

‘The Fall of Balaclava’:
Back O’Wall, Downtown Kingston, and The Naturalization of
Political Violence in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

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Abstract:

This essay uses “the fall of Balaclava” in Marlon James’ *A Brief History of Seven Killings* as a key to interpreting postcolonial political violence in Jamaica. Fictionally renamed for Edward Seaga’s 1963 demolition of Jamaica’s Back O’Wall squatter camp and others that followed, “the fall of Balaclava” demonstrates how the politicization of urban renewal projects led to an artificial geographic divide between the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People’s National Party (PNP) in downtown Kingston. Building off Sheri-Marie Harrison’s article “Global Sisypheus: Rereading the Jamaican 1960s through *A Brief History of Seven Killings*,” I argue that the political manipulation of local geography in the 60s not only helped lay the physical groundwork for a JLP versus PNP war, but more fundamentally naturalized a sense of political rivalry and violence into the post-1963 generation’s perception of community, land, and positionality in society. In *A Brief History*, Bam-Bam, a young JLP recruit who never experienced the coexistence of political diversity in Balaclava, cannot conceive of any tangible existence outside of a JLP/PNP framework. This looks drastically different from the Dons and Enforcers whose experiences in Balaclava allow them to see the artificiality of the current situation and simultaneously promote or exploit it.

Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings* takes place on five different days between 1976 and 1991. Moving from the attempted assassination of Bob Marley ("The Singer") to international Jamaican drug smuggling, the novel uses its seventy-two characters and thirty narrators to explore the growth of political violence in Jamaica during the late 20th century. Though most of the narrative is set between the 1970s and 90s, I examine *A Brief History* in accordance with Sheri-Marie Harrison's reading of the novel's implicit response to the 1960s. Collectively, no more than a few of the book's seven hundred pages explicitly address this era, but the events that occur in it radically shape the lives of many characters and their society as a whole. This essay builds on Harrison's article "Global Sisyphus: Rereading the Jamaican 1960s through *A Brief History of Seven Killings*" and her treatment of the politicization of urban renewal projects.¹ While Harrison reveals the connection between "the fall of Balaclava" in *A Brief History* and the 1963 demolition of Back O'Wall squatter camp and others that followed, I take her insights in a different direction by specifically looking at the novel's characterization of young JLP recruits in the 1970s. I argue that the political manipulation of local geography in the 1960s not only helped lay the physical groundwork for a war between the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and People's National Party (PNP), but fundamentally naturalized a sense of political rivalry and violence in their developing perceptions of community, land, and positionality in society.

After a brief summary of urbanist developments in Jamaica during the 1960s, I locate the connection the fictionalized Balaclava shares with the historic Back O'Wall via the testimony of characters such as Tristan Phillips, Papa-Lo, and Josey Wales. Their experiences in downtown Kingston before and after "the politician come" allow them to see the city in importantly varied ways. In contrast, I then compare their experiences with Bam-Bam, a young orphan in *A Brief History* who lives in Kingston during the 1970s and has been institutionalized under the JLP after both his parents are killed by PNP-affiliated gang members. Developing under the wing of JLP Enforcer Josey Wales, I show how Bam-Bam is structurally unable to comprehend experiences outside a JLP/PNP framework, revealing his politicized socialization. While Bam-Bam is fundamentally stuck in a system of violence, Papa-Lo's, Tristan Phillips's, and Josey Wales's knowledge of alternative and peaceful models reveal their advantage. Nevertheless, the latter's choice to exploit the politicization of urban renewal for power keeps Bam-Bam within his limited frame of reference and downtown Kingston in a civil war.

*The Death of Back O'Wall and
Birth of Tivoli Gardens*

Dating at least to the mid-1930s, Back O'Wall was one of Jamaica's oldest and most historic squatter camps (sometimes called "shantytowns"²) located on the edge of tenements in West Kingston.³ By the 1960s, it had grown to be one of the largest encampments – alongside Trench Town and Dung Hill – hosting between fifteen-hundred and two-thousand people.⁴ Squatters resided in the camps for various reasons, including economic hardship, escape from the police, and societal rebellion. The latter of these is most identifiable with the congregation of Rastafarians at Back O'Wall and Trench Town.⁵ For many Rastafarians, these camps presented an opportunity for them to establish their own "entirely different set of values" and denounce Jamaica's societal structure.⁶ Notably, this could turn camps like Back O'Wall into lively communities where Rastafarian-organized entertainment such as dances and concerts could be held.⁷ By the 1960s, Back O'Wall had become a "stronghold of the Rastafari faith"⁸ and gained much sympathy from other squatters and individuals in the lower class.⁹

Alongside the anti-establishment Rastafarians, the camp served as "an entry point into Kingston for rural migrants seeking a better life in the city."¹⁰ Increased rural population pressures in the 1950s left sixty-two percent of men and thirty-two percent of women in rural Jamaica in search of a job.¹¹ Under the false impression that Kingston contained higher opportunities for "non-manual jobs," many travelled there only to end up in Back O'Wall.¹² This combination of migrants, lower class individuals, and societal disruptors ultimately made Back O'Wall a politically and socially diverse community. Though PNP supporters and Rastafarians would come to make up the largest majority in the camp,¹³ no single political party uniformly controlled it; political ideologies could co-exist alongside each other without mass violence erupting.¹⁴ In other words, local geography in downtown Kingston could be statistically examined to discover political trends, but the land itself was not inherently conflated with the JLP or PNP parties.

For all of Back O'Wall's good, its living conditions were notably far from ideal and many suffered. Hartley Neita famously went through the camp in 1961 and reported seeing "families [that] slept on pieces of cardboard covered with scraps of cloth" while "the combination of the rotting wood, mud, sour water and faeces and scraps of cooked food waste, [made] a nauseous, stomach-turning smell."¹⁵ Additionally, Clarke notes from his 1961 visit that "Back o' Wall [...]"

ha[d] no latrines and no piped water [...] [and was] an area known for typhoid.”¹⁶ The first request asked of him by squatters, he reports, was often “Give us water.”¹⁷ Since squatters couldn’t legally acquire the land they squatted on till after “twelve years of continuous residence” on unfenced private land or sixty years for “Crown land,” there was little to no pressure for landowners to constructively engage with them.¹⁸ Moreover, thinking aid would increase migration to an already overpopulated area or legitimize squatting, the Government regularly refused to provide public services.¹⁹

In addition to its inadequate health conditions, Back O’Wall was labeled “the most notorious criminal den of the country” by JLP politician Edward Seaga. It was said that criminals went to Back O’Wall to avoid law enforcement and, by the 1960s, the grouping of outlaws supposedly made even “the police [...] afraid to enter.”²⁰ Of course, this label is a bit more subjective than the camp’s history of sickness and health crises. Prior to Jamaica’s independence, gangs often formed in response to colonial inequality and discrimination.²¹ As Hutton notes, “[gang members before the early 1960s] often spoke of the persistent rituals of police violence, torture, insults, persecution and general harassment directed at them, and suggested that forming gangs was, in part, the joining of forces to respond to colonial police excesses.”²² This is not to say community directed violence or “lawlessness” did not occur in Back O’Wall – but without erasing any real history of violence, the admission that “the police were afraid to enter” can also be received as a moment of colonial resistance: a politically diverse community of migrants, social disruptors, and economically impoverished individuals reputationally coming together to keep agents of injustice out of their community. Nevertheless, from his platform, Seaga condemned Back O’Wall and its “criminality” as “the Cancer of West Kingston,”²³ effacing, in Hutton words, any “legacy of colonial agency.”²⁴

By the early 1960s, serious plans to rebuild the area of Back O’Wall and other squatter camps began to take form. Overseen by Seaga, Back O’Wall was to be demolished and replaced with single and multi-story housing that would be known as Tivoli Gardens.²⁵ Considering the camps visible need for repair and modernization, the urban renewal project proposed many beneficial and needed improvements to the area, including running water, bathrooms, privacy, and more. Backed with a financial contribution from the United States,²⁶ Back O’Wall’s demolition began in 1963 with plans to build some 800 new units in its stead.²⁷ However, the demolition was notably not peaceful as “bulldozers and flames” violently ate the historic camp, disrupting the lives

of many.²⁸ This particularly was true for the Rastafarian section of the camp who had continued to grow there since the late 50s. Until the new units were completed, squatters would need to find alternate areas to live in, which often meant other squatter camps that would be subject to demolition in the incoming years. Holding onto early promises that housing in Tivoli Gardens would be made available for them,²⁹ squatters of Back O'Wall reluctantly hoped they would have new accommodations in the future.

Unfortunately, by Tivoli Gardens' completion in the mid-1960s, it became clear that many of the squatters would not, and were never planned to be, rehoused by the JLP government. In an effort to secure power, Seaga and other JLP officials politicized their rehousing commitments by selecting individuals based on their loyalty to the JLP rather than their relationship to Back O'Wall. As Clarke notes, many of those selected even came from other constituencies.³⁰ Alongside being given secure housing, these individuals were also given "jobs with which to pay for [their new accommodations],"³¹ benefiting newly formed JLP "territories" and their members. As mentioned, since the largest majority of squatters in Back O'Wall were PNP-affiliated or Rastafarian, a large number of the original fifteen-hundred to two thousand individuals at the camp were consequently left unhoused.

In light of this, PNP and Rastafarian squatters from Back O'Wall felt betrayed by the JLP government's choices and false promises. For them, "Tivoli Gardens [became] a symbol of injustice, enmity and hurt that must be resisted."³² Fueled by injustice or loyalty, opposing gangs who had previously co-existed peacefully – initiating violence primarily against the colonial symbol of injustice rather than each other – began to align more strongly with their respective parties and participate in inter-gang violence on the party's behalf. In 1966, a confrontation between the new JLP tenants and the PNP supporters who'd been snubbed housing took place, marking the beginning of a new era of violence.³³ As I have demonstrated, the catalyst for such a shift in violence can be traced back to the politicization of urban renewal. Critics such as Hutton thus label the newly formed postcolonial inter-gang warfare as, in its essence, an expression of political warfare.³⁴

In the years that followed, Seaga's model of politicized urban renewal became a widespread practice for both PNP and JLP politicians.³⁵ More squatter camps were destroyed, and often violently so. On August 12th, 1966, the Foreshore Road shantytown was infamously demolished under a scene of fire and smoke. Squatters who hadn't moved out of the area before

the 12th were forced to rush into fire and destruction, hoping they could save their belongings before their homes were destroyed.³⁶ Alongside this, Trench Town was allocated some 450 units and turned into a politically charged housing development.³⁷ With the spread of violence, these newly developed territories became garrisoned for the growing inter-gang warfare. Tivoli Gardens remained the principal garrison for the JLP, and the PNP developed lead-garrisons under Arnette Gardens and Matthews Lane. Any land politicians hadn't publicly politicized in downtown Kingston were fought over by each party's gangs. The previous model of political diversity and coexistence seen in Back O'Wall was no more, and "turf politics"³⁸ permeated Jamaica's communities and elections.

By the 1967 election, JLP and PNP territories had been substantially carved out in the make-up of downtown Kingston. Battles between the politicized territories became extreme. Political violence leading up to the election in the previous year had increased so much – alongside the anger stirred after Foreshore Road and Back O'Wall – the government was forced to declare a state of emergency.³⁹ Nonetheless, this declaration actualized into nothing constructive as the evolving rivalry only helped politicians win elections and hold onto power. By the 70s and 80s, the rivalry had become naturalized into the structure of downtown Kingston's society, setting the scene for the events of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

*"Balaclava," "Copenhagen City," and
Political Violence in A Brief History⁴⁰*

Critics such as Sheri-Marie Harrison have already pointed out the connection between the "Fall of Balaclava" in *A Brief History* and the politicized urban renewal of the 1960s. In her essay "Global Sisyphus: Rereading the Jamaican 1960s through *A Brief History of Seven Killings*," she writes, "[though] urban renewal is not directly represented in James's novel [...] it is described retrospectively in dialogue as a formative event in the shaping of what would become Kingston's future."⁴¹ By looking at characters Tristan Phillips, Papa-Lo, and Josey Wales, I reaffirm Harrison's insights on Balaclava and its relationship to the historic Back O'Wall (along with other major squatter camps). My aim here is to show how the aforementioned characters have uniquely experienced the peaceful coexistence of political parties before Balaclava fell and the absolute politicization of space in downtown Kingston after "the politician come." This will allow me to show Bam-Bam's limited frame of reference for community development in the next section.

Drawing on the government's historic refusal to develop Back O'Wall and other squatter camps in the 1950s, Balaclava is characterized in *A Brief History* as "a piece of shit that make you beg for the richness of a tenement yard" (89). People are said to join the camp in order to "dodge murder, robbery and rape only to get killed by a cup of water" (89) – a sentiment reminiscent of Clarke's notes on his visit to Back O'Wall. With two standpipes, two bathrooms, no toilets, nor any running water, Balaclava is extremely impoverished while Uptown is continually expanded and modernized. This includes growing garbage dump surrounding Balaclava and an Uptown sewage treatment plant positioned right outside of the camp so they could "flush they shit straight down to we" (452),

Despite its poor state, Balaclava is accompanied by a spirit of non-violence similarly witnessed in the historic Back O'Wall. Tristan Phillips – a Rastafarian character who previously lived in Balaclava – says, "Balaclava never did so bad depending on where you lived or who you live with. It's not like every day some baby dead or some people get their face eaten off by rats or anything" (453). While "things wasn't good," he admits, "Wasn't good at all," there was still a real sense of peace. For instance, Phillips remembers mornings where he could "just [go] out and [lay] down in the grass, just pure green grass, and watch hummingbird and butterfly dance over [him]" (452). As a character who lives past its "fall," Phillips' reflections reveal a sense of nostalgia for the past.

Just as with the squatter camps at Back O'Wall and Foreshore Road, Balaclava is razed by bulldozers so the JLP-aligned Copenhagen City housing settlement can go up in its place (a clear stand-in for Tivoli Gardens). As a first-hand witness to the violent destruction, Phillips tells how "[a] big iron jaw just chomp 'pon me wall and rip it away [...] and chomp down dirt in the ground, me bed, me stool and part of the roof me build with me own hand" (454). In light of the Foreshore Road demolition, this scene illustrates how some squatters were forced to desperately remove their possessions before they were bulldozed, making Phillips a literary representative for these historic victims.

Simultaneously, the significance of Phillip's Rastafarianism cannot be ignored in relation to these events. Being driven out of Balaclava by JLP bulldozers brings to mind the destruction of Rastafarian strongholds at both Back O'Wall and Trench Town. Just as Rastafarians were removed from Back O'Wall without a real chance of being rehoused, Phillips is forced out while JLP loyalists are given the rights to Copenhagen City. In hindsight, the politicized intent behind his

forced removal is not lost on him. He rhetorically asks Pierce, “You really think the JLP was going help the Rasta part or the PNP of Balaclava?” (452). After being unjustly detained and sentenced to prison sometime after Balaclava’s fall, he eventually chooses to join the ranks of a drug syndicate to keep safe from the developing JLP versus PNP war.

Another key witness to the transformation of Balaclava is Papa-Lo, the first Don of Copenhagen City. Papa-Lo is a JLP supporter who seizes power in downtown Kingston by carrying out orders from JLP politicians. To help ensure PNP-affiliates and Rastafarians stay out of Copenhagen City, Papa-Lo is directed to use violence against them at his disposal. When the politicians came with such a directive, Papa-Lo says he followed through only because he assumed good would come along with it; a claim that is possibly true in part, but questionable considering how aggressively he acts. He commits mass violence against those associated with the PNP in the name of the JLP, further cementing a reality of violence into Kingston’s societal structure, land, and communities. Papa-Lo ultimately solidifies an image as the “baddest” man in Copenhagen City and suggests he does more good than bad in the community as it’s JLP Don when feeling self-conscious about his position.⁴²

In light of his violent tendencies, Papa-Lo can reflect on societal differences before and after the politicization of territory in downtown Kingston. “Before [Copenhagen City],” he says, “man from Denham Town and man from Jungle didn’t really like each other, but they fight each other on the football field and the cricket pitch and even when two boy get rowdy and a mouth get punched bloody, there was no war or rumour of war” (89). Bringing to mind Hutton’s comments on the transformation of gang violence in the 60s, Papa-Lo’s pre-Copenhagen City experiences demonstrate the real lack of actualized violence between gangs in Jamaica before the early-to-mid 1960s. As shown, this model is obliterated when “the politician come.” Papa-Lo adds, “[The politicians] carve up Kingston and never ask we what slice we want. So every land that hit midway on the boundary, [...] they leave it to we to fight over” (90). As Papa-Lo chooses to “fight hard” for unclaimed territory on behalf of the JLP, he simultaneously raises up a generation of violent JLP Enforcers and recruits with him.

The JLP Enforcer most notable for his brutal exploitation is Josey Wales. Wales is another figure who knew of life before Copenhagen City and becomes guilty of exploiting young JLP recruits out of his own self-interest. Interestingly, his violence develops out of the injustice of politicized urban renewal rather than an individual attempt to secure power. As Papa-Lo notes,

Josey Wales entered the era of Copenhagen City without any inclination for violence or hope for territorial control; instead, he began that year training to become a locksmith. Walking home from work on a Sunday via a street he thought had “never declared colours before,” Josey Wales is tragically shot five times. “[On] the Friday before,” Papa-Lo says, “politician come through saying close your mouth and fire your gun” (89). After lying in the dirty water, he is taken to a clinic by a man passing on his bike, saving his life. But, three week later, “A different man come out of that clinic” (89). Thus Josey Wales’s desire for a peaceful life is uprooted by hatred born out of JLP and PNP politicized urbanism.

In one sense, Wales’s experiences directly juxtapose those of Papa-Lo and other Dons such as Shotta Sherrif. While Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif both exploit the politicization of urban renewal in search of power, Wales explicitly did not. His arc develops more violently after being shot, but the arcs of Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif ironically become more pacifistic as they are influenced by Rastafarianism and “the Singer.” Though Wales’s experiences do not absolve him from his extreme exploitation of younger recruits and political violence, his origins demonstrate the pervasiveness of politicized urban renewal.

Nevertheless, the exploitation enacted primarily by politicians, Papa-Lo, and Josey Wales helps ensure the naturalization of “turf politics” into Jamaican society. Even as Papa-Lo becomes tired of it, his actions have allowed others (such as Josey Wales) to easily take up his efforts, perpetuating the cycle of violence. By the 1970s and 80s, the commitment to political rivalry and the bloodshed it brings is complete, and younger individuals in downtown Kingston are left without any models of community engagement outside a PNP/JLP framework of violence.

“I don’t know people who don’t pick side”:

Bam-Bam and 1976 Kingston

Characters such as Papa-Lo and Tristan Phillips have a privileged position compared to the generation they raise up. Those connected to Balaclava can inevitably see the artificiality behind “turf politics” and know it is not the only way communities can form in downtown Kingston. By refusing to denounce the geographic manipulation and instead let it overtake Kingston’s society, young “rudies” in *A Brief History* from Copenhagen City, The Eight Lanes, and other politically drawn territories are subjected to a reality constructed by violence. By looking at the journey of

Bam-Bam, I show the different ways his political socialization structurally restricts him for comprehending a vision of life outside the JLP/PNP framework.

Bam-Bam, the first narrator of the 1976 sections in *A Brief History*, is a fourteen year old boy who escaped to Copenhagen City after witnessing the brutal murder of his parents at the age of ten. While fleeing his parent's murder scene, he accidentally runs into Papa-Lo, Josey Wales, and other JLP Enforcers. Once they realize his parents were killed by PNP-gang members, they immediately ask, "You want to kill [the PNP] back?" (15). Bam-Bam says yes and is taken in as a new recruit for the JLP-affiliated gang. That same year, he shoots a gun for the first time, only to be given his own as a birthday gift from Papa-Lo two years later on his twelfth birthday.

The character who teaches Bam-Bam how to "use gun to shot up a PNP boy if they try anything" (37) is Josey Wales. Wales tells Bam-Bam he needs to know how to handle a gun because he will soon be required to "defend Copenhagen City" (37). Under Wales's guidance, Bam-Bam is quite literally taught how to kill. Soon after getting his gun, Wales takes him to a tied up Rema boy and orders Bam-Bam to kill him. Rema (a territory in the political "crossroads" of downtown Kingston left un-renamed by James) notably leaned towards associations with JLP, though it often shifted depending on which political party could win it over. Bam-Bam does not know him and quickly shoots him in the head.

After the killing, Bam-Bam admits that it was not only "nothing," but that he "did want to kill [him] [...]" "did want to more than anything" (39). At the same time, he adds that he is unsure why this urge occurred so strongly. I interpret this in accordance with his subconscious societal conditioning under the JLP/PNP framework and manipulated geography in general. As shown, Bam-Bam's reality from a young age is bound to politically-constructed violence starting with the witnessed murder of his parents. To say he has been desensitized to killing is not strong enough: murder is, in its essence, something that "naturally" occurs or possibly even "must occur" for him because his reality itself is bound to it. Shooting the Rema boy doesn't make him feel good or bad after doing it – he desired to do it, but it was still "nothing."⁴³ As I have attempted to show, this binding of violence with reality develops out of the politicization of urban renewal and the erasure of previous societal models dependent upon political coexistence.

Alongside his indoctrination to JLP versus PNP violence, Bam-Bam simultaneously experiences real injustices rooted in politicized urbanism. Since the PNP is in government during 1976, Bam-Bam learns that areas associated with the JLP will not be allocated resources to

develop. When walking down an abandoned street with Josey Wales, he sees there are “no house but mound of sand and block, for bigger tenement yard that government not going to build because we is JLP” (38). Bam-Bam’s lack of knowledge about Balaclava makes this sentiment especially unique. For him, the natural question becomes how to get JLP back in power so his JLP-associated neighborhoods can be developed. Politicized geography is simply a given reality – PNP serves PNP, and JLP serves JLP. But this rationalization was not yet a given with the fall of Balaclava; its destruction is accompanied with a sense of betrayal and a real disruption to peace across political parties.

Interestingly, another issue that reenforces Bam-Bam’s views is his limited and one-sided understanding of JLP political history. What Bam-Bam does know about the 1960s is propagandized with JLP sensitivities. He says, “Jamaica Labour Party rule the country in the sixties but the People’s National Party tell the country that better must come and win the election in 1972. Now JLP want the country back and there’s no word named can’t, there’s no word named no” (36). In other words, the sixties implicitly mark an injustice against the JLP for him. They are the victims of lost power given to the PNP. This is radically different from the perceptions Papa-Lo and Phillips testify to in relation to Balaclava. Nevertheless, Papa-Lo is quiet on such perspectives when it comes to his recruits and still sends Bam-Bam to houses before the 1976 election to “remind [them] how to vote” (78).

The culmination of Bam-Bam’s politicized socialization is shown at National Heroes Park during the Smile Jamaica Peace concert. Having attempted to assassinate “The Singer” with Josey Wales and others just a few days before, Bam-Bam stumbles into the Park where “all of Jamaica” is gathering. Among them he looks “for the police, for JLP gunman, [and] for PNP gunman,” but such a framework is not useful – the crowd has become one, revealing an image of coexistence that is new (and incomprehensible) for him. “These people,” he says, “are not JLP or PNP or any other P, they’re just man and woman and brother and sister and cousin and mother and bredren and sistren and sufferah” (256). As they move around him, Bam-Bam feels invisible: “they just don’t see me at all,” he says. Being no one’s political enemy nor on anyone’s radar the same way he would be in JLP Kingston, Bam-Bam does not know how to constructively respond.

While Bam-Bam is invisible to others, they too are unrecognizable to him. He says, “I don’t know these people. [...] I don’t know people who don’t pick side. [...] I don’t know what they look like, what run in their head before they say something, people who never wear Jamaica

Labour Party green or People's National Party orange" (256). The people gathered for the concert represent an existence outside the JLP/PNP framework that structurally defines Bam-Bam's reality, and he is physically unable to comprehend them. In such a liminal state, he can only respond by exoticizing them. He wonders what is going on in their heads, as if it is categorically different from anything he could be thinking about. Only a glimpse of peaceful coexistence in the unity of the crowd coupled with the eventual arrival of "The Singer" on stage proves too much for him.

The tragedy of Bam-Bam, compared to the Dons and Enforcers, is that any possibility of peace and political co-existence is completely restricted to him whereas the latter have other experiences. Without promoting any other forms of communal engagement and simultaneously encouraging JLP-induced violence, Josey Wales and Papa-Lo ensure Bam-Bam's sense of reality is tied to violence. Thus Bam-Bam can only comprehend experiences in or related to a JLP/PNP framework, while the latter characters volitionally participate in it.

Conclusion

By examining Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings* through the urban renewal projects of the 1960s, I have attempted to show how many of that era's events affected developing generations in downtown Jamaica during the 70s and 80s. The key catalyst I have examined is the "fall of Balaclava," which acts as a stand-in for the demolitions at Back O'Wall and other squatter camps. As shown in the novel, the politicized redevelopment of Balaclava deeply impacts Jamaican society by hard-wiring a sense of political rivalry and violence into its core. As emphasized in the story of Bam-Bam, his political and geographic values and his individual sense of self are crucially formed within a JLP/PNP framework that defines his reality. The erasure of historical alternatives prevent him from structurally comprehending a safer model of societal engagement, dooming him to perpetual violence. In contrast, downtown Dons and Enforcers who have experienced both Balaclava and Copenhagen City know of the artificiality behind the current situation. Regrettably, Bam-Bam is one of the many exploited by them, and while they gain power he gains nothing. By the time the Dons grow tired of this system, the violence it creates via the politicization of space directly impacts the lives of other Enforcers, including Josey Wales. This allows him and others to take up exploitative efforts and reinforce the perpetuation of violence in downtown Kingston.

NOTES

¹ Harrison's essay provides a larger discussion on the relationship between urbanization and capitalism in Jamaica (though more generally speaking for many postcolonial nations). I do not build off this or many other of her ideas in my essay. Harrison's insight into the connection between Balaclava and Back O'Wall is what is most instrumental to my discussion of the 1970s, which is why I explicitly reference her. Furthermore, I have intentionally limited myself in other ways. While upholding that politicized urbanism in the 1960s acts as a major catalyst for Jamaica's violence, I am in no way proposing that it is the *sole* factor that must be considered. The JLP versus PNP war in downtown Kingston is inherently apart of a larger constructed divide; mainly, the separation between uptown and downtown. Additionally, the U.S. government's dissemination of propagandized messages and weapons throughout the country can reveal more about the country's history of violence in the 20th century. However, a more thorough investigation of these developments are beyond the scope of this essay, and my focus remains on differing perceptions of reality and community development in *A Brief History* based on characters relationship to "the fall of Balaclava."

² See Colin G. Clarke, *Decolonizing the Colonial City: Urbanization and Stratification in Kingston, Jamaica* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91. While "Squatter Camp" and "Shantytown" are often received synonymously, Clarke points out some historic distinctions between them.

³ Colin G. Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 96.

⁴ Kevin Edmonds, "Guns, gangs and garrison communities in the politics of Jamaica," *SAGE Publications* 57, no. 4 (April-June 2016): 58; Clinton Hutton, "Oh Rudie: Jamaican Popular Music and the Narrative of Urban Badness in the Making of Postcolonial Society," *Caribbean Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 2010): 39.

⁵ Clarke, *Kingston*, 119.

⁶ Clarke, *Kingston*, 119.

⁷ Hutton, 33. A majority of the Rastafarians in the Back O'Wall and other shantytowns were subjected to a long history of forced removal extending beyond Back O'Wall. Pinnacle, a well-known Rastafarian stronghold, was infamously destroyed in the mid-1950s by the colonial government. Their forced removal from Back O'Wall without proper rehousing can thus be understood as a continuation of colonial agendas.

⁸ Robbie Shilliam, "'Open the Gates Mek We Repatriate': Caribbean slavery, constructivism, and hermeneutic tensions," *International Theory* 6, no. 2 (July 2014): 366.

⁹ Clarke, *Decolonizing*, 33.

¹⁰ Edmonds, 58.

¹¹ Clarke, *Kingston*, 78.

¹² Clarke, *Kingston*, 78.

¹³ For reference to the Rastafarian population in Back O'Wall, see Clarke, *Kingston*, 119 ; for PNP, see Deborah A. Thomas, "Rastafari, Communism, and Surveillance in Late Colonial Jamaica," *Duke University Press* 21, no. 3 (November 2017): 84.

¹⁴ Edmonds, 58.

¹⁵ Quoted in Hutton, 31.

¹⁶ Colin G. Clarke, *Race, Class, and the Politics of Decolonization: Jamaica Journals, 1961 and 1968* (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 48.

- ¹⁷ Clarke, *Race*, 48.
- ¹⁸ Clarke, *Kingston*, 96.
- ¹⁹ Clarke, *Kingston*, 80.
- ²⁰ Sheri-Marie Harrison, "Global Sisyphus: Rereading the Jamaican 1960s through *A Brief History of Seven Killings*," *Duke University Press* 21, no. 3 (November 2017): 85.
- ²¹ Hutton, 24.
- ²² Hutton, 24.
- ²³ Hutton, 31.
- ²⁴ Hutton, 28.
- ²⁵ Clarke, *Decolonizing*, 211.
- ²⁶ Colin Clarke, "Urbanization in the Caribbean," *Geography* 59, no. 3 (July 1974): 229.
- ²⁷ Clarke, *Kingston*, 130
- ²⁸ Hutton, 32.
- ²⁹ Clarke, *Kingston*, 130.
- ³⁰ Clarke, *Decolonizing*, 211.
- ³¹ Clarke, *Decolonizing*, 211.
- ³² Hutton, 32.
- ³³ Hutton, 32 : "Hence, a clash allegedly took place at the housing estate between supporters of the PNP and JLP in June 1966 [...] The die was cast. The progressive idea for model housing for Kingston's poor that Seaga envisaged was aborted in the way it came to life."
- ³⁴ Hutton, 29.
- ³⁵ Clarke adds that while the JLP first initiated the politicization of urban renewal, plans for redevelopment were already in the works the year before via the PNP government. With the transition of power in 1962, the JLP were inevitably the ones who implemented it. This is not to say that the PNP would or would not have acted in the same way as the JLP, but it does paint a bigger picture of the political climate in the early 1960s.
- ³⁶ Hutton, 36.
- ³⁷ Clarke, *Kingston*, 130.
- ³⁸ See Edmonds, 58, for a further discussion on the term "turf politics."
- ³⁹ Hutton, 41-44.
- ⁴⁰ All references to Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014) are included with in-text page number citations.
- ⁴¹ Harrison, 87.
- ⁴² This is most identifiable in Papa-Lo's consistent disapproval of rape and robbery. Gang members associated with the JLP are seriously punished if they commit such crimes.
- ⁴³ See James, 39: "Three days later the newspaper have as headline *Boy floating in Kingston Harbour: Murder execution style*. Josey Wales smile and say me is big man now, so big that me make news and all of Jamaica 'fraid of me. I don't feel big. I don't feel nothing."

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