions.” The move to depoliticize regionalization backfired and was a major factor in the eventual cancellation of the SPP by President Obama. This episode contributed to the mounting opposition within the US political right to the North American regional project, which eventually boiled over into support for Trump’s call to rip up NAFTA.

The Trudeau government’s “inclusive approach” to trade policy represents an attempt to disarm such opposition and redirect it toward support for reformed

mechanisms of domestic decision making and regional governance, while also projecting a progressive image of Canada. According to one labour union representative, Angelo DiCaro from Unifor, the idea emerged out of the opposition (primarily in Europe) to CETA. European civil society and government opponents were able to hold up the agreement and threatened its defeat. In response, Canada and the EU negotiated new clauses—for example, reforms to the Investor-State Dispute Settlement model, which responded to some of the opponents' critiques. "What spun out of this," he argues, "was a new narrative that this was a 'more progressive' CETA. This terminology from the opposition movements was co-opted," and then CETA was held up as the gold standard of trade agreements. He argues further: "I think the Liberals did want to try and build a bigger tent of support, not just the traditional business community. Unions were part of that, part of the new government's mandate of engaging more with civil society, unions, Indigenous communities, etc. For them, to speak the language of those groups was a way to build a bridge" (personal interview, Ottawa, March 28, 2018). According to DiCaro, inclusion of civil society actors, particularly labour, represented an important political resource in the repertoire of the Canadian federal government as it confronted an apparently intransigent US administration.

While, at one level, Canadian policy represents an attempt to co-opt popular movement discourses opposed to regionalization, at another level, the Canadian government has taken on broad aspects of the labour movement's response to NAFTA. CLC president Hassan Yussuf was named to the advisory committee created by the Liberal government to inform the government's negotiating posture, along with Perry Bellegarde, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations; representatives of big business; Quebec farmers; and the two main opposition parties. A committee was also established with union representatives, who were able to view and respond to the government's position.

Labour representatives also received regular briefings and provided input into the negotiation of the labour chapter that was eventually included in the USMCA. In contrast with the side accord approach that was followed with NAFTA, the inclusion of a separate chapter on labour protections means that the provisions are subject to sanctions under the agreement's state-to-state dispute-resolution mechanism. The labour chapter (like other recent US and Canadian free trade agreements) includes references to the International Labour Organization's Declaration of Rights at Work, and it also includes improved provisions aiming to protect against discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity; address violence against workers; and provide protection for migrant workers. There is also an annex to the section on worker representation in collective bargaining in Mexico, which commits the Mexican government to adopting legislative reforms to guarantee workers' rights to bargain collectively and to banning so-called protection contracts that allow corrupt and unrepresentative unions to sign collective agreements without workers' input or approval, and even without their knowledge (Sinclair, 2018). The labour chapter was criticized for the weakness of enforcement measures by Democrats in the US Congress, who threatened to hold up ratification. The Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), elected in July 2018, passed a labour law designed to encourage democratic reforms in the union sector. This reform was a response,

in part, to pressures from the United States to live up to Mexico's commitments in USMCA, but it is also a historic demand of independent labour activists affiliated with AMLO's party.³ These dynamics of the process of regionalization in North America thus show how civil society has played an important role in both delegitimizing the previous trade agreement and in pushing for approaches that better reflect the perspectives of non-elite civil society actors. The Canadian government under Justin Trudeau has responded to these pressures by attempting to bring on board civil society through mechanisms of consultation and by partial incorporation of its demands. Even if these concessions were limited, they do confirm the NRA's incorporation of the role of civil society in explanations of regionalization.

Conclusion

With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, North America entered into a perilous and rocky new phase. On a day-to-day basis, politicians, investors, workers and analysts were left guessing what would happen to NAFTA—would it be tweaked, modernized or ripped up? This disruptive context requires a rethinking of theories of regionalization and of Canada's role in the North American region. As I have argued above, some aspects of dominant theories, particularly intergovernmentalism, do shed light on the dilemmas Canada faces, particularly the continued importance of nation-states and government leaders and the crucial importance of the regional hegemon in the fate of the region. Few analysts of regionalization, however, have contemplated the factors that might lead to dissolution and deregionalization (at least of the formal elements of the regional project). In contrast, the NRA provides useful guideposts to understanding recent upheavals in the North American region. As an approach, not a theory, it does not provide strong causal explanations or predictions of future events. But it does draw attention to aspects of regionalization that were overlooked by classic theories of regionalization. For example, the NRA's focus on the unequal effects of globalization helps provide insight into the political forces that have led us to the recent crisis of the regional project during the Trump administration. The neoliberal and institution-lite model on which NAFTA was based has failed to address these negative impacts and has provided fuel for the populist and racist rhetoric of the Trump administration. The strong ideological attachment of the region's founders to neoliberalism blinded them to the uneven impact of regionalization and globalization on citizens across the region.

In this context, the NRA also encourages attention to important aspects of the Canadian government's response to the Trump challenge. The Trudeau government has engaged in consultation with select elements of civil society and has incorporated some elements of civil society critique, particular those coming from labour, into its negotiating strategy, and it has mounted a strong discursive opposition, based on principles of liberal internationalism, to Trump's rhetoric. Even if these policies do little to address the underlying concerns of critics of regionalization and globalization, they serve to rebrand NAFTA and defuse protest. The current moment of crisis in the North American regional project has thus brought attention to the contingent and unstable nature of regionalism. This moment of crisis also supports approaches that underscore how regions are not

natural or the outcome of external forces but, rather, socially constructed and how regions may be “un-done” as actors engage in processes of contestation and discursive reframing of the regional project.

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Notes

1 Even the New Democratic party had dropped its strong opposition to free trade agreements (FTAs) in general, although it remained critical of some FTAs, such as the Canada-Colombia agreement, on human rights grounds.

2 The official name in Canada is the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), and in Mexico, the Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá (T-MEC).

3 The inclusion of a provision requiring that at least 40 per cent of all automobile content be produced by workers earning at least \$16 an hour is designed to address US workers’ concerns, since it will act to discourage factories’ shifting production to Mexico, where such a wage level cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future.

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