PREDATORY POLITICS?:
AN ASSESSMENT OF JAMAICA’S CIVIL WAR, 1990-2000

By

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ABSTRACT: From 1990 to 2000, Kingston, Jamaica experienced a series of murders reaching
death tolls into the thousands, prompting the naming of the city as the murder capital of the
western hemisphere. This paper applies a Gramscian analysis to the Jamaican violence by
examining Gramsci’s theory of the unstable relationships between civil society and politics. In
so doing, it argues that components of a Gramscian-style civil war existed among the drug dons,
political elites, and the Black lower class as a result of overriding political identities, the need for
economic vitality, and the struggle for political power. The paper further raises the question if
the potential for a Gramscian-style political revolution based in lower classes counter-culture
existed during this time period and if the country of Jamaica possessed the potential to become a
predatory state. The paper concludes that if the Black lower class continues to develop their
counter-culture despite the predatory nature of the drug dons, a socio-political revolution would
be expected to appear on the island’s horizon.

As the warming rays of sunlight saunter onto the Caribbean island paradise, black bodies
line the streets of Kingston. They lie strewn across the sidewalks in contorted positions, final
moments of agony vividly emblazoned on their faces. Blood splatters litter the city streets,
forming stained pools that mingle to become unrecognizable, lifeless patterns. Silver gunshells
trace the outlines of bodies that have fallen and penetrate through the air to seek those who have
not. Distant screams linger on the cool island breeze; the desperate cries...desperately crying
out for a listening ear, as the ringing gunshots helplessly drown them out.

This is a war zone. On the Caribbean island of Jamaica, the soldiers don’t wear
uniforms, but they bear large guns and hundreds of bullets. Under the steady aim of these
soldiers, the bullets buzz like flies through the night air, pursuing their civilian casualties like
small soldiers humming a funeral dirge. The ballot provides flimsy protection against the
innumerable bearers of death, but occasionally it keeps away the large ones. In this bastion of
Caribbean paradise, armed drug gangs militantly patrol the streets, enforcing their own form of
unchecked democratic rule. Searching for supporters of the opposing political party, they leave
no suspect unexamined, no house pacified for the night...
From 1990 to 2000, the capital city of Kingston in the Caribbean nation of Jamaica looked like a war zone. Victims of mafia like executions, strong-armed robberies and rapes were strewn on streets of the Kingston slums: the city was dubbed the murder capital of the western hemisphere. During the early-1980s until the late-1990s, murder increased almost three percent, rape increased thirty-three percent, and shootings escalated by twenty-nine percent.¹ These ongoing intra and inter-class battles were rooted in the colonial economic and political structures that engendered huge gaps between rich and poor, black and white, and consequently access to political power. The domestic white and light-skinned black elite that emerged post independence, however, did more to exacerbate than abate the intra-class tensions that often bubbled over in violence. Many of the murders occurred in the garrisons, or communities based originally on social identities that were later defined by political allegiances to either the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) or the Peoples National Party (PNP) during the 1960s and 1970s. After the 1980s and throughout the early-1990s, drug dons emerged as powerful actors on the domestic and international scenes. They battled with political elites over control of the garrisons, which then became polarized by geographical identities, and thus, the drug dons gained control over the Black lower class that was engaged in an ongoing intra-class conflict.

This thesis argues that applying a Gramscian framework to Jamaican politics between 1990 and 2000 reveals how the instability of the Jamaican political system engendered a civil war despite the façade of democratic politics and the international community’s refusal to see it otherwise. Gramsci’s theory reveals how drug dons became part of civil society, yet scholarly literature tends to treat them as outside civil society, in part because of their position as international actors. Furthermore, Gramsci’s concepts of civil society, hegemony, war of

movement, and war of position explain how drug dons supersede, not merely support, the influence of political elites in the lives of the Black lower class. Finally, Gramsci’s theory also helps us to understand why the Black lower class’s resistance to oppressive forms of control contains revolutionary potential. By following Gramsci’s theory, it remains evident that the drug dons possess the ability to turn Jamaica into a predatory state, or a state in which competing groups alter the balance of power by utilizing force to gain control over the state, while suppressing the social movements of the populace.²

The argument will be developed in two parts. Part One provides the theoretical framework for the case study on Jamaica by first examining the impact of politics on the Black lower class. Carl Stone advocates that although inherent problems exist within the Jamaican political system, its political culture continues to benefit the Black lower class; and Obika Gray counters that the Jamaican political system preys upon the Black lower class but also asserts that the Black lower class exercises social power in resisting the oppressive effects of the Jamaican political system. They are examined against Gramscian concepts which provide a more complete framework for the study of the Jamaican politics. Gramsci’s theory and its relevance to Jamaican politics will be further explained with the case study of a Gramscian analysis of Jamaican politics in part two. This section part of the paper will discuss the Gramscian civil war in Jamaica, along with the prospect of creation of a predatory state by drug dons, and the revolutionary potential of the Black lower class.

PART ONE: The Jamaican Political System: Friend or Foe of the Black Lower Class?

Two main schools of thought can be discerned from the scholarly literature on the operation of political elites and drug dons within the Jamaican political system to the detriment of the Black lower class. Carl Stone’s position is that the Jamaican political system provides the Black lower class with an outlet through which to vocalize their grievances. According to Stone, through the election of political elites, the Jamaican political system provides the Black lower class with direct access to political power. Obika Gray argues, contrarily, that political elites fail to meet the needs of the Black lower class; rather than allowing them access to politicians fulfilling their needs, it not only denies their interests but also absorbs their revolutionary culture. Gray claims that political elites operate in a parasitic system in which they sought to broaden their power by feeding off of the revolutionary culture, material and immaterial dependency, and economic vulnerability of the Black lower class.

Stone argues that the Black lower class benefits from the two-party system and patron client relationship because of its condition in immense poverty. For instance, at its highest in 1991, over forty-five percent of Jamaicans were living in a state of utter impoverishment. This inability to acquire access to financial resources left the Black lower class subjected to extreme

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destitution which, according to Stone, strongly influenced their participation in party politics. Stone describes party membership as being dominated by the “poorest of the poor” who have no other way of collectively organizing to have their needs met. He attributes the lack of collective action among the Black lower-class to the manner in which poverty breeds a focus on individual survival and individualizes human struggle. The abject poverty of the Black lower class creates an opening for political elites to supply them with material and non-material resources for survival. This phenomenon has emerged through the patron client system in which political elites exchange material and non-material resources for political support.

Stone argues that the Jamaican two-party political system serves a positive role by providing the Black lower class with an avenue to legitimate power, meaning access to power and the subsequent spoils of the system, and thus influence in the political sphere. The Black lower class can exercise indirect political power by electing candidates for parliament and choosing the leader of the executive, the prime minister. Stone notes, however, that the Jamaican political system can be characterized as a patron client system, defined here as the vertical linkages of the Black lower class to political parties, which supply them with both material and non-material resources for survival. The patron client system subverts horizontal linkages, or loyalties to class identity, in order to operate as a form of class control. This means that while the Black lower class can negotiate within the Jamaican patron client political system, which requires the exchange of economic resources and non-material empowerment for political power, it also prevents the Black lower class from exercising any tangible, direct form of power within Jamaican politics. As a result, this competitive system allows political elites who possess the economic resources (payoffs, jobs, government contracts, and other forms of patronage) to

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7 Ibid., p. 50.
compete for and hold onto government positions. Stone asserts that since the Black lower class lacks the “motivation, resources, and leadership” to organize effectively for their collective interests independently of party politics, this avenue to power, power through party loyalties, benefits the Black lower class by providing them with an outlet to express their concerns and to reap the benefits provided by political elites. Political parties must appeal to their supporters to attract their support, votes and interests, which gives the Black lower class more of a voice in Jamaican politics and increases their leverage in the political community. Moreover, parties in the patron client system must provide benefits, among which are the day-to-day material resources such as “employment on government projects, contracts to carry out government projects in the building of economic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, markets and water supplies, and access to facilities such as housing in housing schemes, and highly sought after opportunities for overseas employment” to the party faithful.

Further, Stone argues that political parties temper class conflicts by redirecting Black lower class dissent and incorporating it into mainstream Jamaican society. Since the Black lower class constitutes the majority of the political parties’ loyal base of support, they shape party policy through “their cultural style and emotional and social needs.” Political elites acquiesce to the opinions and perspectives of the Black lower class and therefore provide them with increased visibility in the Jamaican political system. Increased visibility leads to increased access to modes of influence in Jamaican society, and therefore, to Black lower-class exposure to the economically, socially, and politically removed middle and upper classes. The result is a

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8 Ibid., p. 68-70.  
9 Ibid., p. 54.  
10 Ibid., p. 51.
more cohesive society in Stone’s view because the upper classes recognize, albeit resentfully, the plight of the Black lower class through the political parties’ platforms.\textsuperscript{11}

The basis for the Black lower class’s support for political parties is also, Stone suggests, based in class identities and interests that are conflated with political party allegiances. By aligning their interests with the political parties, the Black lower class sacrifices its class-identity in exchange for a dominant, overriding political identity through which Stone asserts they receive, in exchange, positive reinforcements of “dignity, status, respectability, and recognition.”\textsuperscript{12} The Black lower class continues to support the political parties because it perceived them as delivering “protection and advancements of freedom and social justice.”\textsuperscript{13} Even though the Black lower class is not guaranteed material benefits in the patron client system, the hope of acquiring benefits is sufficient for them to suppress their class interests to those of the party. More distressing, however, is the idea that they will also engage in violent acts to ensure that their party wins national elections.\textsuperscript{14}

Party loyalties and identities are also conflictual. When a political party wins and takes over the reigns of government, the patron client system allows them to allocate state funds to the material benefit of its own loyal party members to the near complete exclusion of supporters of the opposition.\textsuperscript{15} Occasionally violence was inflicted against members of the opposition party in post-election retribution wherein opposition party supporters have found their homes demolished for example, or forced to flee from their communities.\textsuperscript{16} This has created highly-polarized communities based on political allegiances. Politicians use armed gangs that acquire weapons

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 70.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 55.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 55.
through the illegal drug trade or oftentimes the politicians themselves, to carry out violent acts against members of opposing parties and to police the communities in order to coerce political support. Thus, since political identities override class identity, members of the Black lower class engage in violent acts against each other over the promise of these material rewards. Thus Stone argues that while the Jamaican political system does provide access to power for lower class Blacks, in part because of their poverty which prevents organizing in their own interests, he recognizes that one end result has been violent contestations over benefits that foster a competitive system dominated by political elites.

The second dominant view of Jamaican politics, formulated by Obika Gray, argues that the Jamaican political system is detrimental to the Black lower class because it not only absorbs the lower class, it recreates their culture and exploits them for their class vulnerability. In other words, the system is parasitic. Gray argues that parasitic rule operates in Jamaican politics to assist the dominant classes in gaining political power, manipulating society for their benefits, and enforcing their position in the international system by eradicating rebellious counter-movements. Political elites’ objectives of maintaining access to political power and exercising control over rebellious communities is accomplished by integrating their rebellious counter-culture into the dominant political culture.

Moreover, Gray asserts that the Jamaican political system victimizes the Black lower class through the predatory reach of the state into poor communities. The state invades communities through the vertical linkages of the patron-client system, holds the residents captive by policing their political party support, constrains their political choices through the

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17Ibid., p. 58.
maintenance of garrisons, and relies on the coercive apparatus of the state literally to kill support for the opposition party. In this manner, political elites rely also on the policing mechanisms of extra-legal gang members with political loyalties to control garrisons, the politically-confined, geographically bound city dwellers by denying them protection, benefits, and employment if they belong to opposition parties. Like Stone, then, Gray argues that political parties commit acts of violence against their own constituents; yet unlike Stone, Gray sees these acts as stemming from the system itself in an attempt to deny political avenues to power rather than reinforce them.

Gray argues, then, somewhat controversially, that the Black lower class actively rebels against the controlling influences of the Jamaican patron client, two-party political system. He sees this rebellion against the systematic constraints of destitution and cyclical violence as a means of self-preservation; the Black lower class is practicing a culture of rebellion to cope with their subjugated position. In other words, Gray is suggesting here that the very mechanisms that support the corruption of the patron client system engender the rebellious culture of the Black lower class which presents a challenge to the legitimacy of the political system by undermining obedience and countering class control. However, Gray asserts that resistance against the oppressive mechanisms of the state is problematic. Members of the Black lower class who rebel against political participation as a party loyal often fall victim to “harsh state violence, cultural inferiorization, discriminatory application of penal codes and even summary executions by security forces.” Gray concludes, therefore, that the rebellious culture of the Black lower class gives them the ability to counter the repressive aspects of the Jamaican political system even though it positions them as enemies of the state.

\[19\textit{Ibid.}, p. 226.\]
Thus, Gray sees that the political system does allow the Black lower class to exercise some autonomy in developing its own counter-culture – in other words, he argues against Stone that the lower class is incapable of organizing effectively; however, Gray argues that it simultaneously denies that agency by absorbing and incorporating counter-culture into mainstream political discourse and in turn can be manipulated by elite control.\textsuperscript{20} In this manner, the patron client political system transforms the liberating counter-culture of the Black lower class into a dominant, repressive culture intended for its exploitation.\textsuperscript{21} The Black lower class actively develops the counter-culture, but Gray argues that it still exercises a limited autonomy and agency. Limiting both autonomy and agency allows political elites to construct a form of power that feeds upon the Black lower class, exploits their culture of resistance, and disguises the difference between the dominators and the dominated.\textsuperscript{22} In this way, political elites utilize party identities and loyalties to turn the Black lower class upon itself in a violent form of class control, and in so doing effectively undermine the potential threat posed by their rebellious culture to the maintenance of parasitic rule. Political elites engage the rebellious culture of the Black lower class as a means of isolating groups into “protonational tribal communities” which commit violent and murderous acts against one another in the name of political associations.\textsuperscript{23}

Gray maintains that political identities subvert and eliminate any class identities, such that rebellious cultures constructed to resist the parasitic aspects of the Jamaican political system fail to challenge successfully the politicians or to reform the system to ensure that the needs of

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{21} Obika Gray argues that the patron client system no longer operates in Jamaica in his work “Badness-Honour” \textit{Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy}, Anthony Harriott, ed. (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), p. 13-47. However, as the theory communicated in “Rethinking Power” is more widely recognized, it is the perspective utilized in this paper.
\textsuperscript{22} Gray, “Rethinking Power”, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 220.
As a result, the rebellious claims of the Black lower class became absorbed, manipulated, and integrated into Jamaican politics, and any potential threat to the system is destroyed before it reaches a level of potency.

Combining Perspectives: Understanding the Relationship between Politics and the Poor

These two competing schools of thought on Jamaican politics do not offer a complete picture of either the exploitative nature of Jamaican politics vis-à-vis the Black lower class, or their rebellious intent. The first view holds that the Jamaican political system and party politics provide the Black lower class with access to legitimate forms of power. It fails to account for how intra-class conflict, as the result of overriding identities of political party association, provides a benefit both to the Black lower class and to Jamaican society more generally. As such, it also fails to address why, if given an avenue to political power, the Black lower class remains politically marginalized. Finally, there is no satisfactory explanation for why, if these political identities are empowering, they are the basis for increased violence among the Black lower class.

The second school of thought, which argues that the Jamaican political system exerts a parasitic influence on the Black lower class by absorbing their counter-culture of rebellion into the dominant culture, surveying their communities, and enacting violence against them fails to analyze how the social power of the urban poor translates into a legitimate form of political power that could influence the discourse and platforms of Jamaican political parties. Nonetheless, the second view appears to offer a better accounting of the socio-political situation in Jamaica between 1990 and 2000 because it recognizes the counter-culture of the Black lower

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class. A Gramscian analysis, however, takes the best of the two schools and offers a more fruitful framework for analyzing Jamaican politics between 1990 and 2000.

**Gramsci and Jamaican Politics**

Antonio Gramsci’s political framework fills in the gaps of these two schools of thought to provide a more accurate analysis of the Jamaican political system. Gramsci views politics as civil interactions facilitated by a collective consciousness of all classes.\(^{25}\) The concept key to the working of a collective consciousness is hegemony, which operates to mask inequality and conflict. In Gramsci’s view, hegemony is the positioning of elite “norms and values” as a form of power that undermines the collective autonomy of lower classes while privileging the pervasive ideology of the dominant class.\(^{26}\) Hegemony thus affects the everyday lives of the lower class by controlling their perceptions of reality and by defining their needs and wants.\(^{27}\)

According to Martin Carnoy, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony consists of two factors: an elite class manipulating the divisions of the lower-class “through its moral and intellectual leadership;” and, second, the use of this leadership to control the lower-class’ existence by defining their collective reality.\(^{28}\) The state becomes, in this view, the arena of elite domination since it is through state power that the elites promote their ideology.\(^{29}\) “Gramsci views the State as an extension of the hegemonic apparatus,” Martin Carnoy argues, “as a part of the system developed by the bourgeoisie to perpetuate and expand their control of society in the context of

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\(^{27}\)Carnoy, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 70.

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 66.
Clearly, the state functions as the site of elite hegemony through which dominance over the lower class and all of civil society occurs. The state then has the political role of functioning as a superstructure that enforces the will of elites through coercing of the lower class such that it allies with their political interests. Unlike the schools of thought above, Gramsci asserts that elite hegemony and lower-class counterhegemony coexist. Gramsci thus intertwines the three concepts of politics, hegemony, and state to describe the close relationships between the classes, while highlighting the basis for their division and potential destruction.

Conflict, in Gramsci’s view, can lead to a civil war of class struggle once the classes divide in their attempts either to gain access to the state and its hegemonic forms of power, or blatantly reject participation in the state through an alternate form of power. Hence, this paper argues that Gramsci’s idea of the struggle for possession of, or willful exclusion from, the state apparatus, and the coercive hegemonic power associated with its acquisition, or the liberty of rejection, is the primary source of class conflict in Jamaica. As Gramsci forcefully argues, “The superstructures of civil society are like the trenchsystems of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy’s entire defense system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter.” Moreover, as is clear in Jamaican politics, this Gramscian war occurs in two forms: war of movement, or the direct attack on the state, and war of position, in which the lower class must form alliances to attack indirectly the systems that prop up elite hegemony. The war of movement involves the political elites attacking the state to gain power, and the war of position consists of the counter-

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30 Ibid., p. 74.
31 Ibid., p. 72.
32 Ibid., p. 72-73.
33 The words of Antonio Gramsci cited in: Ibid., p. 80.
34 Simon, op. cit., p. 75.
hegemony of the lower class which is designed to undermine elite hegemony over the state apparatus.

A Gramscian framework allows us to view the Jamaican political system in a new way. It combines the perspectives of the two prominent schools of thought on the violence of the Jamaican political system by working back in Black lower-class agency that moves the analysis beyond the patron client system. Furthermore, Gramscian theory shows how the power relationships among social classes have resulted in considerable and disarming violence within and between garrison communities. Thus by using a Gramscian framework, this work reveals the instability of the Jamaican political system and how a civil war can occur within a democracy and without the official designation of the international political community. This analysis of Jamaican politics through the use of a Gramscian lens explains how a civil war occurred in Jamaica from 1990 until 2000.

In addition, the Gramscian framework reveals how the drug dons possess the potential to transform the Jamaican political system from a parasitic state to a predatory state. In a parasitic state, the political elites absorb the lower class, exploit their culture, and transform it into a method of oppression. While this works well in a system that allows the political elites to gain the consent of the Black lower class through such mechanisms as the patron client relationship, it is rendered ineffective when the Black lower class recognizes its exploitation, the mechanisms provoking consent fail, and challenges the system are presented through the development of a revolutionary counter-culture. In contrast, Fatton’s predatory states reject most forms of consent and operate through the use of violent, coercive force to police the majority of the Black lower class into accepting their rule. Both parasitic and predatory states utilize forms of Gramsci’s hegemony (political elites rely on mostly consent, while drug dons increasingly evoke the use of
violent, coercive force) to accomplish their social, economic, and political goals. Although the Black lower class developed a counter-culture to challenge the rule of politicians, they have yet to develop the revolutionary power to overthrow the predatory power of the drug dons.

Gramsci’s theory explains why the Black lower class endured victimization at the hands of the drug dons due to their hegemony of identity prescription, material and immaterial benefits, and their repressive violence. Yet, with the potent counter-culture of the lower class, the beginning stages of a Gramscian revolution simultaneously exist in Jamaica. According to Gramscian theory, as a particular social class becomes conscious of its position, intellectuals would organize to catalyze the lower class toward revolutionary consciousness. Once they possessed intellectual maturity, the Black lower class would engage in a bottom-up revolutionary movement for political, social, and economic transformation. Thus, the apparent Gramscian civil war from 1990 until 2000 could be undermined through the increasing maturation of the Black lower class’ culture of rebellion, as long as the Black lower class could counter the political elites. However, the violent nature of the political culture remains exploitable by the drug dons, who possess no loyalties either to the political elites or to the Black lower class and operate, in essence, beyond the reach of the state. It is here that the revolutionary potential can be lost because of the potential for a predatory state. Thus, when Fatton’s understanding of the predatory state is wedded to Gramsci, we see not only how a lower class political movement for revolutionary change could occur, but also how the potential for a predatory state may further block lower-class aspirations.

**PART II: The Gramscian Civil War, 1990-2000**

This section applies a Gramscian framework to Jamaican politics between 1990 and 2000. It commences with a section revealing how the international situation from the end of British colonial rule in 1962 to late-1980s and early-1990s created a cyclical and persistent condition impoverishment for the majority of Jamaicans. Furthermore, the background section reveals how this international situation provided the domestic conditions necessary for the powerlessness of the state and its political elites enabling the rise of the drug dons as members of civil society and illegitimate actors in the international sphere. The following section details how the international economy affected the social structure of Jamaica and reveals how the drug dons came to acquire a power that superseded that of the state and its political elites. In the final section, the Gramscian framework is used to demonstrate how a civil war occurred in Jamaica during 1990 to 2000; shows how the Black lower class’s counter-culture continued to operate as a form of resistance necessary to engage in a future Gramscian revolution, and how the drug dons possessed the potential to transform Jamaica from a parasitic state into a predatory state.

**Jamaica: The International Context**

Given the increasingly important dual role of drug dons as illegitimate, international actors and as members within Jamaican domestic society, the link between domestic and international actors needs to be explored. From the start of British colonialism, Jamaica’s metropolitan connections, indeed the very definition of colonialism, to international actors determined the development of its economy, politics, and society. This metropolitan connection to Britain hampered Jamaica’s post-independence economic autonomy within the international economic system leaving it at the whim of hegemonic, predatory countries.

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38 Ibid., p. 6.
colonial relationship thus moved onto the post-independence period with Jamaica producing for
the profit of foreign powers.

In the 1980s, the United States’ hegemonic influence on Jamaica was clear through
United States control of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its subsequent imposition of
structural adjustment programs onto the island’s economy against the wishes of then ruling party
People’s National Party (PNP) and its Prime Minister Michael Manley. During the 1980s,
Jamaica underwent an economic crisis that required the assistance of substantial loans from other
countries.\textsuperscript{39} The IMF and the World Bank responded to this crisis by enforcing several
restrictions on Jamaica through stabilization and structural adjustment programs which resulted
in utilizing new debts to pay off old ones and thus created a cyclical crisis of constant
impoverishment for the island.\textsuperscript{40} For instance, Jamaican debt was at $J50 million in 1962, and
after receiving international institutional loans, came to rest at over $J4 billion.\textsuperscript{41} At one point,
debt reserving consumed more than half of GDP.\textsuperscript{42} This failure to provide Jamaica with long-
term programs for development allowed international powers to dominate, indirectly, the
Jamaican economy through controls, restrictions, and policy proscriptions.

The United States’ efforts to undermine the Jamaican banana trade through the World
Trade Organization (WTO) further contributed to the island’s failing economy. In the WTO, the
United States argued that the preferential trade in bananas between the United Kingdom and

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 180.
Jamaica, established under the Lomé Convention, violated the WTO agreements.\textsuperscript{43} The United States thus utilized its influence in the WTO to kill the Jamaican banana trade. Bananas went from one of three main export crops (the others being sugar and coffee) to the sole crop produced only for domestic markets.\textsuperscript{44} Because the small farming of the Jamaican banana trade could not compete with the widespread, cheap production in Latin America, Jamaica was severed from its international markets and poverty rates drastically increased.\textsuperscript{45}

The demise of the banana trade in Jamaica meant that its economy was altered. While always reliant on bauxite exports, as the international bauxite market went toward cheaper Australian exports, it too declined. Thus, the tourist industry was a significant part of the effort for a replacement industry that could provide widespread employment. The tourist industry, with its associated problems of beach erosion, sand mining, reef bleaching, attacks on marine life, food importation, exploitation of people and cultures, destruction of national economy, and other factors, developed into an unsustainable market designed to satisfy foreign markets. Tourism replaced the industries of agriculture and bauxite, and by 1990, tourism completely supported the feeble Jamaican economy.\textsuperscript{46} Agriculture no longer existed as a lucrative industry in Jamaica, and the energies of the Jamaican population shifted to the illusionary promises of prosperity associated with the tourist industry.\textsuperscript{47} But for those working in service jobs, approximately two-thirds of the Jamaican labor force earned less than living wages.\textsuperscript{48}

Moreover, the profits were repatriated and no backward linkages, the idea for example that food

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 484, 515, 517.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 493, 484, 515.
\textsuperscript{47} Witter, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 178.
for the industry was obtained from locals, meant that the net benefit for Jamaicans was only low wage jobs. As a result, tourism failed to improve the chronic unemployment and immense poverty that characterized the Jamaican economy and afflicted Jamaicans.

Emerging alongside increased tourism were the export processing zones. Export processing zones employ workers to produce products for dangerously low wages. They involve minimal regulations on their labor practices, many of which border human exploitation. Although export processing zones employ Jamaicans living in the rural areas, the factories do not appeal to the majority of impoverished Jamaicans, who reside in the urban areas. As a result, the majority of Jamaica’s population remains unemployed and subjugated in conditions of extreme poverty. A disproportionate amount of the urban unemployed are males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. This exclusion from fair forms of employment drives these youth into the arms of drug dons, who quickly absorb them into the illicit economy. Thus, although export processing zones employ Jamaicans in their hazardous working conditions, the majority of urban poor remain without employment and vulnerable to predation by the drug dons who hold out the promise of more rewarding forms of alternate employment.

To supplement the effects of the tourist industry on the Jamaican economy, during the late-1980s and early-1990s, the increased presence of drug trafficking supplied tourists and their western host countries with a new export product. Drug dons, the “bosses” of the local and international drug trades in Jamaica, replaced politicians in distributing the meager economic resources to urban impoverished communities, and they garnered the respect of the unemployed Black lower class who viewed them as leaders within the communities and protected them from
the police and international security forces.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, due to the preexisting demand of western
countries for drugs, a new group of Jamaicans arose to participate in the international economy
and was given significant power beyond state regulation. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the
Jamaican economy experienced a shift when it became the site for the transshipment of
Colombian cocaine. Indeed, by 1999, Jamaica became the leading point of transshipment of
cocaine in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{50} Jamaica had gained a foothold in the illicit international economy.

The movement of large amounts of cocaine through Jamaica, as a result of its
transshipment from Colombia to the United States and Europe, dramatically increased the
island’s levels of crime and violence: approximately forty percent of the annual murders are the
result of conflicts between drug gangs.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, this increased violence is associated with
increased political “corruption and state involvement in illegal activities.”\textsuperscript{52} While the drug trade
provided increased economic opportunities for Black lower-class Jamaicans it also exploited
their vulnerable positions and encouraged a new form of inter- and intra-community violence of
drug turf wars. Like the political patron client system, drug dons’ promises of material and non-
material benefits led the Black lower class into violent acts against rival gangs and in defense of
their own dons.

Income from illegal drug activities supplemented the weak Jamaican economy, yet it
revealed the roles of the United States and Europe as hegemonic forces in determining the
successes and failures of the illicit Jamaican economy. Jamaica only served as the opportune site
for transshipment of non-manufactured cocaine to points in North America and Europe: the

\textsuperscript{49}Michael Platzer, Flavio Mirella and Carlos Resa Nestares, “Chapter Ten: Illicit Drug Markets in the Caribbean:
Analysis of Information on Drug Flows Through the Region”, \textit{Caribbean Drugs: From Criminalization to Harm
\textsuperscript{50}Marilyn J. Jones, “Policy Paradox: Implications of U.S. Drug Control Policy for Jamaica”, \textit{Annals of the
\textsuperscript{51}Platzer et al., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 219-220 and Jones, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{52}Platzer et al., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 217, 221.
substantial profits being made at the last point of manufacture. Moreover, the trade itself is, like
tourism and export zones, fly by night: drug dons have a tenuous hold in drug trade that could be
easily reestablished in other locations that could better profit the Colombian drug lords who
owned it. That Jamaica operated as the ideal location for transshipment is evidenced in that the
United States received approximately eighty percent of the total cocaine shipped through
Jamaica.53

Thus, Jamaica’s vulnerable position in the international economy contributed to the rise
of the illicit economy in cocaine transshipment during the 1990s. The survival of the Black
lower class continued to be threatened by economic circumstances, and after IMF loans and
structural adjustment policies, the political elites and the Jamaican state were rendered
ineffective. Jamaica’s political elite lost their control over the economy and their source of
political power and were replaced by the drug dons in the urban areas as a source of economic
power. However, drug dons, unlike the political elite, hold no loyalties to the Black lower class,
the political elites, and to the entire Jamaican political, economic, and social systems. Through
their access to the drug trade, drug dons were able to infiltrate the pre-established garrison
communities and to foster new markets by domestically selling their export products. As a
result, they began a tyrannical form of rule within the garrisons and predatorily policed the
communities in order to ensure the survival of their newly-acquired domestic industry.
Therefore, the pre-existing drug trade, along with the high demand provided by western markets,
allowed drug dons to find this lucrative, albeit precarious, opening into the illicit international
economy.

The Social Hierarchy in Jamaica

53 Ibid., p. 192.
The majority of the battles in Jamaica’s civil war occur in garrisons, or areas originally defined by political identities and more recently, by allegiances to particular drug dons. Garrisons are characterized by sub-standard living conditions: the Black lower class lacks access to adequate housing, appropriate sanitation, and healthy living environments. Moreover, garrisons confine the Black lower class by restricting who can enter and exit through the use of gangs armed with M-16s and A.K.47 assault rifles. The end result being that the Black lower class cannot leave their homes; their movement is restricted through the policing of these destitute garrison communities. Fear of violence is pervasive. Thus, the drug dons effectively police the Black lower class through their control over the garrisons.

From 1990 until 2000, the Jamaican class hierarchy privileged the drug dons. Because of their immense wealth, high-status, and international involvement in the lucrative transshipment of cocaine, the drug dons superseded the political elites’ class power. Their ability to escape the confines of the Jamaican state demonstrated their transcending class power, liberty from state control, and potent connections to the international economy. Their power arose from their reach beyond the state, and their positions as members of Jamaican society and independent, international actors who were not confined under state authority. This dual role allowed drug dons to extend their sphere of influence, or their social, economic, and political power, beyond the limited power of the politicians, that is, the confines of the Jamaican state. With access to resources that seemed unlimited, a more pervasive and threatening violence, and lucrative ties to

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gangs in throughout the United States, the Jamaican political elite were rendered impotent by comparison.

The drug dons protected their individual interests and exploited both the political elites and the Black lower class, making them predatory members of Jamaican civil society. Often, they have made pay offs to politicians to ensure their continued freedom from the state’s legal encroachment into their illicit activities. The drug dons manipulate the political elites by supplying the capital necessary to maintain the patron client system in order to serve their own individualized interests by remaining above reproach from state legislators. As such, the drug dons have gained the power to patrol the garrisons, to sell drugs at home and abroad, and to exercise their own form of rule within the Jamaican state. Thus, the drug dons exercise more social power than the political elites, that are now reduced to pawns in drug don’s ambitions to maintain their lucrative transshipment industry of cocaine.

The drug dons therefore contribute to the political elites’ dispossession of the Black lower class in the struggle for state power by exercising a dominating influence, or hegemony. The mechanisms political elites used to dispossession the Black lower class included prescribed identity constructions of overriding political loyalties, a fostered dependency on patron client relationship to satisfy their economic and emotional needs, and a system of messianic politics in which the political elites pledged to be the “saviors” of the Black lower class. Political elites therefore fed off of the revolutionary inclinations of the Black lower class, thus potently incorporating the ideologies of the oppressed into mechanisms of elite control over the state. Drug dons essentially operate in tandem with the political elites using similar political tools even

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57 Thank you to Dr. Theodore for pointing this out. See: Sives, op. cit., p. 83 and Clarke, op. cit., p. 208.
58 Clarke, op. cit., p. 220.
59 Gray, Demeaned but Empowered, op. cit., p. 8.
though they have different ends, the end result is the same: social control over the Black lower class.

The political elites, and in the 1990s the drug dons, prescribed their party identities as superior to class identities. These prescribed identities rewarded violence and instigated divisions amongst the Black lower class.\textsuperscript{60} The political elites thus became parasites and fed upon the majority of the Black lower class by paternalistically defining its interests and condoning violence among the members of the Black lower class. Obika Gray reflects on the intra-class violence: “Acting much like communal groups, poor partisans of the two-party system have been slaughtering each other in political battles for over 40 years.”\textsuperscript{61} Once the drug dons achieved substantial power over the politicians they then prescribed new ideas based on geographical location, subverting political identities for garrison identities and fostered more inter- and intra-community conflict. In particular, these inter- and intra-community murders are manipulated by drug dons as a threat when policing garrisons to maintain their control. By murdering supporters of opposing communities in order to please the drug dons, the Black lower class became indirect contributors to their own demise.

Nonetheless, the Black lower class \textit{continued} to counter the domination of the political elite and the extra-legal drug dons. Within the Black lower class, a particular group emerged to provide the ideological foundation for the revolutionary counter-culture: the Rastafarians. A socio-religious group holding Afrocentric principles and believing that Haile Selassie I (the former Ethiopian emperor) was God reincarnate, the Rastafarians helped the unemployed engage in resistance to politicians’ parasitic nature and drug dons’ predatory domination of the state by developing counter-cultures, formulated within the hegemonic framework imposed by political

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Sives, op. cit.}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Gray, Demeaned but Empowered, op. cit.}, p. 11.
elites and drug dons. Socially, politically, and economically-dispossessed Jamaicans developed their own homogenous identity, supplied one another with non-material resources, and created a constituency that resisted the abrasive effects of dependency on the state apparatus. After the 1980s, Rastafarians assumed the role of opposing the parasitic state and contributed their global influence to vocalizing the plight of the Black lower class by serving as a form of apolitical community representation. The Black lower class’s ability to exercise a blatant disregard for the effects of political elites’, and later, drug dons’ control over the state by constructing a collective, autonomous identity in the presence of state-sanctioned violence, reflected the socio-cultural power of the Black lower class in Jamaican politics. As a result, economically-downtrodden Jamaicans posed formidable barriers to the exercise of political elites’ and drug dons’ power at all levels of Jamaican society.

**Revising Definitions of the Powerful and the Powerless: A Gramscian Analysis**

Gramsci’s theory provides crucial insights into the 1990-2000 period of shifting power alliances within Jamaican politics and culture. Civil society gives us a foundation for comprehending the role of drug dons as both illegitimate domestic actors and simultaneous extra-legal players in the international economy. The concept of hegemony provides us with an understanding of why the political elites and drug dons were able to exert considerable influence over the Black lower class, by absorbing and manipulating their counterhegemonic culture of resistance. War of movement, or the ability to exert “a frontal attack on the state,” explains how the drug dons possess the ability to transform Jamaica from a parasitic state into a predatory one. Similarly, Gramsci’s concept of war of position, or the gradual alliance of social groups to overthrow systems supporting hegemony, explains how the Black lower class possesses the

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potential for revolution in countering the drug dons by undermining their hegemonic role in civil society.\textsuperscript{63}

As domestic and international actors, both within and beyond the control of the state, drug dons formed an important component of Jamaican civil society. According to Roger Simon, Gramsci defines civil society as “the social relations and the [private] organizations which embody them,” and as “the result of a complex network of social practices and social relations, including the struggle between the two fundamental classes, capital and labour.”\textsuperscript{64} Drug dons, as members of domestic society, assist in propping up the political institutions that create a hegemonic position over the Black lower class. Through their connections to the domestic economy of Jamaica and the international economy in illicit drugs, the drug dons simultaneously occupy a place within and beyond the Jamaican state. As a result, they hold no allegiance to either the political elites or the Black lower class and their power remains unchecked by the state. They act in a predatory manner by coercing impoverished youth to participate in policing garrisons turning the lower class upon itself. Therefore, while drug dons are members of Jamaican civil society, they also might be the most dangerous due to their unsurpassed power over the politicians and their tyrannical reign over the Black lower class.

Yet, the hegemonic power of the drug dons and political elites over the Black lower class was never complete. The drug dons exercised a form of hegemony, or domination by coercion and consent, through their prescription of geographical identities, employment of the dispossessed youth through the formation of gangs, and the policing of garrisons to kill opponents. In contrast, the political elites wielded another form of hegemony through their

\textsuperscript{63} Gramsci’s concepts of “war of position” and “war of movement” are explained in: Simon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{64} Simon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 27, 70.
prescription of political identities, patron-clientelism, and messianic style of politics. Both
groups coerced the economically-vulnerable position of the Black lower class to secure their own
gains through hegemony: hegemonic control as both consensus and coercion. Drug dons used
their economic power and threat of violence to gain the consent of the Black lower class in
providing them with protection from state regulation, while simultaneously inflicting violence,
instilling fear, and coercing compliance. Political elites violently absorbed the culture of the
Black lower class to catapult themselves into positions of government power, while providing
economic incentives through the maintenance of the patron client relationship, in order to coerce
the Black lower class into supporting their political goals. Perhaps most importantly, both
groups provide non-material resources to gain the consent of the Black lower class: politicians
utilize the empowering identities associated with political party affiliation, and drug dons
likewise provide empowering identities through gang memberships.

However, the Black lower class has understood, frequently, that their interests were being
absorbed into political elite and drug dons interests and responded by formulating a collective
culture independent of their prescribed roles and identities.\footnote{Gray, \textit{Demeaned but Empowered}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 12, 16, and Gray, \textit{“Global Culture and the Politics of Moral Deregulation in Jamaica,” op. cit.}, p. 254, 258, 263-264.} By developing cultural identities
within the confines of the garrison ghettos, the Black lower class practiced active socio-cultural
resistance.\footnote{Gray, \textit{Demeaned but Empowered}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 2-3, 12 and Gray, \textit{“Global Culture and the Politics of Moral Deregulation in Jamaica,” op. cit.}, p. 254, 258, 263-264.} In a Gramscian sense, then, the counterhegemony of the Black lower class
developed to challenge the oppressive hegemony formulated by the drug dons and political
elites. Drug dons and politicians acted in a war of movement by directly attacking the state, its
institutions, and its members (that is, the Black lower class). The Black lower class responded
by engaging in a war of position in which they gradually united under a common cultural identity
to undermine the systems upholding the oppressive hegemonies of the drug dons and political elites. According to Brian Meeks, the Black lower class created a “transcript from below” in which they established their own history, culture, identity, and traditions.67 Rastafarians served as key groups in developing this transcript from below by helping to spread the empowering history and culture of the African origins of Black Jamaicans. They served as the distributors of Black lower class ideology and composed what Gramsci referred to as “the thinking and organizing element” of the proletariat, or the organic intellectuals.68 Hence, an identity battle between the drug dons, political elites, and members of the Black lower class ensued.

Members of the lower class practiced autonomy through self-definition, and the development of a common identity likewise operated as a focal point around which the Black lower class organized and mobilized to achieve social change. Thus, in accord with Gramsci’s idea of war of position, the Black lower class created a class identity that undermined the vertical and geographical prescribed identities of the drug dons and political elites. By organizing across geographical communities and political allegiances, the Black lower class defended itself against the parasitic politicians and the predatory drug dons. Thus, the civil war of 1990 to 2000 was in essence one based in class conflict in reaction to the reconstruction of identity. With group identities constructed differently with the desire to obtain similarly-defined political goals, the class conflict transformed into a Gramscian-style civil war for agency and power within the Jamaican state.

The civil war, with ongoing conflict, was never sustained however as the cultural power of the Black lower class was absorbed by political elites and drug dons as they simultaneously

68 Carnoy, op. cit., p. 86.
acquired their power over the state.69 Unfortunately, the parasitic nature of the political culture allowed politicians to absorb these empowered cultural forms of resistance into their own struggle for hegemonic dominance in Jamaica.70 Similarly, the drug dons exploited the cultural power of the Black lower class to provide themselves with protection from state surveillance and international repercussions. In this manner, both the political elites and the drug dons displayed reliance on the cultural power of the masses – a civil foundation upon which they could accrue their own power. According to Gramscian theory, “it is civil society that defines the State and sets the organization and goals.”71 The Black lower class, albeit marginalized in civil society, nonetheless contributed to the revolutionary development of civil society through their counterculture of rebellion and private identity formation within their own communities. Yet, political elites and drug dons exploited the Black lower class’ vulnerable position in civil society and used their private contributions to achieve their own independent gains. Thus, in Gramscian theory, the politicians and drug dons exhibited indirect dependency on the cultural power, or counterhegemony, of the Black lower class to gain access to state power and resources.

Thus, the Black lower-class was unable to acquire complete independence from the state’s largesse. Mechanisms of the political elite show, in Gramscian terms, how they resorted to “the coercive power of the State as its primary instrument of domination.”72 Political elites justified their positions of state power through messianic politics and the patron client relationship that exploited the Black lower class. Messianic politics exploited the Black lower class in its need for a savior and in the Rastafarian belief in the divine. It justified their rise to power by associating support of their political aims as similar to deliverance from oppression and

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69 Gray, Demeaned but Empowered, op. cit., p. 5, 8.
70 Ibid., p. 5, 8.
71 Carnoy, op. cit., p. 67.
72 Ibid., p. 76. The words in this statement are those of Martin Carnoy.
suffering. According to Gramsci, this kind of messianic politics functions as a form of
hegemonic coercion because it “not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to
win the active consent of those over whom it rules.”

Moreover, messianic politics possessed parasitic aspects because it absorbed the culture of the Black lower class and transformed it in order to acquire political power. In addition, the patron client relationship exploited the dependency of the Black lower class on economic resources from the state. Politicians sold themselves as superior providers who could “save” the Black lower class from poverty and oppression. Although the Black lower class could utilize socio-cultural resources to advance socio-political sovereignty, the meager economic resources in Jamaica forced it to become dependent on the elite controllers of the state as the material providers for their survival.

As for the drug dons, they could use surveillance over the Black lower class to coerce compliance. Systematic violence was their weapon of choice and ensured their continued power over the Black lower class. Had the Black lower class not possessed such inherent power to challenge or to overthrow legitimate and illegitimate state actors, the continual reinforcements of prescribed geographical identities and neighborhood policing would not have been necessary. Essentially, the drug dons resorted to predatory acts of war against their own people in part to remain beyond the reach of the state. The violent brutality of the drug dons demonstrated their will to eradicate large segments of the population to secure their individual power. Constant surveillance, policing, and containment of the Black lower class revealed a lack of freedom in Jamaica and likewise indicated an oppressive, predatory state.

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73 Carnoy, op. cit., p. 65.
74 Gray, Demeaned but Empowered, op. cit., p. 5, 8.
75 Sives, op. cit., p. 82; Clarke, op. cit., p. 206, 208, 213-214, 216, 220-221; Stone, op. cit., p. 57-58
Violence in the garrison communities, as well as the murdering of members of opposing communities, functioned as a form of civil war. Martin Carnoy suggests that Gramscian theory accounts for this kind of political violence: “The State is, at one and the same time, a primary instrument for the expansion of dominant-class power, and a coercive force (political society) that keeps subordinate groups weak and disorganized.”\textsuperscript{76} In this manner, the political elites and drug dons sought to inflict physical harm upon the Black lower class in order to render it weak and disorganized. The violence designed to protect the positions of drug dons thus resulted in the deaths, rapes, and attacks against the Black lower class. It restricted their mobility, limited their freedom, and forced them to engage in self-defense against the thrashing arms of political elites and drug dons.

The Black lower class responded to these acts of war by formulating an independent cultural identity, distributing non-material resources throughout the community, organizing their own form of messianic politics, and fighting the policing of polarized garrison communities.\textsuperscript{77} Their progressive formation of an independent identity, beginning in the 1970s revealed the potential of sovereign notions of self-worth and class cooperation. Non-material resources provided a foundation for the Black lower class to achieve a form of Gramscian consciousness. With the help of the Rastafarians, they advocated future deliverance from the state and its “politricks,” or state-proscribed entities.\textsuperscript{78} Rastafarians either rejected participation in politics altogether, or they participated in an anti-political counter-culture of empowerment and

\textsuperscript{76} Carnoy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{78} West-Durán, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 122.
Rastafarian beliefs functioned in Gramscian theory as the ideological base on which the Black lower class established a counterhegemony. Organizing in direct opposition to the political elites and drug dons, the Black lower class posed itself as an enemy to the hegemony of drug dons and political elites.

In effect, from 1990 until 2000, the parasitic Jamaican politicians and drug dons fed off of the Black lower-class’ culture of resistance, and they practiced violence against each other in a Gramscian state of class conflict and civil war. The political elites exploited the culture of resistance formulated by the Black lower class in order to ensure their own class benefits. However, most importantly, the drug dons utilized widespread, systematic violence to engage in predatory behavior against the Black lower class. These methods of exploitation, control, and violent attempts to quell the resistance of the Black lower class demonstrated the reality of Gramscian civil war in Jamaica. In effect, the politicians and the drug dons acted similarly, yet the drug dons possessed distinctly independent motives. Their desire to remain aloof from punishment and control by the state allowed them to exercise power over the politicians through assisting in the patron client relationship, the policing of garrisons, and in the recruitment of members of the Black lower class to assist in their quest for access to power. Yet, it remains evident that the drug dons were not under the control of the political elites and possessed loyalties to neither the political elites nor the Black lower class. As a result, they operated above state control and enforced their own form of violent rule in Jamaican politics.


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