



## **Teaching Entrepreneurialism: Globalization and the Contradictions of Community Based Development Models in Kingston, Jamaica**

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### Introduction

Globalization is thought to provide enormous opportunities for the growth of Jamaica as a nation, but also poses significant obstacles to members of the state seeking to carve out a workable niche in the world market. Over the past twenty five years, political and economic policies associated with neoliberal restructuring have entailed a dramatic reorganization of the relationship of the Jamaican state to both society and the global economy. Reforms in Jamaica have resulted in both a protracted struggle for the incorporation of the nation's economy into the global market, as well as profound experiences of social upheaval and dislocation. Intensive and largely unplanned urbanization has exacerbated ghetto-related problems associated with violence, high unemployment, skyrocketing crime and the entrenchment of organized crime networks, necessitating community development strategies that can successfully incorporate these disruptive zones into the national agenda of economic and social progress. In this paper I explore the challenges of community development training in entrepreneurship, which has become the hallmark of current development strategy, within one such "disruptive zone".

Neo-liberal globalization has had a deep impact upon the Jamaican economy. Import restrictions were loosened in compliance with the regulations of the International Monetary Fund. The IMF also encouraged widespread privatization of government owned industries not accounting for the insufficiency of leverage to draw necessary foreign investment for the maintenance of these private enterprises. The result has been what the Planning Institute of Jamaica has described as "devastating consequences" which include a decline of living standards and the reduction of government spending on education, health, and social welfare programs (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2000: 9). In order to soften these consequences the People's National Party, during their incumbency from 1989 to 2007, encouraged public/private partnerships to provide support for impoverished communities that could not be fully serviced by social welfare programs. To this end they established the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) which is a temporary governmentally and privately sponsored community development agency, also supported by the World Bank, which partners with communities and private entities to improve infrastructure, education and community health. JSIF remains the predominant purveyor of community development programming nationally and is evident in many low income communities in the



Kingston Metropolitan Area. The methods promoted by JSIF correspond with the state's neo-liberal vision of Jamaica's future as part of the global economy.

The Jamaican state has pursued a strategy that places a large portion of the economic development burden on Jamaican citizens, with individualizing policies that seek to turn persons into "entrepreneurs of themselves" and citizens into potential "allies of economic success" (Rose 1999:142; 162). Along these lines, the Social Sector Strategy Report of Jamaica drafted for the Inter-American Development Bank, maintained that social protection programs "are now viewed as active mechanisms that can assist the poor in investing in their own productivity" (Inter-American Development Bank 2001:18), completing the neoliberal logic by placing the burden of economic development on individual citizenry. Within this strained economic context, poor populations are caught in a deadly bind. While the state has drastically reduced the social safety net for its citizens in the interest of privatization and instilling "self sufficiency," there are limited employment opportunities that would allow people to actually become self sufficient.

Concurrent with the state's development of policies that highlight the importance of citizen responsibility for economic development and care of self, it has also retracted the social and economic safety nets that existed under the previously existing social democratic state. Former state responsibilities – pertaining to education and other basic services – have been shifted to civil society, making Jamaican populations even more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the state's economic reforms. The burden of citizen care has essentially been shifted from the realm of state services and placed instead on local social networks and community or organizational voluntarism. While these local level initiatives are principally concerned with providing services previously furnished by the government, they are also highly concerned with (re)socializing and disciplining disenfranchised urban youth, as I will discuss in more detail below.

#### The Merits of an Ethnographic Approach

Anthropologists are uniquely able to understand how macro level policies on the global scale and international power dynamics impact localities and shape possibilities for change. My field research confirmed the assertion that the current Prime Minister of Jamaica, Bruce Golding, made back in 2005 when he served as the Leader of the opposition Jamaica Labour Party at the national Political Leadership Forum. At the Forum, Golding identified a well known Jamaican conundrum. The "vicious solution loop," according to Golding, is as follows: "We can't fix the crime, and we cannot fix the economy until we fix the crime. But to fix the crime you need resources. You need to create opportunities" (Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies 2006:10). What Golding describes here is a key barrier to national development, high crime rates which deter foreign investment due to fears of national instability. This "vicious



solution loop” creates a holding pattern where crime inhibits economic development and the lack of economic development fosters crime. This cycle frustrates efforts to improve state policies that would benefit members of the nation. Golding suggests aptly that Jamaica’s political leadership has been “working as firefighters, not navigators” (Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies 2006:9). What this has meant in practical terms is that resources have been used in an ad hoc fashion to quell an ongoing series of emergencies because there is a lack of financial capacity to institute long term planning.

My ethnographic research also revealed that although there is, indeed, a “vicious solution loop”, the *nature* of opportunities put on offer to disenfranchised populations is crucial to the possibility of disrupting the cycle. When community development programs offer opportunities that cannot provide immediate and sustainable financial improvements to their participants, they too become “firefighting” strategies rather than paths to real economic growth and national development.

Anthropological methods of long term immersive research and participant observation were useful for understanding how these programs, designed as models to encourage community development, actually operated in practice.

I spent over a year in one West Kingston community during 2001-2002 and continue to document on an ongoing basis, community development initiatives in the area I named “Guy Town”. In particular, the research focused on how these initiatives interrelated with West Kingston culture and local power relations, as well as national development goals as contextualized within constraints and opportunities created by processes of globalization.

#### Entrepreneurialism in the Jamaican Context: Guy Town

The neoliberal ideology that underpins the current development model engenders a fundamentally economic tension when put into practice within weak economies like Jamaica’s. This tension was highlighted in one of the first events I attended during my research in Guy Town—the ribbon cutting for a new Skills Center which had been sponsored by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund. The design of the Skills Center belies the role that this type of community development is to play in Jamaican national development and in the governance of the poor. The skills to be taught in the Center are not the typical production skills toward which the Jamaican poor have traditionally been guided. The skills being cultivated went beyond furniture making, sewing, catering and the construction of material goods, to enhance national agendas promoting “social stability” and to teach new economic skill sets that incorporate Information Technologies. In some ways, training in Information Technology may put the proverbial “cart before the horse” in communities such as Guy Town, where many residents lack even basic education (Jamaica has the lowest rates of literacy in the English Speaking



Caribbean), but it does coincide with the explicit goals of “development” that were emphasized during the most recent period of People’s National Party governance. According to former Prime Minister P.J. Patterson, during an address to the Caribbean Community, the Caribbean has entered into a new “ballpark” with respect to development and incorporation into the global economy which must now be “technology driven and alliance ridden” (Patterson 2000: 7). The incumbent Jamaica Labour Party is continuing to promote this national vision as stated in the report on Jamaican national development goals to be achieved by the year 2030. In the report it is noted that the, “...new paradigm will move from dependence on the lower forms of capital -our sun and sand tourism and exporting sub-soil assets and basic agricultural commodities, to development of the country’s higher forms of capital – our cultural, human, knowledge and institutional capital stocks that will move us into higher stages of development” (Planning Institute of Jamaica 2009:25).The “new paradigm” heavily emphasizes the development of cutting edge scientific and technological capabilities requiring investment in education and research. This is part of a development model focused on moving from an export driven economy to an economy based on the production of knowledge and scientific innovation.

In Jamaica, the construction of a technologically driven economy requires the production of “human resources” via the transformation of the Jamaican citizenry by the state and private development entities. This transformation is necessary for Jamaica’s transition from an industrially oriented economy into the service/technological economies in demand by the “first world”. Former British colonies are uniquely situated to fulfill this niche in the global division of service labor because of their use of English, as has been seen in India among other locales. The design of the Skills Center with its chalkboard clad classrooms, computer lab, and library, chosen instead of workshops with tools and sewing machines, clearly establishes the economic direction in which Jamaica is planning to go and, perhaps optimistically, the role that urban communities such as Guy Town are envisioned to play in that process.

In addition to providing remedial education and technological skills training to community residents, as well as a few failing small income generating projects including a vegetable farm and a concrete block factory, the Guy Town project also incorporated a (re)socialization component. The population of Guy Town is viewed as problematic in that many residents exist in a state of severe poverty, are isolated from other local communities. Given these circumstances community members often suffer from a lack of marketable skills and the social networks that would enable them to gain employment through legitimate means outside of Guy Town. This lack of skills exists in spite of a an atmosphere of industriousness where people spend significant time and energy maintaining their dwellings, and the neighborhood in general, as well as taking up small informal revenue generating activities such as selling lottery numbers, cooked food, and



working as beauticians in make-shift hair and nail salons or as local carpenters, electricians and tailors.

Beyond eking out a hand to mouth living within this informal economy, elaborate organized crime networks have grown up both in conjunction with, and as a supplement to, the Jamaican state. It has been well documented that West Kingston neighborhoods became militarized back in the 1970s when political parties started arming, training, and housing residents in order to drive out rival party supporters and guarantee political support at the polls during election times (Robotham 2003; Stone 1985; Waters 1989). These local groups then went on to become an effective replacement for government services when the state began to retract. Because of these networks, informal employment as members of local “security” details is also available to many young men who may lack other types of skills or even basic literacy. Involvement in organized crime enables the young men to support their dependents, in some small way, while also bestowing a level of prestige and respect upon them that is not typically available to young marginally employed men.

Organized crime networks that access money through drug and arms smuggling, protection rackets, and extortion schemes, offered community residents employment opportunities and protection that was not being offered by the state or the constabulary. However, the disruptive crime and violence that frequently sweeps through West Kingston during periods of conflict among competing criminal organizations meant that some groups within Guy Town became an obstacle to national development by creating instability that hampers the state's efforts at attracting foreign investment. Criminal organizations and the opportunities/safety net they provide in disenfranchised communities contribute to the state's “vicious solution loop” because the dramatic and brutal levels of violence help to promote the international perception that Kingston, Jamaica's center of commerce, is grossly dangerous, corrupt, and unstable.

As part of a strategy to chip away at this problem and encourage greater peace and stability, local residents, with a special focus on young men, were invited to attend classes that would attempt to instill them with new social skills and value systems. Participants were instructed in conflict resolution strategies and self-esteem building regimens that highlighted the achievements of working class/black skinned Jamaicans. Additionally, there were attempts to inculcate new ideas about masculinity that would minimize the working class Jamaican emphasis on males having multiple sexual partners and many offspring as a demonstration of personal status (Chevannes 2001).



While these initiatives have yielded some subtle benefits to participants, including exposure to new ideas and contact with new people from outside the area, the lack of practicable job training renders the programs to be just another example of “fire fighting” a crisis that can only be quelled through long term planning and access to on-going resources. Ultimately, no space has been carved for the urban poor as part of the “new paradigm” of national development and no level of self-esteem building can correct that problem. Only residents with exceptional levels of discipline, personal drive and talent might have a chance to join this proposed science and technology driven economy. The radically unequal playing field experienced by the population of West Kingston, consisting of class and color based prejudice in hiring practices, low quality education, and a physically dangerous, psychologically stressful, living environment is topped off with a lack of access to basic resources like consistent electricity and running water that most middle class Jamaicans take for granted. This population has, instead, been offered “entrepreneurialism” and “self-help” as a solution to their lack of access to “mainstream” employment opportunities.

Entrepreneurialism in this setting, as I described above, largely entails very small amounts of capital being invested in small income generating activities that yield small profits. Here, entrepreneurs are reliant upon the purchasing power of other members of the urban poor due to the class segregated nature of Kingston. It is not a strategy that can substantially improve the income of local families or even initiate savings, reinforcing the “present day survival orientation” that has frequently been observed by anthropologists working among poor urban populations in the Caribbean (Harrison 1988). Development program participants are not being offered the realistic opportunity to enter the legal job market in any meaningful way because there are simply not enough jobs for even highly skilled employment seekers. There is little middle ground on offer to poor Jamaicans who would seek steady employment in positions falling between petty entrepreneurialism and the, as yet unrealized, science and technology driven economy. This missing middle ground, then, can be found on offer by local organized criminals who often provide reliable income in exchange for participation in illegal activities. This informal employment option for West Kingston residents, in turn, exacerbates the problem of national development that the Jamaican state has sought to address through the implementation of community based development programs.

### Conclusion

Processes of globalization may aid in minimizing the duration of Jamaica’s “vicious problem loop” if selective market deregulation is replaced with democratization. Enforced deregulation orchestrated by economically strong and self determined actors and institutions has resulted in a lack of economic protections for countries possessing weak economies on the global scale. The borrowing policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have saddled so-called



“developing” countries with lending stipulations that, in effect, limit the national sovereignty of states attempting to institute economic and social welfare strategies that operate in the best interest of their own populations.

The current global dynamic binds the states of small nations to a future of “fire fighting” national crises due to a lack of economic control. Jamaica is an excellent example of a country that finds itself in such a bind. The Jamaican state has been retracted based on the adoption of neoliberal logic and the realities of economic limitation, leaving society’s most marginal members vulnerable. In addition, these vulnerable populations have been offered the solution of entrepreneurialism and self-help in a setting of scarce resources and limited job opportunities.

The community development initiatives that have been put in place in areas like Guy Town do not offer realistic employment alternatives within a science and technology driven national development model that leaves these undereducated populations without significant new possibilities. This situation leaves poor populations susceptible to the appeal of employment in organized crime, which offers the potential for steady income and personal status.

Without a range of alternatives that fall between the current offerings of petty entrepreneurship and the projected science and technology driven economy, organized crime and concomitant violence and instability will continue to limit Jamaica’s ability to attract the foreign investment that would be necessary for the country to assume a more meaningful position within the global economy. Realistic economic opportunities must be made available to development program participants in “disruptive zones” akin to West Kingston if community based development is to succeed as a key strategy for breaking the cycle of crime and economic insolvency that keeps Jamaica as a whole from becoming a politically and economically self-determined global actor.

Alternately, to interrupt this story of chickens and eggs, a more democratically regulated system of global economic governance might allow economic growth for small nations like Jamaica. In addition, such a system might create the possibility of new employment opportunities without the intense pressure that international lending policies determined by neoliberal logic have placed upon the most at risk members of Jamaican society.

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