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Our contemporary era of neoliberal globalization has seen less permanent migration than the preceding late-nineteenth- / early-twentieth-century era of frenetic transnational capitalist expansion thanks to such factors as nativist backlashes against immigration in the global North and innovations in transportation technology that have made multiple lifetime migrations a more feasible prospect.[1] Nevertheless, population movements have come to comprise one of the five forms of transnational flow that, according to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, constitute the globalizing world social system.[2] In other words, the diasporas of our contemporary era are a key part of the intricate system of interconnections, transfers, and exchanges that have been steadily reconfiguring the societies of our world on a more global scale since the 1970s to a greater degree than ever before possible. This system of globalizing "flows" is commonly conceived of in terms of the cross-border movement of people; expressive and material culture; money, in the form of foreign investment and remittances in particular; and ideas that move through the digital mass media and through diasporic intellectual networks, or what social scientists sometimes call, in contrast to the popular concept of brain drain, "brain

1 See Raphael Kaplinsky, *Globalization, Poverty, and Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 19–22.
2 See Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 588–91.

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circulation." However, in his epic 2014 novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Marlon James draws attention to a less salubrious form of transnational flow that may also circulate through the diasporic networks of the world of neoliberal globalization: that of violence in all its different social registers, from means of social control to response to the traumas of past violence.

The first Jamaican novel to win the prestigious Booker Prize, James's *Brief History of Seven Killings* gives thinly fictionalized treatment to the widespread street violence leading up to the 1976 and 1980 Jamaican national elections, including the December 1976 attempt to assassinate Bob Marley and the aftermath of the increasing militarization of Kingston's neighborhood gangs as they went on to immigrate and brutally dominate the crack cocaine trade in the United States during the 1980s. Drawing, in the manner of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, on the voices of twelve different narrators, James's novel culls perspectives from every strata of Kingston society, plus from those of three American outsiders and one Cuban, to represent the multifacetedness of the conflict strafing the island during this period and dogging the members of its diaspora as in the ensuing years they fled both this violence and the diminished life possibilities brought to Jamaica by International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies.[3]

While *Brief History of Seven Killings* could be read as a work exploiting common Jamaican stereotypes of guns, drugs, and reggae, the novel marks an attempt to use narrative to complicate received notions of the role of violence in Jamaican society while textually evoking the representational elusiveness of violence and its tendency to spread transnationally in the age of neoliberal globalization. This narrative is a recent addition to a long lineage of Jamaican novels rendering the violence of Kingston's slums that includes Roger Mais's *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953), Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964), Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Margaret Cezair-Thompson's *The True History of Paradise* (1999). Any text that attempts to approach violence in any sociohistorical context through any mode of discourse will inevitably run into the fact that in its raw intensity, sheer emotionality, and essential Dionysianness violence will outstrip any attempt of language to capture it or do more than obliquely evoke it. *Brief History of Seven Killings* works within this constraint focusing on violence's role in altering the social milieu of Jamaica and its diaspora just as much as on representing individual acts of violence and by drawing on a heterogeneous mix of fictional genres to capture various aspects of the tide of violence saturating the Jamaican political scene of the latter 1970s and then accompanying the rise of the transnational Jamaican drug "posses": gang crime fiction to capture some of its grim street-level immediacies and its emotional mix of shock and exaltation, Cold War spy fiction to attest to mutual imbrication

3 In 1980 Prime Minister Michael Manley broke off an ongoing series of negotiations and loan requests with the IMF when it demanded that his government eliminate ten thousand to eleven thousand public-sector jobs, which would have decimated the middle class of the already economically ravaged country. Upon his election in 1980, Prime Minister Edward Seaga resumed working with the IMF and became a close ally of the conservative Ronald Reagan administration. Martha Addante, *Mapping the Global Landscape in Women's Diasporic Fiction* (diss., Western Michigan University, 2009), 138.

of geopolitics and local acts of violence, and New Journalism to situate the social upheaval it inaugurates in a simultaneously subjective and objective register of comprehension. In doing so, the narrative depicts a host of violent acts—shootings, beatings, stabbings, acts of arson—but focuses particularly on the ramifications of this violence, both social, as in the intensification of Jamaican diasporic migration, and individual, as in gang leader Josey Wales's rise to power, bystander Nina Burgess's flight from home and family, and adolescent Bam-Bam's acculturation into gang life and eventual destruction. Drawing on all these techniques and approaches, the novel uses narrative to convey an experiential sense of how violence was imbricated in the power networks structuring the society of Jamaica's underclass during the period in question, how it was conceptualized by those caught up in it, and how it became a constitutive part of the emergent world system of neoliberal globalization, both in the power play of neo-imperialism instigating this violence and in its further transmission through the transnationalism of Jamaica's sizable diaspora.

The narrative of *Brief History of Seven Killings* begins with the two days leading up to the attempted killing of Bob Marley, fictionalized as "the Singer," in his home just prior to his Smile Jamaica concert. In the novel this attack occurs as a product of a power struggle within the neighborhood gangs aligned with the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), which was struggling to unseat the democratic socialist government of then prime minister Michael Manley. Josey Wales (a rising "don" based on the historical gang kingpin figure of Lester Coke [a.k.a. Jim Brown]) wants to kill the Singer to prove himself a capable partner to the Medellin cocaine cartel and to become head of the Copenhagen City neighborhood gang allied with the JLP by unseating current don Papa Lo (based on the 1970s leader of the Phoenix gang, Claude Massop), who has become disenchanted with the constant call to use violence as a means of community policing and political strategy.[4] Wales recruits a small group of young gunmen to carry out the deed, unleashing waves of future violence, but the novel roots this act in Jamaica's longer histories of violence, from the early postindependence political assassination narrated in its prologue to the destruction of the shantytown where Wales lived as a young man (based on the Back-O-Wall informal settlement bulldozed in 1966 to create space for the building of Tivoli Gardens).[5]

But while situating the violence that began to intensify in Jamaica across the 1970s in terms of these longer histories, the novel avoids presenting it in terms of the facile "culture of violence" theory, which David Scott defines as the homogenizing, essentializing notion that Jamaicans have a transhistorical "inclination towards violence or at the least a constitutional aggressivity that is the cultural-psychological foundation of the violence."[6] A clear example of

4 Copenhagen City is based on the Tivoli Gardens public housing complex constructed by JLP minister of welfare and development Edward Seaga in 1966 as a reward to his ardent support base in West Kingston. See Laurie Gunst, *Born fi' Dead: A Journey through the Yardie Underworld* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003), 79–80.

5 See Kevin Edmonds, "Gungs, Gangs, and Garrison Communities in the Politics of Jamaica," *Race and Class* 57, no. 4 (2016): 58.

6 David Scott, "The 'Culture of Violence' Fallacy," *Small Axe*, no. 2 (September 1997): 144, 146.

this theory, which has too often been used by both natives and outsiders alike to explain the prevalence of violence on the island, can be found in the short ethnography of Kingston gang violence included in *Rising Up and Rising Down*, William T. Vollmann's encyclopedic rumination on the nature and history of violence in human society. This text cites the viewpoint of Jamaican deacon Peter Espeut that Jamaica was founded on violence inaugurated with the extermination of the Arawak tribe by the Spanish and that swelled with the brutalities inflicted to uphold the system of plantation slavery, creating a society of bloodshed, racial division, and social dependence.[7] The so-called garrison communities (in the words of another of Vollmann's sources) of the sort represented in *Brief History of Seven Killings* are a continuation of this earlier physical and institutionalized violence in the form of "modern-day slavery."[8] Laurie Gunst's history of Jamaican gang violence *Born fi' Dead*, an important source text for *Brief History of Seven Killings*, also posits this continuity between the atrocities of the island's plantation past and the political violence that became increasingly evident in downtown Kingston in the late 1960s and spread like wildfire as the 1970s wore on: "In many ways," one of Gunst's Jamaican informants said, "the politicians and their gunmen took over where the slave masters and their overseers left off: the practice of intimidation was a logical outgrowth of the brutal intimacy that had always prevailed between the powerful and powerless."[9] But in the study *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*, cultural anthropologist Deborah Thomas argues that it is both inaccurate and socially deleterious to conceive of the relationship between Jamaica's past and more recent violence as the product of a simple culture of violence inaugurated during plantation days and running across time. For Thomas, violence is a function of social class and its attendant material circumstances of existence, and, following the premise of Richard Slotkin's monumental study of violence and the frontier in US culture, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890*, Thomas posits that it is social structures reproduced over time, not enduring violent cultural formations, that create new violence with each generation.[10] In *Brief History of Seven Killings* James suggests the same, tracing the violence represented in the novel back to the founding of the "garrison communities" of allied Jamaican political parties and neighborhood gangs, but also hinting that the violence that has ravaged postindependence Jamaica is

7 See William T. Vollmann, *Rising Up and Rising Down: Some Thoughts on Violence, Freedom, and Urgent Means* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 669–70.

8 Vollmann, *Rising Up and Rising Down*, 690. First coined by Carl Stone in his 1980 *Democracy and Clientelism in Jamaica*, "garrison community" describes the impoverished armed neighborhood enclaves policed by local dons that were unwaveringly loyal to either the People's National Party (PNP) or the JLP, who in turn supported these communities in order to control their vote during national elections. See Damion Keith Blake, "Shadowing the State: Violent Control and the Social Power of Jamaican Garrison Dons," *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research* 8, no. 1 (2013): 58.

9 Gunst, *Born fi' Dead*, 66. A number of the gang members in *Brief History of Seven Killings* bear strong resemblance to Gunst's journalistic portrayals of historical gang members. Perhaps most striking is Tristan Phillips, one of the main narrators of the portions of the text set in 1980s New York City, who bears immense similarities to Gunst's depiction of her Gully Posse gang informant Trevor Phillips. Gunst's eulogy for Phillips, titled "Requiem for Trevor" and reprinted as an appendix to later editions of *Born fi' Dead*, appeared in *Small Axe*, no. 3 (March 1998).

10 Deborah A. Thomas, *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 4, 6, 51.

more regional than national in nature and a matter of affinity with the distant past rather than direct causality. Among the most colorful characters in *Brief History of Seven Killings* is the CIA-affiliated right-wing Cuban exile counterrevolutionary Dr. Love, né Luis Hernan Rodrigo de las Casas, whose name alludes to Bartholomé de las Casas, the Spanish missionary who first chronicled the atrocities of the extermination of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean in *A Short Account of the Decimation of the Indies* (1552). By drawing this connection between Jamaica's gang violence and the act of genocide that gave birth to the region, *Brief History of Seven Killings* poses both as common products of an exogenous imperialist violence that has defined the region throughout its history, but not a matter of the genocide of Jamaica's indigenous population having in any way caused its gang violence centuries later. Similarly, in painstakingly situating the proliferation of gang violence emanating from Kingston's ghettos in terms of the evolving political struggle between the JLP and People's National Party (PNP) as well as the US imperialist Cold War politics considered below, the novel poses violence in Jamaica as the product of particular historical conjunctures rather than some a- or transhistorical culture of violence.

In giving narrative form to Jamaica's politicized gang violence, James's novel shows how it serves first on a local scale to advance individual and partisan social ends, but also to establish social positions of dominance. This dual function dates back historically, according to Anthony Bogues, to how Kingston's "rude bwoys" were taken beyond their original social role of making vigorous public displays of black masculinity by being coopted into the emergent Jamaican postindependence two-party political system starting in the 1960s.[11] The rude bwoy accepted becoming a player within this system of political patronage in exchange for being granted the role of community protector and distributor of social benefits, such as public works jobs. With the gradual breakdown of the hegemony of the creole nationalism of the first postindependence decades and the waning of the oppositional cultural currency of Rastafarianism and Black Nationalism, the dons of Kingston's impoverished downtown neighborhoods came to occupy increasingly powerful local-level positions wherein they served roles such as community benefactor, arbitrator, and judge.[12] The constituent narratives of *Brief History of Seven Killings* explore how the efforts to attain and maintain this patriarchal social role of don, which serves as the "glue" of the fraught Kingston ghetto social order, are predicated on public displays of violence and socializing young men into an order of masculinist aggression.[13] The first of the novel's narrators, following its prologue, is Bam-Bam, an

11 Anthony Bogues, "Power, Violence, and the Jamaican 'Shotta Don,'" *NACLA Report on the Americas* 39, no. 6 (2006): 22.
12 Ibid., 24–25.
13 See Rivke Jaffe, "Criminal Dons and Extralegal Security Privatization in Downtown Kingston, Jamaica," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 33, no. 2 (2012): 184–97. Jaffe argues that with the neoliberal retrenchment of security provision along with other key aspects of the social state, the dons of downtown Kingston have stepped in to fill roles of law enforcement, criminal sentencing, and community mediation. *Brief History of Seven Killings* represents a range of masculinities, perhaps most notably the similar yet varying queer masculinities of Josey Wales's right-hand man, Weeper, and American hitman John-John K. However, socially successful masculinities in the novel almost invariably depend on assertions of power through masculinist acts of violence—whether carried out oneself, like Papa Lo expressing his status as don through punitive beatings or killings, or through underlings, in the manner of politician Peter Nasser attempting to

adolescent who has left a neighborhood controlled by a PNP-aligned gang after witnessing a sub-don sexually violate then kill his father.[14] Josey Wales takes Bam-Bam under his wing in Copenhagen City, grooming him to participate in the shooting of the Singer. "Every Jamaican man is a man searching for father and if one don't come with the package, he's going to find another one," Wales reflects. "That's why Papa-Lo call himself Papa-Lo, but he can't be the father of anything anymore" (42).[15] By thus becoming Bam-Bam's proxy father, Wales can make use of the potential for violence that he represents, but in order to do so he must initiate him into this masculinist realm of social power affirmation through killing. In a scene that Bam-Bam narrates, Wales takes him to a shack and, in a transference of phallic power, gives him a pistol and orders him to shoot a youth from a rival neighborhood:

> Right now, he say and shove the gun in my hand. I hear the boy crying. He hail from the Rema and I don't know anybody from there so. . . . Right now, Josey Wales say again, Gun weight is a different kind of weight. Or maybe it be something else, a feeling that whenever you hold a gun is really the gun holding you. Now, or me deal with the two of you, Josey Wales say. Me walk right over to the boy and smell him sweat and piss and something else and pull the trigger. The boy don't scream or shout or ungh like when Harry Callahan kill a boy. He just jerk and dead. (39)

By reducing this "boy" to a state of infantile abjectness and then nonsubjectivity, Bam-Bam puts himself in a position of dominance and empowerment, though Josey Wales will in turn capitalize on these as he uses Bam-Bam to enhance his own power position by visiting violence upon the Singer, then disposing of Bam-Bam by burying him alive in the oblivion of the maternal earth (268). This episode is but one instance of what Philip Nanton observes in his review of the novel: humiliation, which accompanies so many killings in the narrative, serves as a form of social and political control.[16]

While illustrating how this specifically male-gendered violence gains power and social efficacy in good part through this potential for dehumanization it contains, the novel also employs narrative to show how the irrationality and inescapability of the Jamaican street violence represented takes on a degree of form and coherence for its enactors by way of the Hollywood mediascapes that made increasing inroads into Jamaican society in the years following the country's independence. In the aftermath of the shooting at the Singer's house, Demus, one of the assailants, finds lines from the famous "Do you feel lucky, punk?" scene

achieve greater political power through using Josey Wales as an agent of violence (the acts of which Wales further subcontracts to the likes of Bam-Bam). Both Weeper and John-John K carry out killings in part to perform the identity of gunman as a means of showing that their masculinity has not been compromised by their homosexuality, while Alex Pierce has his masculinity undercut when gang leader Eubie, in a show of power and intimidation, infantilizes him by making him urinate in his underpants.

14 Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (New York: Riverhead, 2015), 13; hereafter cited in the text.

15 This accords closely with Gunst's claim that in seeking to fall under the influence of local political leaders and the neighborhood dons they were closely associated with, her informant Trevor Phillips had "embarked on the search for surrogate parents—a Jamaican boy's classic quest." Gunst, *Born fi' Dead*, 191.

16 Philip Nanton, "Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*: Abjection Sustained," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 23, no. 1 (2015): 140.

from the reactionary Clint Eastwood film *Dirty Harry* racing through his head as he flashes back to the rawness of the attack just perpetrated (248)—just like Bam-Bam has seized on thoughts of Dirty Harry when carrying out his first killing, in the passage quoted earlier. Here, as in the idealized, morally sanctioned killings of the Marty Robbins gunfighter ballads and Western films whose popularity in downtown Kingston the novel notes earlier, violent responses to interpersonal conflict and the colonial legacy of racialized deep poverty are not simply matters of pop cultural imitation.[17] While Gunst argues that the Jamaican street gangsters who would later emigrate to the United States learned "bad-guy style from Hollywood" and quotes one of these young "posse" members as saying films like *Scarface*, *Rambo*, and *The Godfather* "mean something very different in the ghetto," where they offer behavioral models to be emulated, *Brief History of Seven Killings* offers a more subtle, nuanced perspective on the relationship between exogenous mass-media violence and the real-life violence that swept Kingston during the period it depicts.[18] In the episodes cited above, as elsewhere in the novel, characters use violent mass-media content to make sense of the violence they witness and so often find themselves drawn into. This partakes of a certain degree of male chest-pumping bravado, but it is just as much an effort to give comprehensibility to a form of experience that is disordered, traumatizing, and primal rather than rational. This vision of transnational media influence offered by the novel is not one of Americanization and "monkey see, monkey do" brainwashing—what is called the "magic bullet theory" of strong and direct influence in mass media studies—but rather something akin to George Gerbner's cultivation theory of media influence outlined in "Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process" and other writings: "The repetitive pattern of . . . mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment."[19] This "common symbolic environment" structures how experiences are comprehended and responded to; it cultivates a sense of how the world works, which *indirectly* influences behavior while offering frames of intelligibility. James's characters are not culturally duped into mimicking big-screen acts of violence; they draw on these images to make constructive sense of the violence in their worlds and how it involves them. In posing the relationship of Jamaican gang violence to exogenous popular culture in this manner, *Brief History of Seven Killings* avoids the pitfall Deborah Thomas observes as marring many discussions of this topic: exteriorizing violence by imagining it as

17 "Every Jamaican can sing and every Jamaican learned to sing from the same songbook. Marty Robbins's *Gunfighter Ballads*. . . . Ever sufferah is a cowboy without a house and every street has gun battle written in blood in a song somewhere. Spend one day in West Kingston and it makes perfect sense that a Top Ranking calls himself Josey Wales. It's not just the lawlessness. It's the grabbing of a myth and making it theirs" (James, *Brief History*, 83–84). In this regard, it is noteworthy that the novel emphasizes this cultural borrowing from the mythic Old West by substituting a nom de guerre taken from a Western film for Jim Brown, the name of a blacksploitation actor/athlete taken on by Lester Coke, the historical inspiration for Wales.

18 Gunst, *Born fi' Dead*, xv, 210–11.

19 George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan,and Nancy Signorielli, "Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process," in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann, eds., *Perspectives on Media Effects* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986), 3.

being sown by wholly foreign US cultural imperialism rather than as a product of Jamaican social structures that have long been transnational by nature.[20]

In this manner the novel sheds light on one way Jamaica's experience of globalization—here, it is importation of exogenous expressive culture—has structured the social phenomenon of its violence. But equally, Jamaica has been bound up in the transnationalisms of globalization in its exportations of violence, and what is particularly compelling about the representation of bloodshed in *Brief History of Seven Killings* is its exposition of the geographical diffuseness of this violence transmitted through the Jamaican migrant diaspora.[21] Thomas notes that with a quarter of Jamaica's men already working abroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its society has long stretched transnationally beyond its national borders;[22] the "diasporic scattering" of Kingston's gangs and their violence circulating as a commodity within the larger Jamaican diaspora represented in the novel simply marked a new historical permutation in the transnationalism of Jamaica.[23] If a number of earlier works of Jamaican fiction thematize the colonial or residual colonial nature of the Jamaican violence of their times through their representation of the island's social segmentation and legacy of underdevelopment, *Brief History of Seven Killings* gives narrative form to the nature of Jamaican bloodshed in the era of late Cold War and early post–Cold War incipient neoliberal globalization and the migrations it occasioned. The novel is set as PNP president Michael Manley's democratic socialist regime is buckling under the forced austerity measures of the International Monetary Fund and US efforts to destabilize the country and thus foment a regime change by helping to arm the neighborhood gangs aligned with the JLP. In this manner both Cold War covert efforts to sociopolitically shape former colonial societies and the more subtle and diffuse efforts of international financial institutions to enforce the neoliberal "Washington consensus" are at play in trying to stem the possibility of socialist alternatives to the dawning global order of oligarchical free-market capitalism—whatever the human costs involved may be. The novel represents Jamaica in the throes of these new multivalent forms of imperialism; it draws attention to them from the very beginning of Bam-Bam's opening narrative, recounting as it does a largely uncomprehended harangue given by a CIA operative "'bout Allende Lumumba, a name that sound like a country that Kunta Kinte come from" (7). These references to President Salvador Allende and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba serve to highlight the commonalities between the US government's covert support for the toppling of populist leftist regimes in Chile (1973) and the Republic of the Congo (1960–61) by reactionary, pro-US military dictators and its attempts to strong-arm the course of Jamaican democracy during

20 Thomas, *Exceptional Violence*, 90.

21 A process whose historical referent David Scott refers to as the "globalization of the posses," a transformation symptomatic of the larger processes reconfiguring Jamaican society as it was pulled into the globalizing networks of transnational capitalism. Scott, "'Culture of Violence' Fallacy," 142, 143.

22 Thomas, *Exceptional Violence*, 141.

23 Ibid., 3, 74.

the late 1970s. In the novel, the main exemplar of covert US involvement with the island is Barry Diflorio, the fictional CIA station chief in Jamaica from 1976 to 1979. Viewing his job with increasing sardonic and disgusted bemusement, Diflorio is beset by enough conscience and doubt to humanize him as a character, but he just as frequently serves as a mouthpiece for the ethos underlying US imperialism, ridiculing Jamaican society and taking for granted the CIA's right to influence global affairs by any effective means, including the training of military strongmen at the School of the Americas (317). Moving out of his Kingston office to return to working with the US-backed military junta in Argentina, Diflorio reflects on US involvement in Rhodesia and South Africa and gives voice to a Monroe Doctrine–esque vision of a world still ordered in terms of separate hemispheres of global Northern control of the global South: "We [the United States] shouldn't even be in fucking Africa, leave that to the fucking limeys and the fucking Belgians and the goddamn Portuguese, still so bad at colonialism after all these years" (316). This enduring imperialist attitude in the era of postcolonialism is undergirded by notions of racial inferiority, as evinced in a darkly comic scene involving Mr. Clark, a field officer posted to Jamaica after DiFlorio's departure, and Josey Wales, who is playing dumb to gain strategic advantage. Clark offers Wales a propagandistic coloring book titled *Democracy Is for US!* "It's a breakdown," Clark explains. "This is the world in a democracy. See? People in the park. Children running down the ice cream truck, maybe somebody over there is grabbing a Twinkie. . . . And watch that chick, hot, right? Wearing that miniskirt. Who knows what those kids are learning, but they go to school. . . . Look at the tall buildings. That's because of progress, markets, freedom. That's the free market, son" (412). Besides the infantilizing address "son" here, what stands out is the selling of "democracy" solely through access to consumer goods, including the commodified woman's body pictured. The question of choice is narrowed down in neoliberal fashion to the consumerist economic choice between competing products, which Clark contrasts with his othering of the state of East Germany on the following page, where he claims women get abortions because they have to stand in line to buy soap and only have access to a chicory and rye faux-coffee substitute (413). While equating communism as aberrant other with homosexuality ("They're just like homos, they recruit" [413]), Clark here reproduces the late–Cold War US narrative that life is miserable in the Eastern Bloc because it lacks the same "democratic access" to variegated name-brand corporate products such as Twinkies. But Josey Wales plays along with this jingoistic zealotry only to achieve his own ends, participating in this flare-up of the Cold War by raining bullets in the slums of Kingston just so he can set up a cocaine smuggling operation that will allow him to rise as a kingpin bringing drugs through the Caribbean into the United States after the dust from Jamaica's 1980 national election has settled. But for his rank-and-file foot soldiers like Bam-Bam, the violence they are encouraged to enact to advance the United States' geopolitical aims has no meaning beyond its experiential immediacies: "The white man say we're fighting for freedom from totalitarianism, terrorism and tyranny, but nobody know what he mean" (73). The core

geopolitical drama of the novel arises when incomprehension in the face of these political abstractions on the part of lower-class Jamaicans meets the US neo-imperial desire to possess the island, imagined through the stock tropes of tropical paradise, in the masculinist vein of a man corporally controlling and exploiting a woman: "It hard though, don't it," imprisoned former gang member Tristan Phillips tells journalist Alex Pierce. "Hard for you not to compare her [Jamaica] to a woman. Congratulations, that is very non-white of you" (568).

The novel narrates how this racialized neo-imperial longing to control Jamaica, mixed with the island's legacy of colonial economic underdevelopment, unleashes a wave of political violence that travels through the Jamaican diaspora and transmutes itself slightly into violence in the service of the informal economy of black market capitalism. Fiona Adamson describes this process more generally as it helps to shape our world of neoliberal globalization: "The cycles of violence which are produced by economic exclusion, political repression, and marginalization become transnationalized and reembedded in transnational networks that span the globe."[24] In its multiple shifts between different settings and points of view, *Brief History of Seven Killings* gives narrative form to this transnational social process as it has played out in the case of Jamaica, testifying eloquently through narrative as to how top-down political violence can cross geographic borders and morph into more intimate forms of interpersonal violence carried out in pursuit of things such as kinship bonds, economic gain, and affirmation of social position. While this movement of violence across transnational Jamaican society plays out across—and in fact defines—the novel's overall narrative arc, the social forces at play become particularly apparent late in the text, during an encounter between the girlfriend of a wounded gang member and Nina Burgess, a character working as an emergency room nurse at a New York City hospital after fleeing Jamaica because of a falling out with her family and witnessing the attempt on the Singer's life. Burgess, whom Christopher Taylor labels the "novel's window onto the Jamaican diaspora," is fascinated when three gang members, shot in retaliation for the killing of Josey Wales's son back in Kingston, are brought in, as she is confronted simultaneously with the local immediacy of this violence and its transatlantic scope.[25] One of the wounded men exclaims, "*Them kill young Benjy. Is armagideon* [*sic*] *now, Kingston Miami, New York, London*" (613; italics in original), a sentiment echoed by the aforementioned girlfriend shortly thereafter: "Them kill the boy and Kingston erupt with wildfire. What a thing. And the fire spread all the way to Miami and New York. My man tell me smoke even blow all the way to Kansas" (650). The metaphor of wildfire here evokes both the destructiveness of retaliatory responses to the initial killing and the rapid intensity with which they spread among the geographically dispersed branches of the major Jamaican drug gangs. And apropos of that, this violence incubated and periodically unleashed by these gangs, born initially of the

24 Fiona Adamson, "Displacement, Diaspora Mobilization, and Transnational Cycles of Political Violence," in John Tirman, ed., *The Maze of Fear: Security and Immigration after 9/11* (New York: New Press, 2004), 57.

25 Christopher Taylor, "Goings-On in the Tivoli Gardens," *London Review of Books*, 5 November 2015, www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n21/christopher-tayler/goings-on-in-the-tivoli-gardens.

CIA's Cold War meddling and the struggle for power among the political parties of Jamaica, is not incidental to the life of the Jamaican diaspora; it is in part constitutive of it. This is true both of Jamaicans chased from the island by the rising tide of violence, like Nina Burgess, and of those like the wounded gang member, whose girlfriend observes, "For some man, for plenty man, is that same crap [drug dealing and gang partisanship] that send them here. Otherwise them wouldn't have no way to come to America" (633). The drug trade is a major, if often unspoken, component of the worldwide circulation of goods that in part comprises what we call globalization. Here it creates the impetus and the need for migration from the global South to the North, but in a way that continually binds these members of a diaspora to the place of origins that continues to serve as headquarters for their multinational criminal enterprise. As the girlfriend also remarks to Nina Burgess, "You lucky you manage to run far away from Jamdown, but for the rest of we Jamdown follow right back o' we" (635).[26]

At its heart *Brief History of Seven Killings* uses the vehicle of narrative fiction to convey a sense of the reverberations across transnational Jamaican society of this violence, born of neo-imperialism and perpetuated in a particularly masculinist manner, as it simultaneously serves to disperse and bind together the Jamaican diaspora. As such, it complements the body of historical, sociological, and journalistic accounts of these phenomena by presenting them and their affective repercussions in more subjective human terms through its chorus of narrators. But what of the figure of Bob Marley in the text, foregrounded in mass-media coverage of the novel and the various promotional materials put out by its publisher? Is this just because, as the most internationally famous Jamaican in history, Marley helps position the book in readily recognizable terms, thus making it more sellable, or does Marley's history as a victim of violence bear crucial thematic relevance to the overarching question of violence in its relationship to neo-imperialism and the transnational flow of people? It is often observed that Marley was "the first superstar from the third world," but it is often forgotten—and as a work of cultural production, *Brief History of Seven Killings* serves as a corrective to this—that as a survivor of an attempted killing born of the neo-imperial North/South geopolitical relations of his day, Marley shared the fate of innumerable postcolonial subjects driven from their homeland by the "economic exclusion, political repression, and marginalization" of which Adamson writes. And at the same time, the novel draws attention to how Marley's music has provided solace and a rallying cry for those suffering in the face of these transnational forms of structural and physical violence, as it observes in a brief aside describing a young female Kashmiri musical group which, before being dispersed by the patriarchal military and religious authorities, plays the Singer's music as "a balm to spread over broken countries" (601). But even though "the Singer is support, . . . he cannot shield, and the band breaks away," the resistance and spirit of endurance his music serves to foster continues to flow across the globe: "But in another city, another valley, another ghetto, another slum, another favela, another

26 *Jamdown* is a nickname for Jamaica in nation language.

township, another intifada, another war, another birth, somebody is singing Redemption Song, as if the Singer wrote it for no other reason but for this sufferah to sing, shout, whisper, weep, bawl, and scream right here, right now" (601).[27] In posing Marley's cultural impact thus, *Brief History of Seven Killings* presents his musical legacy as the Janus-faced twin to the mutable violence that moves along the transnational channels of our contemporary world. If, as the novel contends, brutality and pain can circulate among diasporic networks, these can be counterbalanced to some extent by the messages of hope and resilience transmitted through works of expressive culture which travel along their own transnational circuits within the world of neoliberal globalization. Beyond the horror it narratively conveys in its treatment of the bloodshed of one of the most tumultuous passages of Jamaican history, *Brief History of Seven Killings* functions in this manner as a counter-narrative that gives a more complex and nuanced take on the scope of transnational Jamaica and its social histories of violence in the age of incipient neoliberal globalization—a narrative vector that comprises the novel's resounding contribution as a work of cultural production.

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27 *Sufferah*, a term originally used to denote Jamaica's urban poor, is here semantically broadened to encompass the multitudes of socially and economically marginalized people inhabiting the global South.