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Guns, gangs and garrison communities in the politics of Jamaica

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Abstract: While traditional political rivalry in Jamaica can be traced back to pre-independence times, modern-day Jamaican politics have been overshadowed by Kingston's influential 'garrison communities'. In order to establish and maintain political dominance in key constituencies, the loyalty of impoverished but highly influential gangsters in Kingston's ghettos was secured by the main political parties through the development of large scale, highly politicised and heavily armed public housing schemes – essentially operating as states within a state. This article examines the roots of Jamaica's current crime epidemic, revealing that it is not just a story of drugs, gangs and guns, but has deeper connections to the CIA, the Cold War, and the efforts to marginalise the 1970s democratic socialist government of Michael Manley and his People's National Party. Manley's convincing electoral victory in 1972 deeply troubled the United States, as his open commitment to democratic socialism, implementing moderately progressive policies like the minimum wage and free education, and his close friendship with Fidel Castro placed Jamaica firmly in the crosshairs for American covert operations.

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Gun violence in Kingston, Jamaica, made international news headlines, again, in May 2010 – when intense fighting between the Jamaican Defence Forces (JDF) and alleged gang leader Christopher 'Dudus' Coke's heavily armed supporters left more than seventy people dead, including several members of the JDF – resulting in intense political fallout which would later topple Prime Minister Bruce Golding. While the media's portrayal of this violence was simplistically linked directly to the drug trade, a proper understanding has to reference the legacy of historical local political rivalries; CIA intervention and Cold War shadow operations over control of Jamaica and its quest to make an independent path in the world; the domination of foreign capital; oppressive home-grown social policies; and the hollowing out of the Jamaican state by neoliberal reforms during the late twentieth century.

The rise of well-connected, armed organisations like that of the gang leader Dudus Coke in Kingston's ghettos illustrates the way in which the geopolitical climate of the Cold War overdetermined Jamaican politics at the turn of the century – where the lines between the 'good' and 'bad' guys were often blurred, and sometimes totally contradictory. This was the context in which, starting in the mid-1970s, the CIA conducted lengthy destabilisation campaigns in Jamaica, consisting of the steady provision of financial support and covert arms shipments to supporters of Prime Minister Edward Seaga's pro-US Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), and therefore to JLP-affiliated gangsters like Lester 'Jim Brown' Coke, leader of the notorious 'Shower Posse' and father of the aforementioned Dudus Coke.

The fallout from the 2010 Dudus Coke shoot-out marked the first time that serious questions were asked about the true extent to which politics and criminal gangs were interconnected in Jamaica. Previously the ex-colony had been praised for its stable two-party system and peaceful transitions of power. So, how did the country's top politicians get so close to a wanted drug dealer and killer?

Although elections have been held regularly since independence in 1962 and changes of government have occurred periodically, Jamaican politics has ever been plagued by gun violence and electoral manipulation. The key to understanding these issues is the emergence of 'garrison communities', a particular feature of the Jamaican political system central to the development and continuation of violence, electoral manipulation, corruption, and Jamaica's deep connection with the international drug trade.

Clientelism and the organisation of Jamaican politics

A 2010 report from the Small Arms Survey revealed that approximately 80 per cent of all crime in Jamaica is gang related.[1] But, while there are indeed many

gangs which simply seek to violently control the streets in order to maximise their profits in the drug trade, many of Jamaica's largest gangs are perhaps better defined as paramilitary organisations, deeply entrenched in both domestic politics and the international drug trade. Changing economic opportunities within Jamaica have complicated traditional power relations between the gunmen and the politicians, and it is no longer clear who calls the shots in these relations.

The two-party structure of Jamaican politics – divided between the Jamaican Labour Party and the People's National Party (PNP) – is geared towards mass mobilisation and, as such, both party constituencies cut across class lines. Given that Jamaica has always been a highly unequal society marked by extremes of wealth, one of the primary objectives of Jamaican political parties since pre-independence times has been to capture the loyalty of the urban working poor and un/underemployed, who make up a significant segment of Jamaican society. The development and maintenance of vertical relationships between the political leadership and the marginalised population constitutes a form of clientelism – a system of 'more or less personalized relationships between actors or sets of actors, commanding unequal wealth, status or influence, based on conditional loyalties and involving mutually beneficial transactions'.[2]

In the Jamaican context, clientelism, as with patronage, works as a form of class control by stunting the development of horizontal political alliances amongst the working class and urban poor. According to Amanda Sives, 'it does this by creating dependence on the political system, which becomes a mechanism for marginalized people to meet their minimum material needs and provides a sense of belonging'.[3] This entrenched practice has led to what, within Jamaica, is termed 'tribalism', where politicians take care of their own narrow base of constituents by granting favours in the form of jobs, infrastructure, and gifts of money or food, in exchange for loyalty votes.

The ultimate goal of such relationships is to maintain the status quo of a 'relative social peace' in which political demands fall short of calls for a transformation of society through the introduction and implementation of policies based upon social justice. Rather, the marginalised settle for immediate material promises of jobs, housing, infrastructure, peace and protection for loyal communities. Granting short-term material benefits to communities which remain otherwise alienated and marginalised dampens demand for political and economic reform. Sives argues that this relationship of '*partial satisfaction of immediate individual needs* serves as a safety valve in situations where the distribution of income is profoundly unbalanced', and further, that 'the ability to contain radicalism either by absorbing it, repressing it, or ensuring that it never surfaces has been one of the key strengths of the Jamaican elite'.[4] While the possibility exists for individuals to remain outside this network, it is a remote one, given the near total control that politicians can have over, for example, providing employment opportunities.

In order for this system to be sustainable, the political class must have reliable power-brokers within the community to exercise continuous control, and it is within this nexus of opportunism that the Jamaican paramilitaries emerged.

While the definition of what the paramilitary is remains fluid, it can best be described as 'a variety of military-like forces that are not incorporated into the state's regular armed forces – national police forces, local defence forces, militias, intelligence services, security forces, and coastal or border patrol forces'.[5] Politically aligned Jamaican gangs such as the infamous Shower Posse certainly fit into this description as semi-loyal, semi-autonomous paramilitary organisations.

Depending on which political party holds state power, and/or the status of their relationship to one another, Jamaican gangs may serve either as paramilitary agents or adversaries; performing internal security functions to deliver electoral support, police and/or protect the party faithful; securing strategic territory at the behest of the political hierarchy. They can also be party to violently disrupting or suppressing political opposition in opposing or contested territories. In return for these party loyalties, the gangs are given a large degree of territorial autonomy, consisting of a withdrawal of police and military forces from their no-go domains. And in many cases they are granted the licence to operate their own systems of justice and welfare delivery.

During the early days of Jamaica's political gangs in the 1960s and 1970s, the gangs were largely dependent on material support and weapons provided by their political patrons. As the economic situation changed in the 1980s, politicians controlling the state lost much of their ability to distribute state resources willy nilly, due to the imposition of structural adjustment policies. But in this same period the gangs gained a significant new source of income, linked to the growth and expansion of the international drug trade, allowing them to become more autonomous.

A final feature of a paramilitary group is the ability to equip and arm its members, in a manner similar to the establishment's military or police forces. Gangs in Jamaica are routinely equipped with automatic weapons such as M-16s, AK-47s and even heavier weapons such as .50 calibre 'Grizzly' rifles and grenade launchers.[6] The majority of the weapons (approximately 80 per cent) arrive in Jamaica from the United States, particularly from the Florida counties of Broward, Dade and Orange.[7] Higher ranking gang members also have access to police-issue body armour and to large amounts of ammunition which emerge on the street, reflecting a high level of corruption within the JDF.[8] This systematic link between clientelism and paramilitarism has become crystallised most notably through the formation of 'garrison communities'.

The birth of the garrison community

The roots of the current relationship between politicians and the urban poor in Jamaica are generally agreed to have been nurtured under Alexander Bustamante (the founder of the JLP) in the pre-independence times of the 1940s, when his role as the Minister of Communications (the unofficial government leader at the time) allowed him to 'determine the levels and allocations of public works, and in the

process control the distribution of work and employment opportunities'.[9] Due to the legacies of colonialism and underdevelopment, there was a substantial reserve of people in the urban centres of Jamaica without steady employment, and this provided the necessary conditions for the emergence of patron-client relationships. According to Fitzroy Ambursley, during pre-independence times it was not unusual to find that 'the distribution of tickets for seasonal farm work in the U.S. was always divided along political lines'.[10]

Aside from the granting of political favours, historically, the rival political parties established their own industrial trade unions. The JLP had the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) and the PNP had the Trade Union Congress (TUC) which emerged out of the Caribbean labour crisis of 1938. By the mid-1940s, the BITU and the TUC had their separate spheres of influence, but rival union members were routinely used as instruments to violently disrupt the political organising of the opposition.[11]

After Jamaica gained political independence in 1962, the economic landscape did not change for the better, and the hopes which accompanied self-rule turned sour. As a result, a growing lawless counterculture began to emerge in the slums of West Kingston in response to escalating rates of poverty and hardship. Individuals calling themselves 'Rude Boys' proclaimed their rejection of common social norms and practices.[12] And by 1963 the Rude Boys, desirous of improving their fortunes, had begun to fight each other for control of 'the ghetto', contributing to the development of what would come to be known in Jamaica as 'Turf Politics' – where political parties sought geographical or positional control over given areas, using gangs as part of an electoral strategy for securing votes.[13] The infighting between JLP-aligned gangs like the Phoenix and the PNP-aligned Spanglers and Vikings gangs, eventually incited a low-intensity war in West Kingston.

Once in power, the JLP sought to further manipulate the newly influential gangs for its party interest. A key component of its plans eventuated with the construction of a Standard Oil refinery in the capital's waterfront district, known as Kingston Pen.[14] The development had displaced many families previously reliant on fishing for their livelihood. These families became increasingly agitated about being forced to become squatters, and they received a great deal of public support due to the hardships they faced. The JLP capitalised on this situation, announcing the construction of a public housing complex which would absorb the families and stand out as a symbol of the new, socially progressive Jamaica.

In order to obtain land for the new housing development, the state had to bulldoze a slum area called 'Back O Wall' which was populated by supporters of the PNP. The shantytown was primarily an entry point into Kingston for rural migrants seeking a better life in the city.[15] It was made up of dilapidated wooden and tin shacks, with small rivers of raw sewage running along many of its paths. It was home to approximately 1,500 people – and was regarded as one of the most dangerous and crime-filled areas in Kingston. The local business elite welcomed the clearing of the area. In the past, a number of high-profile altercations between

market vendors and Back O Wall residents had turned violent.[16] The shantytown would be transformed to become 'Tivoli Gardens'. In time, this move came to be seen as the first step towards institutionalising the garrison community political model and the violence which accompanied it.

With the construction of Tivoli Gardens beginning in 1965, the JLP formed a political base from which it would exercise power in the community and eventually throughout much of Kingston. The project was managed by a Harvard-educated anthropologist, Edward Seaga, who later became the Prime Minister of Jamaica. Seaga had become very familiar with and well-known in the West Kingston community during the three years of his academic fieldwork.[17]

The JLP attempted to install its political hegemony through the development of constituencies wholly dependent upon the party's disbursement of housing, employment and public works. Housing residents were devoted entirely to the JLP. Little variance of political opinion was tolerated within government housing garrisons where residence depended on hard-core support for the party and on fanatical loyalty, whereby garrison residents were willing to sacrifice much for the party in exchange for little.

Witnessing the success of the JLP model at Tivoli Gardens, the rival PNP created and supervised similar garrisons in Trenchtown and Arnett Gardens. And the PNP capitalised on the JLP's displacement and harassment of ghetto dwellers, organising opposition and establishing a counter force within the slums. This pattern of forcing the poor and vulnerable to choose political sides eventually resulted in up to twenty garrisons being established across Kingston.

Over months, indeed years, and in the run-up to the 1967 election, the splintering of urban communities into 'garrisons', alongside continuing high rates of unemployment, resulted in increased everyday violence in the streets. Waves of strikes by BITU and the TUC added to the protests of the residents displaced by the Tivoli Gardens construction, which in turn brought about retaliation and disruption by the gangs; and the lines between the criminal and the political became increasingly blurred. Gangs on both sides of the political divide were increasingly bold; in the summer of 1966, police were routinely shot at, and one assault on them involved an attack with a bomb packed with dynamite.[18] Fights with fists, rocks and bottles became a thing of the past.

In September 1966, Jamaica experienced its worst episode of electoral violence to date, when in the course of just two weeks a dancehall was firebombed, a theatre bombed, and public buses attacked – in addition to countless armed firefights on the street.[19] The violence got so out of hand that the JLP announced a state of emergency in Kingston which lasted for an entire month. This first seismic episode of the new type of organised electoral violence marked Jamaican politics for the next forty-five years. More than 500 people were injured, twenty people died, and 500 were arrested during police raids in the newly formed garrison communities.[20]

The garrison community defined

Following the example of Tivoli Gardens, more and more garrisons were formed through the construction of housing projects set up by the ruling party and populated with its supporters, with all political opposition chased out at gunpoint. Top-ranking gang leaders who controlled entry and exit to the garrison communities developed special relationships with the political leadership related to the different garrison constituencies – often members of parliament. As with the distribution of material favours in pre-independence times under Alexander Bustamante, top gang leaders worked as conduits, connecting the party faithful in the local community to jobs, housing, visas and cash. The primary condition underlying the continuation of these relationships was the deliverance of votes at election time; and it was not uncommon for garrison communities such as Tivoli Gardens to deliver 100 per cent (or more) of the vote to the aligned political party.[21]

In return for their loyalty, a degree of political protection insulated the gangsters from the reach of the security forces.[22] Paramilitaries, unlike the official military and police forces, were often responsible for the dirty work of community control – perpetrating killings and other violent acts. And according to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, the conviction rate for murder was appallingly low, at just under 30 per cent.[23] From this position of relative autonomy, gangs such as the Shower Posse were able to expand and establish themselves as criminal organisations with international reach, operating in the United States, Canada and England. The Shower Posse, for example, controlled a large wharf, Port Bustamante no less, which was used to export drugs and to import weapons.[24]

Within the garrison community of today, the gang leader, or Don, has come to be much revered – regarded as a father figure and a great provider for many in the community. He is looked up to as more than just a leader, being, in many cases, judge and jury in the resolution of community disputes. Many young men aspire to achieving the wealth and status obtained by the Dons, who serve as role models in communities bereft of opportunity and material goods. Children as young as 11 have been noted as being gunmen within the garrisons, attracted by rewards of fame and wealth.[25]

While these disturbing developments have been a fact of life for Jamaica since its independence, there has been no evidence of sustained political will to dismantle the garrison communities. As a result, for many Jamaicans, everyday life is entangled in a web of crime, violence and political patronage. But it is as well to remember that what we see unfolding in twenty-first century Jamaica has a history which goes much deeper than the modern-day links between politicians and gangs caught up in the drug trade. It goes back to the struggle for the political orientation of an 'independent' Jamaica, and to its people's anti-colonial struggles for social justice and self-determination.

The CIA and the Cold War

By the early 1970s, Jamaica's postcolonial economic order which had been established through the pursuit of the 'industrialisation by invitation' model used by Puerto Rico, with its related development of bauxite reserves in the 1950s and '60s, was rapidly losing credibility in the eyes of the Jamaican people. On the doorstep of the US, and with the JLP holding political power since independence, Jamaica had come to be thought of as a safe and ideologically aligned US ally. All this changed with the election of Michael Manley and his People's National Party administration in 1972. Manley's election turned Jamaica into one of the primary battlegrounds for progressive change in the developing world.

Manley declared that his government sought a 'third path', a 'non-capitalist path of development to distinguish experiments like ours from the neo-colonial capitalist model of the Puerto Rican type and the Marxist-Leninist model of the Cuban type'.[26] Famously, he was on record as saying, 'I'm a friend of Castro's … but I'm a democratic socialist, and he is an affirmed communist. I'm certain that he views me as a fuzzy liberal.'[27] And although the country struggled economically during his first two terms from 1972 to 1980, his government introduced a raft of progressive social policies, including public housing programmes, rent control, price controls on basic commodities, a minimum wage, literacy programmes, maternity leave for women, healthcare, and youth employment programmes.

But Manley's political mantra 'better mus' come' was undermined by international economic events beyond his control. The first shock came in the form of the 1973 OPEC oil crisis. With Jamaica totally dependent on imported oil, sharp price increases quickly sent the economy into a downward spiral resulting in a rising trade imbalance. And then came the PNP's announcement in late 1974 of a commitment to 'Democratic Socialism', backed up by the imposition of an increased bauxite levy and the formation of the International Bauxite Association (IBA), which generated a new wave of fear, unsettling US investors and Washington.[28] In retaliation for the bauxite levy, Kaiser Aluminium moved its operations to Australia – a pattern of relocation which was followed by other foreign and domestic investors.[29] Manley was engaged in a battle which he could not win. In 1976, he was reduced to negotiating support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). By 1978 Jamaica had agreed to a very strict structural adjustment programme which demanded price liberalisation, interest rate adjustments, currency devaluation and cuts to social spending.[30]

So it was that Edward Seaga emerged as a reactionary right-wing figure to steer Jamaica on a more US-friendly course; Seaga had influential connections in the United States, and had once served as Jamaica's Governor to the IMF, in addition to holding a similar position with the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank. Seaga 'was also a member of the Latin American Advisory Board of the President of ADELS – an operation owned by 200 of the largest firms in North America, Europe and Asia'.[31] And to

assist him in intimidating the political opposition, at the same time solidifying his own electoral support, Seaga turned to his trusted enforcer of the Phoenix gang (predecessor to the Shower Posse), the Don Claude Massop and his second in command Carl 'Byah' Mitchell.

While the arming of the gangs in this new era did not follow the otherwise strict ideological division, the JLP did receive covert shipments of arms from the CIA, in addition to other social control tactical equipment.[32] The ex-CIA agent Philip Agee later revealed that 'the CIA was using the JLP as its instrument in the campaign against the Michael Manley government, I'd say most of the violence was coming from the JLP, and behind them was the CIA in terms of getting weapons in and getting money in'.[33] In *Jamaica Under Manley: dilemmas of socialism and democracy*, Michael Kaufman suggests that Agee was even more explicit, in that

> He charged that his former employers and the international aluminium companies were working with certain JLP supporters in an attempt to unseat the Manley government. Agee, who had carried out similar operations in Ecuador in the 1960s, spoke across the country of CIA methods. These, he said, included 'the spreading of false information in the local and foreign press, funding opposition groupings, supplying arms and logistical support, and helping plan disruptions and para-military operations'.[34]

Consequent growing violence on the streets of Kingston even touched reggae music's global star Bob Marley. Hoping to bring about a reduction in violence, in April 1978 Marley, at his 'One Love' Peace Concert, symbolically raised the hands of Manley and Seaga on his stage, to signal a political truce. Marley had been persuaded to become involved by the Don Clyde Massop, an old friend of Marley's from his days in West Kingston. Massop, although a JLP affiliate, had been growing tired of the gunfights, jail time and deaths which benefited nobody except the politicians. He famously proclaimed 'the peace will have to last because our lives depend on it. The youths have been fighting among themselves for too long and is only them get dead. Everybody I grow up with is dead.'[35]

Remarkably, Massop, a JLP man, had begun to make alliances with PNP gang leaders like Dennis 'Copper' Barth. But, recognising that peace between the gangs of the marginalised 'sufferers' would threaten the established political status quo, the police at the behest of the politicians did their best to ensure that it would not last. In May 1978, Barth was the first of the Dons to be killed in an effort to restart Kingston's gang war. The hit on Barth was organised by Lester Jim Brown Coke, the father of Christopher Dudus Coke. Coke the elder was regarded as having his eye on the leadership of the JLP's most powerful gang – and his ambition proved useful in destroying the truce organised by Massop. In February 1979, the police executed Massop during a traffic stop in which they shot him over fifty times.[36] And by the end of 1979, all of the gang leaders who had organised the truce had been killed. Other Dons and their top-ranking gunmen went into exile in the United States, Canada and England, with the assistance of the political

elite – many emigrating with fake travel documents.[37] This exodus of criminal figures from Jamaica in the mid-1970s set the foundation for the new international crime networks that were to emerge.

So it was that economic crisis, destabilisation efforts, and high levels of political violence effectively overdetermined Manley's campaign to bring about democratic socialism in Jamaica. The PNP would not gain a third consecutive term. And as Manley himself remarked, Jamaica's experiment in democratic socialism came to an end amidst 'a hail of bullets and a river of blood'. In the nine months leading up to the election in 1980, an estimated 800 people were killed as a result of politically motivated violence – making it the bloodiest election in Jamaican history.[38] Between 1976 and 1982, 1,096 tenement yards which housed 17,000 people were destroyed by arson within a two square-kilometre area around the PNP garrisons of Rema and Arnett Gardens. Additionally, during this time an estimated 2 per cent of the 15–27 age group were killed each year.[39] This period is regarded as a major turning point for violent crime in Jamaica. After this, high levels of murder and violence became a notable and lasting feature of the society. In the election, the JLP gained fifty-one of the sixty seats in the House of Representatives and almost 59 per cent of the total vote. And Seaga became one of President Reagan's staunchest allies in the region – cutting ties with Cuba and supporting the invasion of Grenada in 1983. But his attempts to make Jamaica more investment friendly were not enough to turn the economy around.

It should be noted that Jamaica's assisted shift to the Right in this period was part of an accelerated counter-revolutionary push in the Caribbean region, which saw the CIA supporting the Contras in Nicaragua, the death squads in El Salvador and conservative military forces throughout the Caribbean. In this period, too, the activist intellectual Walter Rodney was assassinated in Guyana and Archbishop Romero was assassinated in San Salvador.

The impact of neoliberal globalisation and the rise of the Shower Posse

The reversal of foreign investment under the PNP government, in combination with the conditionalities imposed by structural adjustment policies, decimated much of Jamaica's economy. Following the standard IMF formula, tariffs were reduced, the Jamaican dollar devalued, taxes cut, state-owned enterprises privatised, and public services and government employment levels slashed. The austerity measures brought about reduced industrial subsidies and supports, in addition to the implementation of increased user-fees for health and educational services. The result was a steady increase in the cost of living for the poor and a steady rise in unemployment.

Jamaica was told that a prosperous future was to be obtained through the pursuit of comparative advantage within the global market. Its productive economy was to be transformed into a service economy, largely based upon tourism. In Washington it was thought that Jamaica's embrace of the free market would

endorse Ronald Reagan's belief that 'free enterprise Jamaica, and not Marxist Cuba, should be the model for Central America in the struggle to overcome poverty and move towards democracy'. However, despite the influx of aid, between 1980 and 1982, Jamaica's trade deficit tripled, with inflation reaching 30 per cent by 1984–1985.[40] These unwelcome economic shifts triggered a massive wave of emigration, with 200,000 Jamaicans moving abroad during the early 1980s.[41] By the end of Seaga's term in 1989, he had negotiated five more loans with the IMF in which the debt had doubled to $4.4 billion – resulting in roughly $1,800 in debt for each Jamaican citizen and a rollback in the gains previously made in healthcare and education.[42]

With this whittling away at the Jamaican state, the once extremely influential politicians who controlled the garrisons with their largesse were now strapped for cash. At the same time, Colombian drug lords found Jamaica's garrison communities to be extremely valuable trans-shipment points to North America and Europe. As a result, the enriched Dons replaced the state as the major patrons of inner-city residents, and even replicated state services, providing housing, job opportunities, welfare and even informal systems of justice. With the invasion of the cocaine economy in the 1980s, the localised political gangs of the 1970s morphed into transnational criminal enterprises with a tight hold over local politicians. The wealth that was made from the cocaine business far outweighed any of the handouts that had been doled out by politicians in the years before. The tables were turned, and the power relations between the politicians and the Dons were changed.

The growing political influence of garrisons afforded the housing projects greater levels of autonomy and diminished state interference. The process in which garrisons were created was not unlike the creation of mini feudal states within West Kingston. The most famous of the criminal organisations to emerge in the new climate of neoliberalism within the garrisons was the Shower Posse, now led by Lester Jim Brown Coke.

Coke had made a name for himself as one of the most trusted, effective and brutal hitmen for the JLP – and as such stepped into the vacuum of power created by the killing of Claude Massop in 1979. Evidence of this ruthlessness was seen during Coke's brutal involvement in the massacre of twelve people in Wilton Gardens in 1984.[43] He quickly established that he was not a person to be messed with. With garrison control over Port Bustamante, and now a network of exiled Dons across the United States and Canada, Coke was seeking to take his posse to the international level. The drug trade within Jamaica was also shifting to meet the demands of the global market. The country long known for its potent marijuana began transporting cocaine as well, with the assistance of the Colombian drug lords and the connivance of the Jamaican political establishment. The shift away from exporting marijuana to transporting cocaine was, in part, also due to the large-scale eradication efforts of the Drug Enforcement Agency across Jamaica.[44]

To complicate matters more, connections between the CIA and the gangs became even more apparent after a 1989 exposé in the *Miami Sun-Sentinel*. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a former Jamaican government official stated that 'Things became so hot for the gunmen that they began to leave for the States, most of them with Seaga's blessing … Many left Jamaica through their CIA contacts.'[45] The CIA's assistance to the gangs, which included more than just facilitating travel, also consisted of arms training. The anonymous official also stated: 'These guys are not just criminals, they are trained terrorists … I am speaking out because the U.S. does not want to take responsibility for the monster it helped to create.'[46]

With the expansion of the Shower Posse and other gangs overseas, their violence was no longer restricted to Kingston. While Lester Coke ran the Jamaican side of the operations, his counterpart Vivian Blake ran things 'stateside'. And from Miami, Blake and Coke, who presented themselves as construction contractors, were known campaign financiers of Seaga's leadership bids.[47]

According to one report, the US law enforcement agency the ATF linked 700 drug-related murders in the United States to the newly arrived Jamaican posses from July 1987–July 1988. In the six-month period of July 1988 to January 1989, they were implicated in 744 murders.[48] Additionally, the posses were assumed to be in control of 40 per cent of the crack cocaine trade and, between 1984 and 1987, were reported to have moved approximately 300,000 pounds of marijuana and 20,000 pounds of cocaine from Jamaica across the United States.[49] Despite the violent success the Shower Posse had enjoyed, in 1988 an arrest warrant was issued for Blake's involvement in the murder of four people in a Miami crack house.[50] Blake escaped capture by hopping on a cruise ship and returning to the safe haven of Jamaica, where he assumed he could hide from the authorities in the JLP garrison.

During a stay in Miami in 1987, Coke was arrested and deported to Jamaica to face trial for the murder of the twelve people killed in the Wilton's Garden massacre of 1984.[51] His connections with Seaga ensured that he did not face trial and he remained untouchable.[52] Then, in November 1988, Coke killed the driver of a minibus; it was thought that he would once again walk away without being charged. But the minibus drivers organised a strike in protest and Coke was taken into custody. However, he was soon released on bail and was never convicted, as the star prosecution witness in the case failed to testify.[53]

The political protection afforded to the JLP-aligned gangs did not last long. And the re-election of a 'reformed' Manley in 1989 signalled that neoliberalism had triumphed over the need to construct a more equitable society. Upon his re-election, Manley once again renegotiated an assistance plan from the IMF which led to a sharp devaluation in the Jamaican dollar and a fire-sale of remaining public assets. That same year, former Shower Posse member Charles 'Little Nut' Miller was charged with drug trafficking but agreed to testify against other gang leaders in order to receive immunity. In his testimony he implicated himself in nine murders and revealed his connection to the JLP as a 'political enforcer', as

well as his CIA connections – going so far as to say that 'the United States made me what I am'.[54] After testifying, Miller returned to his native St. Kitts where he blossomed into one of the region's most notorious drug barons, until imprisoned in the United States on drug charges in 2000.

So, the imposition of neoliberal strategies on the Jamaican government contributed in no small measure to altering the relationship between the garrison residents and the government. The IMF had mandated that the Jamaican government implement cutbacks in social spending – and as a result healthcare, education and social services were dramatically scaled back. In the hiatus created by the erosion of the Jamaican state the gangs took an even deeper hold on the garrison communities. Many of the Dons began to pay for their members' tuition fees, school supplies, bus fares, medical expenses and even funeral costs.[55] With the lack of resources, the state and political parties became less influential – and in many ways the gang became the state.

1992 brought forth the greatest opportunity to highlight the connections between the JLP, the Shower Posse and the CIA. After a series of high-profile killings in the early 1990s, the US sought to extradite Lester Jim Brown Coke to the United States (to face charges similar to those eventually faced by his son 'Dudus' nearly twenty years later). But the opportunity for Jim Brown Coke's testimony to be heard in open court never presented itself as:

> On the afternoon of the day Jah-T [Brown's son] was buried, Jim Brown was burned to death in a conflagration in his prison cell. The British Privy Council had denied his extradition appeal, and agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration were waiting in Kingston to put him on a plane to Miami. Brown had vowed that if he went to trial in the United States, he would tell the world everything he knew about Seaga and the Shower Posse. 'Is not I-one goin' down alone,' he had said to a fellow prisoner shortly before he died. No one ever found out who set the mysterious fire in his cell, but everyone knew that both Vivian Blake and Seaga wanted Brown dead.[56]

Lester Coke had not thought that he was expendable. When he realised that he was, and was ready to expose the vast web of guns, banks, politicians and cocaine, he died mysteriously. With another power vacuum opened in the early 1990s, Lester's son Dudus Coke took over the reins of the Shower Posse and the Tivoli Gardens garrison. It was estimated that Dudus came to command over 200 armed 'soldiers', in addition to running his own prison and enforcing a violent code of discipline upon the residents of Tivoli Gardens.[57] As an example of the seriousness and extent of his political power, from 2001 to 2011, he lived in Tivoli, where everyone called him 'president' and, after 2001, Jamaican police were not able to enter the neighbourhood without his permission.[58]

Tivoli established its own justice systems, made its own laws, employed sanctions and collected its own taxes. The informal governance units also created welfare systems for the poor, and some provided medical services for the sick and

care for the elderly. As the IMF proposed the reduction of government expenditure on health, education and other social services, the Dons became community benefactors. According to one regional press report:

> As those street forces increased their trade in illicit drugs, more arms were brought in and the extortion racket, otherwise known as 'tax', was partitioned off along PNP and JLP lines. Much more importantly, the dons became the effective government as most of these taxes were used to fund the poor and send their children to school, feed them and assist in dealing with health matters and the funerals of old people.[59]

The influence of Dudus Coke was not limited to Tivoli Gardens or West Kingston – his power over both the garrison and the JLP political elite was noted by the US State Department in leaked documents. A State Department Cable from 2009 outlining a discussion between PNP MP Peter Bunting and Kingston Embassy officials highlighted that Coke and his deep political connections were well known:

> Bunting, who has spoken previously with Emboffs on the topic … asserted that the Coke extradition request was a 'test of Jamaica's political will' in fighting organized crime and that the PNP was highly embarrassed by the GOJ's [Government of Jamaica's] response. 'It's okay to extradite small criminals, but when it comes to big ones we stall,' Bunting lamented … he admits that the PNP has had its own history of relationships with criminal dons in garrison communities, he continues to insist that the JLP's ties to, and dependence on, organized crime are of a far greater magnitude.[60]

The cable quoted above contained a reference to the US's 2009 extradition request for Dudus Coke to face narcotics and firearms smuggling charges in New York. Prime Minister Bruce Golding (2007–2011) rejected the request, claiming that the evidence against Coke had been obtained illegally. Subsequent events would do more to highlight the connections between the JLP government and the gangsters than any investigative report could imagine.

The 2010 State of Emergency

The hesitancy of Prime Minister Golding to make a move against Dudus Coke was primarily due to his close connections with both the Don and the wider Tivoli garrison. Golding had been handpicked by Seaga to take over his West Kingston constituency, and was given the influential garrison-building position of Minister of Housing and Construction.[61] Golding even went so far as to hire the California law firm Manatt, Phelps, and Phillips to lobby against the US extradition request for Coke. Many in the Jamaican media speculate that he went to such lengths because he owed much of his political success to Dudus, Jamaica's most infamous gangster.[62]

After nine months of stalling the request for Dudus Coke's extradition, on 18 May 2010, Golding gave in to the unrelenting international political pressure and issued a warrant for Coke's arrest. Almost immediately, barricades of old automobiles, refrigerators, scrap wood and tyres blocked the major intersections throughout West Kingston in an attempt to delay the oncoming raid, while gunmen took up their posts on tenement rooftops in order to drive back the eventual incursions by the police.[63]

Responding to this sign of community support for Dudus Coke, the police sent several buses to Tivoli Gardens to evacuate the residents before the raid began – but the majority of them returned to the stations empty. This, however, did not come as a surprise to Kingston's Mayor, Desmond Anthony McKenzie, who had previously warned US embassy officials that Coke's affiliates 'would not take this (Coke's extradition) lying down'; he predicted that there would be 'severe repercussions' and 'collateral damage' if Coke were arrested, which would 'risk destroying everything the Government was trying to do on the economy and crime'.[64]

On 20 May, hundreds of Tivoli residents and Dudus supporters – the majority, women dressed in white – organised a protest and marched outside the Denham Town police station to voice their opposition to the government's decision finally to arrest Dudus Coke. Participants in the protest remarked to the media, 'We are prepared to die for Dudus'; with a senior citizen reported as saying, 'Is over 40 years me live in the community, Dudus is a nice and peaceful person. Because of him, people can walk without fear.'[65] Signs carried by Coke's supporters revealed the deep extent of their connection, declaring, 'Jesus died for us, we will die for Dudus' and 'After God, Dudus comes next.[66]

Aside from the protesters, it was thought by many of the gunmen in the garrison that they would have the upper hand in fighting the police on their own turf, as the police had not been able to enter Tivoli Gardens since 2001 without Coke's permission.[67] As evidence of this mistaken level of initial confidence, on 23 May, several police stations in West Kingston were attacked, and one set on fire, by Coke's armed supporters.[68]

In response to the attacks on the police stations, the police declared a state of emergency and launched their attack on Tivoli Gardens with armoured personnel carriers, helicopters and even mortar fire. Within four days of fighting, 500 people (mostly young men) were arrested, and seventy-six people were killed.[69] The Jamaican security forces say that many of the dead were armed gunmen allied with Coke, although they recovered only six guns during the assault.[70] Despite not finding Coke, it is widely believed that the police operation took advantage of the situation to kill a number of suspected criminals – in the process murdering dozens of innocent individuals.[71]

After nearly a month on the run – with Tivoli Gardens under the control of the police – Coke was finally apprehended on 22 June 2010. He was intercepted by the JDF at a roadblock on the Mandela highway, accompanied by a Reverend

who confirmed that Coke was on his way to the US Embassy to turn himself in.[72] Dudus stated that he sought the safety of the embassy in order to avoid the same fate as his father, who had been burned alive in a Jamaican prison cell while awaiting extradition. Upon his arrest, Coke waived his right to an extradition hearing, which was taken as further proof of his distrust of both the Jamaican government and police.

Several months later during Coke's trial in New York City, US Attorney Preet Bharara said: 'For nearly two decades, Christopher Coke led a ruthless criminal enterprise that used fear, force and intimidation to support its drug and arms trafficking "businesses". He moved drugs and guns between Jamaica and the United States with impunity.'[73] During his trial in Federal District Court in Manhattan, Jermaine Cohen, a former member of Coke's gang provided vivid testimony about Coke's role in a half-dozen killings.[74] Cohen, who was trusted with cleaning up Coke's private prison, testified that he had routinely seen Coke disappear into his prison with a power-saw, hatchet or gun, calmly assaulting, dismembering or killing those who had stolen from his gang, withheld funds or violated his strict code of behaviour.

In his letter to Judge Robert P. Pattinson Jr, before his sentencing, Coke made reference to his charitable activities within Tivoli: 'I did a lot of charitable deeds and social services to help members of my community. I was involved in community development, where I implemented a lot of social programs that the residents from my community could better their lives, programs that teach them about self-empowerment, education and skills training.'[75] He added, 'I also host a lot of charity events annually such as: An Easter treat for the elderly persons in my community, a back to school treat for the children after the summer holiday has ended, by giving the children school bags, books, pens, pencils, uniforms and other items that are necessary for school. I also provide the children with food and refreshment along with entertainment at this event.'[76] And he embellished his Robin Hood persona, remarking:

> I am also a founding member of a school in my community. The name of the school is the Western Institute of Technology (W.I.T.), where the students are train how to use a computer and about information technology (I.T.). When a student pass their exams and graduate with their certificate they are able to work throughout the Caribbean because the school is a part of the H.E.A.R.T. foundation of Jamaica which is a Government Program.[77]

Despite his best efforts, on 8 June 2012, Christopher Coke, the Don, the President of Tivoli Gardens, was sentenced to twenty-three years in prison.

Conclusion

The Dudus Coke saga severely damaged the reputation of Prime Minister Bruce Golding. Golding's resignation on 25 September 2011, deeply shook up

Jamaican politics and led to the eventual steamrolling of the JLP in the December 29 elections of the same year by the PNP, led by Portia Simpson Miller. The one-term run of the JLP under Golding was the first time in Jamaica's political history that the electorate did not give a sitting government a consecutive term. The Golding-Coke scandal appeared to be too much for the Jamaican people to forgive, returning just twenty-two JLP members to the sixty-three seat parliament.

For many, the trial of Christopher Dudus Coke was seen as an opportunity for him to come clean about the deep links between organised crime and the political establishment. 'We hope that Mr. Coke will "sing like a bird", naming names and pointing fingers', wrote the *Jamaica Observer* in a September 2011 editorial. 'In a small society such as ours, it is not possible for Mr. Coke to have been able to run such a "successful" organization without the involvement of well-placed individuals in both the public and private sectors. Not to mention the beneficiaries of his nefarious activities.'[78] But Dudus Coke did not sing.

While much of the crime in Jamaica and in the garrison communities is directly related to the ongoing drug trade, fuelled by unemployment, inequality and lack of opportunity, the state's interventions focus only on containment, not prevention. A 2011 IMF report stated that Jamaica had the second highest unemployment rate in the Caribbean region, at roughly 11.8 per cent, and the fourth highest poverty rate at 43.1 per cent, compared with twenty-three regional neighbours. Jamaica was ranked as the second most unequal country in the Americas, only behind Suriname.[79] In 2014, over one million Jamaicans were earning less than $2.50 per day, or $12.50 per week.[80]

The reality is that Jamaica has been drowning in an unfathomable sea of debt for the past thirty years. In 2010, 40 per cent of Jamaica's GDP went to debt relief, making it one of the most indebted countries in the world.[81] Redirection of resources away from the Jamaican people results in neglect of some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities. Figures such as Dudus Coke gain public support by providing essential welfare resources like education and electricity to residents effectively abandoned by the government. Such are the structural dimensions of the relation between poverty, debt and crime.

In 2012, prominent Jamaican educator Herbert Thompson remarked that 'From all indications, over one million of our people struggle daily to provide the basic amenities of food, shelter, clothing and educational opportunities to satisfy immediate family and household needs. When that number is added to the thousands of those who live on the edge of economic uncertainty, being just able to "make ends meet" from one week to the next, we come face-to-face with the hopelessness which is our reality as a struggling third-world nation.'[82] Consequently, as the *Jamaica Observer* has ventured, 'For all intents and purposes, there is a civil war unfolding in Jamaica.'[83] This is the context out of which figures like Dudus Coke emerge, and in which, bizarrely, they can take on the mantle of gangster-warriors of the people.

An entire generation in West Kingston, indeed of all Jamaicans, has been shaped and scarred by the events of 2010. Investigations into the relationship between ex-Prime Minister Golding and Dudus Coke are ongoing – witness the 2015 public hearings on the murderous events at Tivoli in 2010.[84] The underlying conditions that led to that debacle require urgent attention, else other manifestations not unlike the Dudus Coke affair will surely occur.

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