Anthony Harriott and Charles M. Katz, eds. 2015. *Gangs in the Caribbean: Responses of State and Society*. 350 pp. ISBN: 978-976-640-507-6.

Erica Caple James. 2010. *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma and Intervention in Haiti*. 357 pp. ISBN: 978-0-520-26054-2.

Veronique Maisier. 2015. *Violence in Caribbean Literature: Stories of Stones and Blood*. 141 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7391-9711-0.

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Violent times as never before? Violence and Caribbean Development

The Caribbean region is ironically or paradoxically painted as paradise on earth but this bellies a place of great violence and poverty. The latter has often been reserved for Haiti, as it is so often referred to as the poorest country in the Americas, without, however, any explanation as to why it has become such. Jamaica, similar to Haiti, has been charged with being a poor, unsafe and aggressive place to visit. Two of the works begin with this understanding in mind and venture from there to explain the aftermath of a violent economy having been formed and the results of its continuation even after presumed emancipation. The three abovementioned works and their authors demonstrate the troubles of violence as well as the long-lasting and entrenched nature of violent structures and relations, notwithstanding the image of paradise used to lure holidaymakers to our shores to frolic and revel in the balmy sunshine of the tropics, where black bodies served majority white-owned plantation pleasures. Even with the break signaled by the 'end of colonialism' the space has fallen into a relationship even more insidious and controlling as people get poorer, states fail their citizens through greed and corruption, for example, and interpersonal relationship violence, not to mention broad-term violence and dysfunction, become endemic to a 'new' world that never broke with the old world nightmares. Although terribly disparate in their approach, these three literary, social science and international political economic studies show how the system is unraveling as the research continues and attempts to

identify ways to disengage from old paradigms that continue to promote massive inequalities and violence to newer more supportive people-focused structures. However, as religion, transnational gang relations, corruption and personal exploitation and enrichment seem to blanket the landscape, the dystopia of paradise becomes more obvious.

As violence mushrooms and transforms communities in the Caribbean from peaceful colonial paradises into garrisoned community and gang-controlled, drug trafficking transshipment points where politicians 'seem' ineffective in or unable to change or manage the volatile situation that undermines the democracy they so often boast about. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other international agencies release annual reports on the state of violence and crime in the Caribbean, and this often informs the reader of the increase in civil unrest and youth violence. Jamaica, much like Haiti has been infamous among Caribbean countries for the high level of insecurity and unrest, not to mention full-on violence. Recently, there have been a number of publications all hinged together by violence. This review examines three of them very briefly as each one approaches violence and crime from a distinct perspective. Veronique Maisier's work on *Violence in Caribbean Literature: Stories of Stones and Blood* articulates a less direct, more delayed and certainly filtered form of performing violence. Whereas Erica Cable James's *Democratic Insecurities* and Anthony Harriott and Charles Katz's *Gangs in the Caribbean* demonstrate and grapple with a far more direct form of violence performance and one that has developed tremendously in the second half of the twentieth century. The former text is a massive study of international and national overlaying of violence and how resource-poor Haitians struggle to survive by selling their stories of victimization and exploitation while the latter text focuses on the scourge of gangs in the Caribbean, a more recent development that is undermining, along with the cross-border delivery of aid, especially from well-meaning but implicitly implicated funding and developmental agencies who do not understand or ignore the intricacies of Caribbean realities, poverty, and the power of the former colonial powers to undermine democratic sovereignty along with special interests groups at in the region and in particular countries who have been set up through the legacies of slavery and colonialism, which continue to monopolize trade routes, for example, to exploit the population. Maisier's work is an excellent journey through literature of the violence that has been vested in the Caribbean from slavery and colonialism and that this violence remains with Caribbean communities today.

It is not coincidence that over the last twelve months national referenda in Caribbean countries that would pave the way to provide equal legal rights for women and men have been resoundingly defeated

by communities terrorized by the threat of same-sex marriage. The violence this promises to Christian morality as couched in the Caribbean is deeply steeped in strict moral codes that were imported with penal laws from England but have since evolve din England while remaining steadfastly guarded in the Caribbean. Many have attested to Chinua Achebe's recognition of the threat of religion as the bibles came and the missionaries in turn left with the land. This is interesting and significant historical impact on the present day that has remained ignored. Further, as Maisier's text shows, there is a legacy of violence that transcends the supposed 'simple' inter-personal violence to include class violence and structural violence that go unchallenged. The vestiges of slavery have left us with a small ruling elite who separate themselves from the masses, except in discourse, but sell out the nation in order to enrich themselves.

Haiti has become the so-called poster child for insecurity and unrest given the sad devolution of governmental power and control and corruption that it became a synonym for perhaps due to Duvalierism. However, when smaller and less-populated, less-developed countries or territories in the Caribbean begin to boast the same or similar crime statistics as the two monsters, that are quickly followed by Trinidad and Tobago, we understand that something is amiss. As Thomas (2012) and Sives (2012) both illustrate in their work on Jamaica, there is a reason for and a historical context to the violence there. Thomas's concept of exceptional violence is extremely useful when it comes to understanding or reevaluating the context of Jamaican violence and gang violence in particular as it is explored in *Gangs in the Caribbean*. Thomas's concept is also useful in the context of *Democratic Insecurities*, as this is exactly what is afoot. It seems that the very democracy that we value is quickly being eroded by exceptional violence and then structural violence that justifies a culture of violence as Johan Galtung explains it (1969, 1990). It is not coincidental that an increasing number of Caribbean scholars have begun to re-examine the role of structural violence in development and underdevelopment. Perhaps, though, as one might conjecture from Jacques Stephen Alexis' novels *General Sun, My Brother* (originally published 1956, 1999) and *In the Flicker of an Eyelid* (originally published in French 1959, 2002) that lay out the violence visited on the inhabitants of Haiti and Santo Domingo, not only by internal actors but also by those who were there occupying the space, such as military personnel, for example.

Both texts, *Gangs in the Caribbean* and *Democratic Insecurities* articulate the reality of a crumbling state and one that is undermined by corruption as well as violence. In the former, the authors of the various chapters show how gangs have evolved in the Caribbean at the same time, they have become transnational and unofficial players in the local

political system. When compared with literary texts about the Caribbean we see the beauty and suffering as well as the political dysfunction that are now legacies since slavery and colonialism.

Today in the Caribbean, inequality and lack of opportunity for the working classes marks a decided dip in the quality of life for many. With this dip has come rising crime statistics, and as economies shift to increasingly service orientated jobs, the need for a skilled labor force, especially with soft skills multiplies (IDB). This has come in tandem with strongman leaders who, according to studies, have been linked to gangs and drug cartels.

In *Democratic Insecurities* James explores the complex interrelations between international aid and the challenge to sovereignty and development these agencies engender in Haiti. The book is divided into seven chapters sandwiched between an introduction and the requisite notes and bibliography. The introduction 'Democracy, Insecurity and the Commodification of Suffering' provides an interesting and disturbing contextualization of the work that will follow. It seems that people's suffering has now become a benefit to be exploited by themselves, they have learned how to work a system that sees them as victims, and an international community that is undermining the sovereignty of states, as Negri and Hart argue (*Empire*).

James writes: I suggest that the discourse of trauma and rights reflects concerns for individuals, organizations, and government that result from a crisis of the sovereign state, especially those deemed fragile or failed. The government of Haiti's (GOH) response to the plight of traumatized victim was hampered not only by insufficient material resources but also by a legacy of corruption, nepotism, and graft from previous administrations. Thus international, national, and local aid agencies and agents intervened between victim and international political actors, the Haitian state, and their own communities but always within limits denied by the prevailing climate of ensekirite. Regardless of such restrictions, many Haitians perceived these institutions as invaders over which they had no control (Étienne 1997). (James 2010, p. 23).

It is ironic that the last time such widespread state failure and lack of support for the Haitian populous was perhaps obvious was after the 1937 Massacre of 'blacks' who were usually *braceros* or sugarcane workers by Trujillo. As the state fails the democratic process, more people own small fiefdoms which they buttress through scraping off the spoils from international aid that is received by a small handful of companies who can 'distribute' it, but because they own the workings of the state and are a part of the nepotism, they render the people that much poorer, for when the AID finally trickles down, if indeed it does, it is miniscule or it simply never reaches the people it is directed at.

Further, as the state fails to do its job at protecting and providing for its citizens, more of them are forced into transactional relations that are clearly evidenced by what James explores, work done in the Bahamas on transactional sex among teenagers and young people and the work on gangs by Harriott and Katz. ". . . the performance of trauma narratives has become a necessary transaction in order for survivors to participate in local, national, and international compassion economies" (James 2010, p. 29).

In humanitarian contexts, stories of misery are frequently solicited from 'victims' in the course of providing social or judicial services to them. As such, the creation, performance, and circulation of false stories were means by which resource-poor victim sought security, capital, and power, especially when their ongoing struggles were no longer considered acute (29).

The three works covered may approach violence from very different angles, but they work together to provide an extremely nuanced and complex political, historical, interpersonal, economic and transnational understanding of violence and exploitation and how implicated and deeply involved some governments are in perpetuating violence against their citizens. The state sees itself as constantly at odds with the communities it claims to represent. Moreover, as the state closes in around itself, as is so clearly evidenced in the work on gangs, it allows the drug dons and gang leaders to become de facto leaders and, through deeply entrenched partnerships with these individuals, it is unable to carry out its job of protecting citizens and providing them with adequate services. Ultimately, the state and its mechanisms, most having arisen from a historical reality where corporate powers from colonial days continue to manage the present day economies from the shadows. As scholars of structural violence and cultural violence such as Erik Paul and Johan Galtung will make evident, (as James points out clearly in her text), the state uses its influence and big business influences to achieve its ends usually to the detriment of national development and the populous. The literary texts examined in Maisier's study have been much explored over the decades since their publication, but read in this context and in conjunction with these other two texts, reveal a troubling violence that seems to respect nobody or have an end in sight. The un-naming and renaming of the character, as Maisier argues, is another act of destabilizing violence which is common today, only in a different guise. Though Rochester's damage to Antoinette/Bertha in Rhys's novel is emblematic of the damage heaped on the Caribbean by the colonial powers, it is also symbolic of a violence that refuses to grant women equal legal rights to men as has been evidenced in two countries in their 2016 referenda. It is a travesty of current days that governments have been coopted by their

need for largess and their inability to provide support to their populations as is argued of the situations in many Caribbean countries that has given rise to the partnerships between gangs, organized crime, drug lords or dons and political parties.

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