

The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 32
No. 2
2012

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, CORRUPTION, AND “FELT NEEDS”: THE CHALLENGES OF NEIGHBORHOOD REFORM INITIATIVES IN KINGSTON, JAMAICA

ANNE M. GALVIN

ABSTRACT

Despite the enormous opportunities for the growth of Jamaica as a nation that neoliberal globalization is purported to provide, this political-economic model also poses significant obstacles to members of the state who seek to carve out a workable niche in the world market. Policies associated with neoliberal restructuring over the past 25 years have demanded a dramatic reorganization of the Jamaican state in relation to both society and the global economy. Reforms in Jamaica have resulted in 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, unplanned, urbanization has exacerbated the problems associated with poverty, including violence, high unemployment, skyrocketing crime and the entrenchment of organized crime networks, necessitating community development strategies that can reshape disruptive communities in accordance with the national agenda of economic and social progress. In this article I explore the complexities of one such strategy ethnographically.

KEY WORDS: Caribbean, community development, urban anthropology

INTRODUCTION

Neoliberal globalization, which was supposed to provide unequalled opportunity for growth in even the smallest nations, has deeply influenced the operation of the contemporary Jamaican economy and the stability of the state. The term is being used here to indicate both the globalization of an ideology of neoliberalism, as well as the implementation of neoliberal policies by states across the globe, frequently (though not always) necessitated by inducements from international bodies including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Though different, these overlapping registers share in common an emphasis on “...the deployment of new, market-based techniques of government within the terrain of the state itself. At the same time, new constructions of ‘active’ and ‘responsible’ citizens and communities are deployed to produce governmental results that do not depend on direct state intervention. The ‘responsibilized’ citizen comes to operate as a miniature firm, responding to incentives, rationally assessing risks, and prudently choosing from among different courses of action” (Ferguson 2009: 172). Civil unrest in Tivoli Gardens, a Jamaica Labour Party affiliated community in Kingston, is but one example of the profound consequences widespread privatization and state retraction has had for working poor and unemployed populations.

In May of 2010, the news that then-Prime Minister Bruce Golding would accede to American pressure to extradite Christopher “Dudus” Coke was met with organized violence by Tivoli Garden's residents. Coke, a well-known patron figure in Tivoli Gardens, was to be tried on narcotics and illegal arms trafficking charges. Golding managed to delay signing the extradition agreement issued in August 2009 for nine

months, claiming that the evidence had been obtained illegally and that the extradition represented an attack upon national sovereignty. He secretly engaged legal representation in Coke's defense. The incident in Tivoli Gardens underscores the bind in which urban unemployed populations are caught amidst global economic instability, a national context of insignificant economic growth, and the withdrawal of social safety nets. Residents of communities like Tivoli Gardens have become increasingly dependent upon figures like Coke to meet basic daily needs, just as the Jamaican state has become increasingly dependent upon these same figures for the maintenance of stability in disenfranchised zones within the Kingston Metropolitan Area (see Galvin 2012).

In an early attempt to buffer the effects of the state's retraction, the People's National Party, during their incumbency from 1989 to 2007, promoted public and private partnerships as a solution that might provide support for communities that would no longer be fully serviced by social welfare programs. They established the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), 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 community development organization nationally and is present in many low-income communities in the Kingston Metropolitan Area. JSIF's methods correspond with the Jamaican state's vision of the country's future within the global economy. Preparation for this projected economy neglects the contemporary problems of unemployment for populations that lack sufficient education and access to the infrastructure that would facili-



tate their participation. This gap in economic planning leaves entire communities dependent upon the patronage of figures like Coke and jeopardizes the state's ability to govern.

A large portion of the economic development burden has been displaced onto 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). In fact, the Social Sector Strategy Report of Jamaica drafted for the Inter-American Development Bank, maintained that programs "are now viewed as active mechanisms that can assist the poor in investing in their own productivity" (Inter-American Development Bank 2001: 18). Within this low-growth economic context, poor populations are unable to find an employment niche to accommodate their large numbers and productive capabilities. The reduced social safety net for citizens retracted in the interest of privatization and instilling "self sufficiency," cannot compensate for the limited number of employment opportunities that actually promote self-sufficiency. Responsibilities formerly within the state's domain – pertaining to education and other basic services – have been shifted to civil society, making Jamaican populations vulnerable to the pendulum swings of private profitability within the global economy.

It was initially during the nineteen-eighties that neoliberal governance replaced democratic socialist and capitalist party agendas in Jamaica. The values of self-help and entrepreneurialism promoted in poor communities over state safety nets simultaneously allowed patrons like Coke, and his father before him, to consolidate their power in neighborhoods they supported using resources acquired within the booming transnational cocaine trade. Both political parties maintain ties to powerful transnational crime syndicates whose members are de facto extensions of state power. They supplement resources available to the poor and maintain an uneasy stability in deeply disenfranchised neighborhoods. Residents of these militarized communities have willed allegiance over to those who visibly provide for them, and are increasingly alienated from a state that seems uncaring, ineffectual, and often brutal.

The vast financial resources and ruthlessness of organized criminals eventually made them more powerful than the politicians who attempted to harness their influence (Robotham 2010). Rather than deferring to judicial or police systems, members of the urban poor increasingly relied on extrajudicial justice meted out by organized criminals, which is often viewed as more efficient than formal justice. The availability of illicitly obtained resources efficiently undermined the state's control over their criminal partners who now had significant economic capital that parlayed into social capital through the goods and services they provided.

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, while contradictorily reinforcing the need for organized criminal interventions, such as Cokes', that provide necessary resources and a somewhat orderly local legal structure.

BARRIERS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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, participant observation conducted between 2001 and the present, confirmed the assertion that then-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 that 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



The Applied Anthropologist



ANNE M. GALVIN



Community Development...

within constraints and opportunities created by processes of globalization.

TEACHING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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 that 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 and 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 (see 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



The Applied Anthropologist



ANNE M. GALVIN



Community Development...

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 (see Chevannes 2001).

CONCLUSION

While community reform 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 "firefighting" 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 technologically driven "new paradigm" of national development that also continues to shift the burden of citizen care from the shoulders of the state and onto those of "responsibilized" individuals and communities (see Ferguson 2009; Galvin 2011). 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 (see 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.

As food for thought, processes of globalization may aid in minimizing the duration of Jamaica's "vicious solution 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 Jamaican State, even after exiting their economic agreement with international lending agencies, continues on the path of austerity, maintaining similar economic policies to those enacted while under agreement.

As things stand, small states are bound to a future of "firefighting" national crises due to a lack of economic control caused by global deregulation and due to the ideological acceptance of neoliberalism as a panacea. Jamaica is an excellent example of a country that finds itself in such a bind. The retraction of the Jamaican state, a reaction to the adoption of neoliberal logic and the realities of economic limitation, has left the society's most marginal members increasingly vulnerable. This struggling population has been offered entrepreneurialism and self-help as a solution in an environment where scarce resources and limited job opportunities offer little hope. 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 under-educated populations without significant new possibilities. The result is that poor populations are highly 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



The Applied Anthropologist



ANNE M. GALVIN



Community Development...

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.

Anne M. Galvin is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at St. John's University. She received her Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research in 2006. She has conducted extensive ethnographic field research in Kingston, Jamaica from 2001 to the present. She can be contacted at 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens, NY 11439, galvina@stjohns.edu.

REFERENCES CITED

Chevannes, Barry

2001 *Learning to Be a Man: Culture, Socialization and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

Ferguson, James

2009 "The Uses of Neoliberalism." *Antipode* 41 (S1):166-184.

Galvin, Anne M.

2011 "Governing the Margins: Crime Containment and Community Development in Kingston, Jamaica." *NEAA Bulletin* (Fall):91-105.

2012 "Caribbean Piracies/Social Mobilities: Some Commonalities between Colonial Privateers and Entrepreneurial 'Profiteers' in the 21st Century." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (3):755-785.

Harrison, Faye

1988 "The Politics of Social Outlawry in Urban Jamaica." *Urban Anthropology* 17 (2/3):259-277.

Inter-American Development Bank

2001 *Jamaica: Social Sector Strategy*. Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, D.C.

Patterson, P.J.

2000 "Mobilizing Human Resources in Support of Caribbean Development." In *Contending with Destiny: The Caribbean in the 21st Century*. Edited by Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

Planning Institute of Jamaica

2000 *Jamaica Human Development Report 2000*. Kingston: Planning Institute of Jamaica.

2002 *Economic and Social Survey: Jamaica*. Kingston: Planning Institute of Jamaica.

2009 *Vision 2030 Jamaica: National Development Plan*. Kingston: Planning Institute of Jamaica.

Robotham, Don

2003 "How Kingston was Wounded." In *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*. Edited by Jane Schneider and Ida Susser. New York: Berg.

2007 *Culture, Society and Economy: Bringing Production Back In*. London: Sage.

2010 "Belly of the Beast – Tense Relationship between Dons, Politicians." *The Gleaner*, May 23. Accessed 14 March, 2012. <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100523/lead/lead3.html>.

Rose, Nikolas

1999 *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies

2006 *Jamaica: The Way Forward*. Presentations at the Political Leadership Forum 2005.

Kingston: Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies.

Stone, Carl

1985 *Democracy and Clientelism in Jamaica*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

Waters, Anita

1989 *Race, Class and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

