

Amanda Sives. 2010. *Elections, Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica 1944-2007*. Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle. 232 pp. ISBN: 978-976-637-331-3.

Deborah A. Thomas. 2011. *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 298 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5086-6.

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The Anglophone Caribbean has held out that its democratic process is second only to Whitehall. However, many Caribbean states had until recently, distanced themselves from the example of democracy presented by Jamaica with its rivalry between People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP). The violence employed in the Jamaican democratic process that Amanda Sives thoroughly explores had not been seen elsewhere in the region. This was to unravel somewhat in later years with Guyana and Haiti, among others, that challenged Jamaica for its first-place position in violent democratic process.

In the 21st century, however, the region has become sadly renowned for its violence; a chasm beyond the elections violence that was typically Jamaican was opened when gang violence that the Shower Posse inflicted on various communities spread. Of course, colonialism and, as Wallerstein illustrates, world systems have left a lasting legacy of what Stiglitz (2013) would call rising inequalities that create more problems with violence than would be experienced in more equitable communities. Sadly, this wave of crime and violence has spread across the nations in question and led the UN Report on Crime to spotlight the fact that so many Caribbean countries are in the top ten for crime and violence. The US State Department has warned its citizens against travel to said countries, yet the rent-seeking governments continue to increase the disparities between rich and poor and re-inscribe the links between themselves and drug dons, in Jamaican parlance.

The Caribbean has become an example of a transnationally connected violent place where bad behaviour is apparently encouraged as a Member of Parliament in the Bahamas showed in February of 2014

when he boasted about beating his former girlfriend. Governments have behaved in everything but honourable ways, as Prime Minister Golding and others have been famed for.

Deborah Thomas and Amanda Sives address violence through different avenues: Thomas examines violence in general terms as it relates to Jamaica, while Sives focuses on how violence in elections creates problems. It is interesting that as Thomas focuses violence increasing and worsening in the country; Sives argues that Jamaican election violence is decreasing.

A regional shift away from less organised forms of violence and crime towards more structured and organised forms is apparent. In Jamaica, as Thomas underscores, the dons are intimately connected with government ministers. This was borne out in her focus on the Dudus debacle and Prime Minister Golding's resistance to extraditing Coke to the United States. Is it without irony that lawmakers are apparently in the pockets of lawbreakers? Is it ironical that the population seeks relief from government lack of support via their local drug don. The riots that served to protect Coke bear witness to that; Tyvoli Gardens came out in strong defence of Dudus, risking their lives because they realised that their lives were inextricably linked to his freedom because of his paternalistic role.

Sives' observations on the connections between violence and politics and especially in the elections in Jamaica provide an entry point for Thomas' later discussion on the same yet different theme. Of course, both texts follow in the wake of Laurie Gunst's *Born Fi Dead*, where Gunst creates a time line and narrative of the development of posse culture in Jamaica that develops and expands in the United States and Canada and returns to Jamaica redoubled and less controllable.

I find Thomas's insight that violence is partially due to colonialism very illuminating. She offers:

The ideologies that supported the particular form that exploration and exploitation took in the Americas during the early colonial period . . . were meant to obscure the actual class relations and conflicts that developed over time. Moreover, they created the condition for apprehending progress and development in terms of adherence to a particular set of cultural values rather than through the lens of a historical political economy. (51)

Perhaps Sives' introduction also speaks to this as she discusses the use of the masses by the system to empower itself. Is this a precursor to neoliberalism that Ong sees as challenging notions of citizenship?

Because neoliberalism *creates* the new frontier space for opportunistic circuits through a remapping of the administrative purview of the state, particular populations (sometimes entire regions) fall through

the cracks, as it were, comprising, in Ong's words, those "staggering numbers of globally excluded" (Ong 2006:23) who become stateless and illegitimate, stripped of all claims to political or social citizenship, not unlike those slaves on New World plantations. (44)

When talking about politically-inflected violence Sives argues that the large body of literature that deals with the same, does not deal with the issues as seen in Jamaica.

This is due partly to the assumption that politically violent actions or acts seek to radically shift the balance of power or overthrow the state. This has not been the case in Jamaica where violence has been a weapon in the armouries of the political parties in the struggle for power. The violence has been 'contained' within the boundaries of a liberal democratic political system, although the extent to which democratic norms of have been practiced can actually be challenged. (XI-XII)

In Jamaica, though, Sives underscores that her work focuses on 'Partisan political violence' [which] refers to incidents of violence or threats of violence carried out directly by party supporters against rival party supporters and others, to influence the outcome of an election, to increase or defend the support base of the party, to create exclusive electoral enclaves (effective no-go areas for political opponents), . . . Included in this definition, are the violent actions . . . connected to the construction and maintenance of the garrison'. (xiii)

We seem to have the creation of what will become garrisoned communities, or no-go areas, similar to Dudus' Tyvoli. Thomas, builds on this idea through the use of the frontier. As she argues:

To theorize the proliferation of violence in Jack Hills in relation to a frontier concept therefore requires that we consider that frontiers may be created through the dissolution of hegemony, not only by its ordinary absence (Meeks 1996; Roitman 1998). Moreover, while Jack Hills became a frontier zone, it was not directly the result of capitalist opportunism. . . Instead, Jack Hills became a frontier through the redirection of an already existing circulation of power, influence, and illegality that proliferates in Jamaica through the development and splintering of formerly politically affiliated, and now turf-related, gangs. (43)

It is here where these texts intersect that proves such fruitful reading. Could the political parties have known when they established these garrisons that they would ultimately become such 'frontier zones'? Could that have foreseen the resultant microcosms and turf wars? Was this a part of the larger colonial plan that sought to dehumanise those in the colonies and control through economic and structural mechanisms? Perhaps García Canclini, Bourdieu, Stiglitz, Lazarus, Fanon and Said, for example, critique similar mechanisms of control and frustration.

I find Sives and Thomas's theorizing of their spaces and their use of history to be most informative. Where Sives focuses on the role of the state, Thomas focuses on "other forms of authority emerged to take the place of the state—in this case, neither NGOs and other multilateral institutions nor privately owned companies (Trouillot 2001) but gang leaders and drug dons" (42).

The promise of citizenship through political violence and activism as seen in Sives is debunked by what Thomas shows "For these community members, the promises of citizenship have long been bankrupt, and their own ability to participate (in markets, in political life) has long been circumscribed" (42). Ultimately, the citizens have been disenfranchised by the state's marginalisation of them over decades. This harks back to what Cesaire argues is colonization 'work[ing] to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him" (173). Thomas argues that: "On the one hand, then, it seems plausible to argue that that Jack Hills became a frontier as a result of the state's neglect, of its marshalling of resources to other, more politically connected communities". She later develops that

... the state had not completely disappeared. Members of the opposition party and the army *knew* what was going on in Jack Hills; they *knew* who the main players were. They simply did not *act* until the situation reached crisis proportions' (42).

Thomas further contextualises Sives' work by demonstrating the apparent disinterested yet dexterous nature of the state, much like the coloniser in Cesaire's words who works through his manipulation of the colonised's ability to see him/herself as a whole being and not as 'other'/inferior. Once colonials have been made marginal, half the battle is won, unless those citizens who feel dehumanised can rally and create networks that work to counter the state's divestment from them and disempowering of them. Thomas shows that the state regained control though using crisis as reasoning to impose military and police control that would effectively rid the state of many of the youth that were purportedly troublesome.

Both texts expertly illuminated links between history and present, political structure and neoliberal-capitalist machine, similar to the plantation (system) Benítez-Rojo argues repeats across the region, that continues to benefit from rising inequalities and frontiers zones where member of communities see themselves as barred from claiming citizenship's benefits.

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