Risk, Vulnerability and Geopolitical Relations in the ‘North American Community’ in the Wake of 9/11

Emily Gilbert
Canadian Studies and Geography
University of Toronto
I: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

- Naomi Klein argues that disaster capitalism: “uses the desperation and fear created by catastrophe to engage in radical social and economic engineering” eg: reconstruction

- Disaster creates a “terra nullius” that can then be “discovered” and settled (Naomi Klein)

- Condoleezza Rice: the Asian tsunami was “a wonderful opportunity” that “has paid great dividends for us”
Risk society: mobilizing threats and vulnerability to manage and promote capitalist intervention

“The more threatening the shadows cast by future prospects, the more lasting are the disruptions that can be brought about today through the dramaturgy of risk” (Ulrich Beck)

Towards preemptive disaster capitalism?

August 2004: creation of the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization; led by Carlos Pascual
“to lead, coordinate and institutionalize US Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path towards peace, democracy and a market economy”

http://www.state.gov/s/crs/

to change “the very social fabric of a nation” so that it is “democratic and market-oriented” (Carlos Pascual)
Post-conflict planning and monitoring of 25 states that are not yet in conflict: “pre-completed contracts”

Other traces of disaster capitalism? “Friends” and allies? Neighbours?

9/11 and Ground Zero: a *terra nullius* for the reconfiguration of North American relations?
II: North American Relations in the Aftermath of 9/11

- Hillary Clinton: “security trumps trade”

- US concerns about leaky borders
  - West Wing; America’s Most Wanted
  - April 2005: Newt Gingrich
  - Richard Holbrooke, Paul Cellucci

- Canadian trade concerns: border delays
  - $2 (CDN) billion crosses border daily
  - 87% Cdn exports go to US (35% GDP)
Stephen Clarkson: border holdups portend “a monumental disaster with an impact no less significant than the destruction of New York’s twin trade towers”

- 30 Point Smart Border Action Plan
- Canadian Anti-Terrorist Act
- Revised Canadian Immigration Act
A new “big idea”
- NAFTA-plus
- Customs union; common market; currency union
- Energy security; immigration controls

Towards a “North American Community”?

Social and economic reconstruction emanating out of fear and vulnerability?
III: Security and Prosperity
Agreement of North America

- Signed March 23, 2005
- Regional cooperation and concerns about global competition

Aims are
- to make region safe and secure
- to ensure businesses are competitive, economies are resilient
- to ameliorate quality of life
- Expands on earlier bilateral agreements
  - Economic cooperation; eg autos
  - Harmonization of external tariffs
  - Regulatory cooperation; eg energy
  - Pre-clearance programs and biometrics

- Model of “partnership”
  - Cooperation, collaboration, coordination
  - But through harmonization = voluntarist, market-oriented approach (Andrew Barry)
  - Deepening neoliberalism: limited political infrastructure, mechanisms for citizenship
Quality of life issues included

- Education; science and technology; environment; health

Shift to biopolitics (Michel Foucault)

- Trilateral concern for the health, welfare, prosperity and happiness of the population (Mitchell Dean)
- Appeals to “citizens” or “the people” being “protected,” “responded to,” “invested in,” their “full potential” promoted
Biopolitics and security: marginal populations and developmentalism

- “Improvements in human capital and physical infrastructure in Mexico, particularly in the center and south of the country, would knit these regions more firmly into the North American economy and are in the economic and security interests of all three countries” (Independent Task Force on the Future of North America)

- “In the long run, healthier indigenous communities will be able to more fully participate in the social, economic, and cultural life of North America” (Annex to the SPPNA)
Promotion of “homo economicus” (Nikolas Rose)

- Productive, efficient, self-maximizing, self-monitoring citizens

Security and “homo economicus”

- Perception that “The suicide bomber is the most radical contrast to the homo economicus. He is both economically and morally completely uninhibited, and for this reason, a bearer of absolute cruelty” (Ulrich Beck)
IV: Conclusions

- Disaster of 9/11 and reconfiguration of “North American Community”
  - Triangulation of security, prosperity, quality of life
  - Mobilization of economic and security vulnerabilities to facilitate neoliberal and developmentalist reconstruction

- Consolidation of regions of security—compare to “regions of risk” or “regions of threat” (Greg Bankoff)
Preemption and partnerships the twin keystones to National Security Strategy (Colin Powell)

“Not least among the policy priorities laid out in the NSS is our determination to develop cooperative relations among the world's major powers. It is here, above all, that the key to a successful conclusion to the war against terrorism lies” (Powell).
Creation of “peace, democracy and a market society” (Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization)

“freedom, economic opportunity, and strong democratic values and institutions” (SPPNA)

Hence can understand multilateral partnerships as a kind of preemptive disaster capitalism: sense of risk and vulnerability used to reconfigure society and economy across trilateral region
• Interdependence of security, economy, quality of life
  • Justifies a disaster continuum that ranges from terrorism to ‘natural’ events (Didier Bigo)
  • Legitimizes securitization and militarization of all kinds of disaster response
  • Promotes ubiquitous interiorization of risk management and disaster planning to allay sense of vulnerability