



**Fifty Years of Independence: Jamaica's impact  
and development as a sovereign state  
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## Whither Nationalism

### Jamaica on the Cusp of Fifty: Whither Nationalism and Sovereignty?

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I say that the mission of my generation was to win self-government for Jamaica. To win political power which is the final power for the black masses of this country from which I spring. I am proud to stand here today and say to you who fought with me, say it with gladness and pride, 'Mission accomplished for my generation'. And what is the mission of the generation, the generation that succeeds me now I quit my leadership? It is to be founded on the work of those who went before. It is to be made up by the use of your political power of tackling the job of reconstructing the social and economic society and life of Jamaica. This, then, is the hope of the future which can only be born of an understanding of the country today and what it thinks and what it feels.<sup>1</sup> Norman Washington Manley

On the evening of December 29, 2011, Portia Simpson Miller led her People's National Party (PNP) to a decisive 42-21 seat victory over the incumbent Jamaica Labour Party (JLP)<sup>2</sup>, setting a new precedent as the JLP, only recently having anointed Andrew Holness to replace Bruce Golding as its leader and Prime Minister, turned out to be the first government in the country's modern political history to serve only one term in office. The election results took many by surprise. Most, including the majority of pollsters and political commentators<sup>3</sup>, holding conservatively to the traditional rhythms of Jamaican politics, felt that the electorate would

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Washington Manley, "Mission Accomplished: The Wheel has come Full Circle", in Rex Nettleford (ed.) *Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-1968*, Longman Caribbean 1971, pp.368-384.

<sup>2</sup> See "It's Portia! PNP delivers crushing 41-22 seat defeat to JLP", *Daily Observer*, Friday December 30, 2011. The initial seat count shifted by one seat from 41-22 to 42-21 in favor of the PNP when on the basis of recounts the former JLP Minister of Industry Christopher Tufton narrowly lost his South West St Elizabeth seat to the PNP candidate.

<sup>3</sup> See Arthur Hall, "Ignoring the Polls", *The Sunday Gleaner*, January 1, 2012.

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give the JLP another chance and that the decision to replace the controversial and politically damaged Golding by the young (39 years old) and reasonably untainted Holness would lead to a narrow victory. No one foresaw a landslide and while, in the keenly competitive waters of Jamaican politics, this translated into less than a sixty thousand vote and six percentile point advantage, it was nonetheless deeply demoralising to the losers. Equally surprising, was the low voter turnout, as only 52.7% of the electorate felt compelled to vote for one of the two dominant political parties or any of the few and minuscule independents<sup>4</sup>. This latter trend, reflective of a secular decline in voting numbers since the election of 1980, was nonetheless precipitous, leading to another record, of the lowest voter turnout since Universal Adult Suffrage elections began in 1944.

These two features, the fickleness of the electorate and its willingness to dump the incumbents after a little more than four years in office and a possible unhappiness with both parties evident in the low poll are indicative, I suggest, of a broader discontent with the state of politics, indeed, of the political, in Jamaica. Ironically, this is consolidating at the same time that the electoral process in Jamaica is at a highpoint in terms of levels of organisation, transparency of processes and commitment to the system from the dominant parties - the latter most evident in the virtual absence of violence and evident mingling of opposing supporters, both in the lead up to and during the 2011 election<sup>5</sup>. In the year, then, of Jamaica's fiftieth anniversary of independence to be celebrated on August 6, 2012, it is both the best and the worst of times. In terms of the system and the social acceptance of its results, elections and the political process

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://jamaica-elections.com/general/2011/results/index.php>

<sup>5</sup> See "The Maturing of the Political Process" Editorial, *Daily Observer*, December 30, 2011.

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have never been more universally accepted and legitimate. Yet, in terms of the saliency of the electoral exercise as a means of forging genuinely alternative ways of social and political living, there is growing despondency.

## **The Dudus Events**

The political event most influential in determining the contours of the present conjuncture is, of course, what is commonly referred to as the 'Dudus events' of May 2010.<sup>6</sup> On the day after Labour Day, May 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), supported by contingents from the police, breached, via a flanking manoeuvre the carefully constructed barricades around the Western Kingston community of Tivoli Gardens, erected to protect from imminent arrest and extradition to the United States, Christopher 'Dudus' Coke, self-proclaimed 'President' and 'Don' of the community and erstwhile supporter of the governing JLP. The swift military action and the room by room search that followed led to the deaths of some 73 persons – an unprecedented number even in violence-prone Jamaica – providing fuel for a continuing controversy as to whether all or even most of the casualties had been combatants. What is uncontroversial, is that the stonewalling of the US extradition request by the Golding government, various degrees of obfuscation and dissimulation of the details to the parliament and public and the attempt to use the reputable US consulting firm Mannatt, Phelps and

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Rupert Lewis, "Notes on the West Kingston Crisis and Party Politics", paper delivered at the conference, "States of Freedom, Freedom of States", UWI Mona, 16-18 June 2010 and Brian Meeks, "The Dudus Events in Jamaica and the Future of Caribbean Politics", *Social and Economic Studies* vol.60 nos3&4, September/December 2011, pp.183-202

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Phillips to lobby in favour of delaying or even rescinding the request, had served to embolden Coke and his supporters, leading to the inevitable confrontation and tragic denouement.<sup>7</sup>

In the months that followed and until recently, rates of violent crime in the country fell dramatically. There were, for instance, 700 fewer murders between June 2010 and May 2011<sup>8</sup> compared with the previous year, encouraging claims by some members of the incumbent party that they should be returned at the polls, as it was under their watch that the intractable problem of violence had at last been brought under control. But of course, it had not been the Government, which had resisted the extradition kicking and screaming all the way, but the insistence, not always behind the scenes, of the hegemonic power and the growing crescendo from civil society, that established treaty and the rule of law should be followed that eventually forced the Government's assent and precipitated the action that damaged the military apparatus of the Tivoli Gardens state within a state. Thus, it is not surprising that even as murders and other violent crimes subsided, so too did Golding's standings in the polls,<sup>9</sup> until the moment on September 25, 2011 when it became clear that he would not be re-elected and he resigned in the ultimately futile hope that newer leadership would take the Party to victory.

## Questioning Sovereignty

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<sup>7</sup> The subsequent Enquiry and report on what came to be known as the Manatt/Dudus events, mildly scolded the Prime Minister for acting 'inappropriately'. It was sharply critiqued by the PNP as a whitewash. See "Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Extradition Request for Christopher Coke", <http://www.jis.gov.jm/pdf/Manatt-Final-Report-1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> "Iron Fists Can't Curb Crime", *The Sunday Gleaner*, 19 June 2011.

<sup>9</sup> A poll conducted in April 2011 found that 57% felt that Golding had no credibility in the Manatt/Dudus affair. Of these, 49% felt that he should resign and only 38% felt that he should remain in office. See "Golding's credibility falls Further-Poll", *Jamaica Observer*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Golding-s-credibility-falls-further>

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At the heart of the extradition controversy and the debates that have raged in the following months, is the fraught notion of sovereignty. When it was brought to public attention that Minister of National Security under the earlier PNP regime Peter Phillips had signed memoranda of understanding facilitating the wiretapping of Coke and that this information had been shared with the US, he was accused of acting against the national interest and chants of ‘CIA Agent’<sup>10</sup> – even more ironic given the JLP’s traditions of pro-American, right of centre politics -were directed at him from the Government benches of the House. Golding himself on more than one occasion alluded to and warned against outside interference in Jamaica’s affairs, suggesting that his insistence on Coke’s ‘rights’<sup>11</sup> was in the national interest and even in the aftermath of the extradition and detention of Coke, rumours continue to swirl that other members and associates of the former government remain on a short list of persons likely to be served with extradition notices for various crimes.<sup>12</sup> Most bizarre of all was the matter of the US surveillance plane, a Lockheed P-3 Orion that had been seen by many and was photographed circling the airspace above Kingston during the military action<sup>13</sup>. When asked in October 2011 whether the government knew about this, then Minister of Security Dwight Nelson at first denied that the plane even existed, only to be contradicted later by PM Holness who suggested, confusingly, that it was a military matter and thus outside the purview of the Minister of National Security.<sup>14</sup> The inflammatory, verging on slanderous, accusations against Phillips; the inversion of traditional anti-imperialist positions, with the JLP seeking to claim the

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<sup>10</sup> See Ian Boyne, “Downtown Bangarang”, *The Sunday Gleaner*, February 20, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See “Golding Defends Dudus Delay”, [http://go-jamaica.com/news/read\\_article.php?id=17315](http://go-jamaica.com/news/read_article.php?id=17315)

<sup>12</sup> See “Prominent Jamaican Politician Indicted by US Grand Jury? Extradition Soon?” Caricom News Network, 12 October 2011, <http://caricomnewsnetwork.com>

<sup>13</sup> See Mattathias Schwartz, “A Massacre in Jamaica”, *The New Yorker*, December 12, 2011, pp.62-71.

<sup>14</sup> See Edmond Campbell, “PM Admits Jamaica gave go-ahead for US Spy Plane”, [http://go-jamaica.com/news/read\\_article.php?id=33752](http://go-jamaica.com/news/read_article.php?id=33752)

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high, nationalist ground; the Government's subsequent obfuscation on the actual relationship with the US during the military action, all point to the need for a more careful, even forensic conversation on the status of sovereignty and its usefulness as a concept for small states in the early decades of the Twenty First Century.

If, long before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Gerard Chaliand could have described the romantic notion of 'Third Worldism' – the idea that the independent states emerging out of the decolonisation movements of the Fifties and Sixties could build new Utopias – as a myth<sup>15</sup>; then pessimistic perspectives have further consolidated in recent years. Thus, Samir Amin, one of the iconic anti-imperialist thinkers of the Sixties, suggested in 2003 that the post-Bandung South can be divided into three distinct components: the first group, the 'active periphery' of East Asian countries is deeply involved in the processes of modern capitalism. The second group, consisting of India and many Latin American states, is also involved, but far more vulnerable than the South East Asian countries. The third group, constituting much of Africa and smaller states (presumably like the Caribbean) is locked into "...outmoded international divisions of labour"<sup>16</sup> and therefore extremely marginalised in the contemporary world. If, in Amin's assessment, even the dynamic peripheries remain vulnerable, there is little if any space left for the marginal countries, beyond the provision of passive reserves (armies) of unemployed labour for the developed economies. Equally pessimistic in proposing the absence of any room for manoeuvre by small peripheral states is Immanuel Wallerstein, who argues, *inter alia*, that short of what he describes as 'radical alterity' (AI

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<sup>15</sup> Gerard Chaliand, *Revolution in the Third World*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> Samir Amin, *Obsolescent Capitalism: Contemporary Politics and Global Disorder*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2003, p.18.

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Qaeda, Iran) or the failed policy of direct confrontation (Iraq) the only 'weapon' that small, peripheral states have in their strategic armoury, is the somewhat ephemeral mass migration of persons from the South to the North, with the potential of these groups becoming a fifth column of support for the causes of the South in the centre countries.<sup>17</sup>

Far more textured - perhaps out of disciplinary sensibility - in the appreciation of the continuing saliency of state, though I fear, equally pessimistic in conclusion, are some of the positions from the international relations establishment. Thus Stephen Krasner, in his argument for sharing sovereignty, develops the proposition that conventional sovereignty has three elements – international/legal sovereignty, or the internationally recognised right to juridical independence; Westphalian/Vatellian sovereignty, or the right of each state to domestic authority structures; and domestic sovereignty or the actual control of authority within a state's territorial boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Krasner's argument, at first glance reasonable, is that the rules available to provide assistance for well-governed states are inappropriate for badly governed ones. Governance assistance and transitional administrative forms are inadequate and

In the future, better domestic governance in badly governed, failed and occupied polities will require the transcendence of accepted rules, including the creation of shared sovereignty in specific areas. In some cases, decent governance may require some new form of trusteeship, almost certainly de facto rather than de jure.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein *The Decline of American Power*, New York and London, the New Press, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and failing States", *International Security*, vol.29 no.2, 2004, pp.85-120. See similarly, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.85.



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Aside from the evident hubris in the assumption of the common acceptance of a marker for 'badly governed' and 'failed' states, the glib acceptance of 'occupation' as an occupational hazard facing developed countries, is the even more hubristic reassertion of the language of colonialism in the use of 'trusteeship' as the descriptor for the proposed arrangement. I readily admit that Krasner has proposed exceptional conditions for his new arrangement including instances of civil war and imminent starvation of the domestic population, all compellingly reasonable; yet I suggest that in the permanency implicit in his exhortation to rewrite norms of international sovereignty is the dangerous reassertion of archaic principles of imperial power and dominance rejected more than six decades ago. It is perhaps appropriate to re-examine those principles and the momentous struggles to de-centre them in this moment of pause, before too rapidly marching down that hoary road.

What, however, if the onward march of capitalist globalisation has so changed the world that the markers of power no longer pass mainly through the corridors of the state? Susan Strange's argument, novel at first, is now widely acknowledged that in the contemporary world, power has shifted upward from weak to strong states; sideways from states to the market; and that some power has 'evaporated', in that it has diffused and no institution is exercising it.<sup>20</sup> A version of this argument is carefully elaborated by Barbadian political economist Hilbourne Watson, who argues that the 'Techno-Paradigm Shift' is completely altering the traditional notions of nation, sovereignty and citizenship:

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<sup>20</sup> See Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

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Caribbean nation states have very little prospect of making it alone as separate entities in the coming century. National development strategies can offer little more than stillborn outcomes. Caribbean people understand that sovereignty offers them little beyond the symbolic. The Caribbean must grow beyond its internal limits if it is to grow at all. Since global integration is the wave of modern capitalism, the region's leaders must think of bold ways to transform the Caribbean into a globally linked region. However, it must find ways to identify the technologies, skills and commodities to drive such an option.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, in the interstices of Watson's paean in favour of the idea that capitalism has steamrolled the state, the nation and all such archaic constructs, is a clear and manifest call for an activist polity that will 'grow', 'think of bold ways' and 'find ways to identify' and 'drive such an option'. What are these if not the markers of a modified, yet still potent and activist state? And if, indeed, a new, activist state is required, what will be the purchase, the ground around which the significant majority will unite in this effort of common goals and a common future? As difficult as it may be to digest, the answer would seem to head in the direction of imagining<sup>22</sup> new national, or perhaps, trans-national projects that would provide the glue for new modalities of living and producing. Thus even if Susan Strange was absolutely right on the retreat of the power and room to manoeuvre of the state, she does not seem to have proposed its negation as a player on the chessboard of globalisation; and even if Watson is correct on the constrictions and complexities inherent in global supply chains, his conclusion, quoted above, is

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<sup>21</sup> Hilbourne Watson, "Global Power shift and the Techno-paradigm Shift: The end of Geography, World Market Blocs and the Caribbean", in *Post-integration Development in the Caribbean*, Maribel Aponte Garcia and Carmen Gautier Mayoral, Social Science Research Centre, Rio Pederast, University of Puerto Rico, 1995, p.78.

<sup>22</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York, 1991.

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far removed from the helpless stasis evident in Amin's dismissal of 'marginal peripheries' or the return to trusteeship explicit, if presented as the exceptional case, in Krasner's 'shared sovereignty'.

The somewhat simplistic, though I think important proposal that is being advanced here is that while it is possible to think about and identify genuinely failed states, or imagine very small states that fall below the threshold to possess any meaningful agency, the notions of sovereignty and agency are more points along a continuum than absolute values. From such a stance, the challenge facing small, vulnerable states is how to advance along this continuum, to accumulate, as it were, greater sovereignty in order to provide the widest range of policy options for the development and prosperity of the citizens who live within its boundaries.

### **Auditing Jamaica's Sovereignty**

What then is the state of Jamaica's Sovereignty? Using Krasner's framework, we can propose that International Juridical Sovereignty, though its saliency is and always has been debatable, is still very much in existence, as is Westphalian/Vatellian sovereignty, though the latter has historically been compromised. Domestic sovereignty on the other hand, has survived recent tests to its integrity and has, in the present moment, the greatest potential for enhancement. If all three elements are to be seen as interlinked and thus mutually enforcing, then sovereignty, writ large, might be advanced (or retarded) by movement along one or more of these avenues.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Krasner, 2004, p.87.

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Jamaican International/Juridical sovereignty is written into law, the country's membership in the United Nations and numerous other international and regional associations. It has never been formally compromised and though real power has always resided in the Security Council, votes in the UN General Assembly still matter. Voting and statehood are thus not entirely ephemeral and Jamaica has shown a remarkable ability, even within the confines of the post-Cold War, globalised world, to adopt independent positions. Substantial cases include the opposition to George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq and to the ouster of President Aristide from Haiti,<sup>24</sup> both of which Commonwealth Caribbean (Caricom) states stood together, drew the ire of the United States, but did not waiver. The interesting lesson that might be drawn from a regional perspective is that regional unity matters in the face of a potentially hostile hegemon, but the numerous votes of the independent small states of the Caribbean are also important. Unity enhances sovereignty, but unification might not always achieve the same objective.

Westphalian/Vatellian sovereignty or the right to non-interference has been formally honoured, though there is a substantial body of opinion that suggests that the Manley regime of 1976-1980 was destabilised by covert intervention<sup>25</sup> from the United States as well as by International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies that served to undermine the credibility of the government.<sup>26</sup> More recently, it has been proposed that international and bilateral binding trade agreements such as advanced by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the European Partnership Agreement (EPA) severely restrict the policy options available to small states, often forcing them to pursue trade regimes that might prove inimical to the nurturing of productive

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<sup>24</sup> See Ricky Singh, "Caricom Firm Against War", March 27, 2003, <http://madimc.org> and Ricky Singh, Caricom/Haiti relations again on Tenterhooks, *Jamaica Observer*, 11 July 2004, [www.jamaicaobserver.com](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com).

<sup>25</sup> See Michael Manley, *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery*, Writers and Readers, London, 1982.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ibid.*

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domestic sectors. In the case of the EPA, despite widespread reservations from business and intellectual sectors, Commonwealth Caribbean countries waived in the face of determined pressure from the EU and accepted an agreement which is only now being fully debated in the region. Yet, among African states notably, concerted resistance to the stock provisions of the EPA have led to negotiations with greater options for flexibility and compromise than the Caribbean case would suggest.<sup>27</sup> The approach toward greater agency and assertiveness would seem therefore to be in the direction of maintaining unity at the regional level while developing a common technical capacity to negotiate in favour of those common positions that emerge. Recent experience with Caricom's Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM - now restructured as the Office of Trade negotiations (OTN), suggests that both these requirements must be met. The most complex dimension is that of domestic sovereignty. Despite a healthy debate in the national media over the last decade, Jamaica is not a failed state.<sup>28</sup> The country has been able to reduce poverty, improve infant mortality rates<sup>29</sup> maintain a credible if stressed system of health care and provide a modicum of basic education for its population. There are caveats for all of these assertions, particularly in the failure to educate far more citizens to the tertiary level, but they are made as a counter to the 'failed state' assertion. Economically, however,

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<sup>27</sup> Admittedly, there is a perspective within the region and internationally that concedes defeat, that the notion of sovereignty is dead, if it ever had real meaning for small states. For instance, in the wake of the NATO-led 'No-Fly' initiative over Libya which morphed into the overthrow of Muammar Gadhafi, including his capture and brutal execution against all international norms, the *Jamaica Observer* proclaimed: "Since the implosion of the Soviet Union, the globe consists of the West and the rest of the World...and a government/leader who defies the West will be punished sooner or later". This perspective, however, fails to appreciate the special window of opportunity provided by the 'Arab Spring', the temporary favorable international alignment that emerged and the sizable internal anti-Gadhafi coalition. These together suggest that while Westphalian sovereignty may be under its severest test, it is not to be entirely discounted. See Editorial: "Lessons from the demise of Gadhafi", *Jamaica Observer*, November 3, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance, Mark Wignall "Failed State Status on the Horizon" *Jamaica Observer*, February 7, 2012 and Earl M. Bartley, "Jamaica: Failed or Failing State?" *Jamaica Gleaner*, January 26, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> See Planning Institute of Jamaica, *Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 2010*, Kingston, 2010.

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Jamaica's performance over the last two decades and more broadly over the fifty years since independence has been poor, with periods of low growth interspersed by periods of stagnation. The World Bank's 2011 Memorandum suggested that Jamaica rank 180 out of 196 countries in terms of its rate of economic growth, with an average growth rate of 1% over the past twenty years.<sup>30</sup> Among the outcomes has been a wholesale exodus of human capital, with the World Bank estimating some 85% of the country's tertiary trained population residing outside of its boundaries.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite this reality, an overarching debt burden projected to grow to 150% of GDP by 2012,<sup>32</sup> the World Bank's conclusion is that growth can be 'unlocked' if a few critical and painful measures are addressed. The Bank suggests that the key factor inhibiting the country's growth is low productivity, eliciting a multi-pronged strategy including reducing crime, investing more in education, removing entrenched 'perverse' tax incentives and moving away from the 'enclave development model'.<sup>33</sup>

While there is substance in all of these proposals, there is a prior and overarching consideration contributing to economic stagnation associated with the breakdown of social consensus.

Elsewhere, I have proposed that Jamaica is in a prolonged moment of hegemonic dissolution.<sup>34</sup>

The social pact between the classes that took the country into independence came apart in the Seventies as the Michael Manley regime sought to rapidly advance outstanding demands for social equality and inclusion. It was never put back together again and Jamaica has endured a

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<sup>30</sup> See World Bank, *Jamaica: Unlocking Growth*, World Bank Country Economic Memorandum, May 26, 2011

<sup>31</sup> See F. Docquier and A. Marfouk, *International Migration by Educational Attainment (1990-2000)*, The World Bank, Washington D.C., Tables A1-1 and A1-2.

<sup>32</sup> See World Bank, 2011

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See Brian Meeks, "The Political Moment in Jamaica: The Dimensions of Hegemonic Dissolution" in Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: from Black Power to Abu Bakr*, The Press, University of the West Indies, Kingston, 1996, pp.124-143.

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long interregnum in which neo-liberal platitudes of the 'magic of the market' and grassroots interpretations of the same, such as the crude materialism of the 'bling' culture, proliferated. This profoundly social and political collapse came with its important ethical/philosophical dimensions as common sense notions of right and wrong were jettisoned along with notions of the nation and a particular concept of the Jamaican national project, embodied in the 1962 independence slogan 'Out of Many One People'. A critical political dimension of this moment was the emergence of the Don and the so-called 'garrison communities' of the inner city.<sup>35</sup> These semi-autonomous fiefdoms were both a reflection of ethical and philosophical dimensions of advanced hegemonic dissolution as they were an indication of the failure of the formal state to provide the social and security needs of a significant cross section of its urban citizens.

The 2010 Dudus events and the extradition of Coke, severely undermined but have not entirely eroded the emergence of autonomous states within the state. What it has done is provided a moment for pause, which has been further prolonged by the election of December 2010. Politics like nature abhors a vacuum and this moment could either segue into a phase of regeneration of the garrisons and even more intense urban warfare and uncertainty; or it could lead to a set of national conversations that would lay the basis for new social arrangements, new ethico-philosophical foundations and an enhanced domestic sovereignty that would give Jamaica greater manoeuvrability in the world.

## **A Way Forward**

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<sup>35</sup> See Anthony Harriott, "The Crisis of Public Safety in Jamaica and the Prospects for Change", *Souls: A critical journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, vol.3 no.4 fall 2001, pp.56-65

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I present my way forward as a series of theses:

1. The severe damage to the Dudas-led Empire in 2010, the role of civil society in raising its collective voice against the apparent cohabitation between the government and the Don and the decisive victory of the PNP at the polls, together provide a moment for rethinking not only Jamaican politics, but the nature of the Jamaican polity.
2. The fiftieth anniversary of independence is a most appropriate time to consider these matters and launch a conversation, a 'Constituent Assembly of the Jamaican People at Home and Abroad' that would look closely at Constitutional matters, the economy, terms of social engagement and the philosophical underpinnings of the society.<sup>36</sup>
3. The philosophical question needs special attention. It is a patently false assumption that there is a common set of precepts that unites Jamaica. The debate that emerged following the publication of excerpts from the diary of a notorious gunman, Cedric 'Doggy' Murray, leader of the Stone crusher gang in 2010, is noteworthy.<sup>37</sup> Doggy's musings suggested a seamless intermingling of Old Testament religiosity with murder to avenge perceived social inequality, a view often voiced in different ways by many dancehall deejays. Similarly, the 2010 LAPOP study of Political Culture and Democracy in

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<sup>36</sup> The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies at UWI has already launched its own critical look at fifty years of Independence in the commonwealth Caribbean, "Fifty-Fifty: Critical Reflections in a time of Uncertainty" with a series of scholarly and public discussions around key sectors, policies and individuals associated with the project of national development across the region. See <http://thesalises5050project.blogspot.com/>

<sup>37</sup> See Meeks, 2011, pp.196-8.



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Jamaica found that in assessing support for the political system on a 100 point index, “Jamaica’s 48.6 points score places it close to the bottom of the chart”.<sup>38</sup>

4. A new philosophical conversation would have to address questions of social equality; place on the agenda lingering matters such as pervasive but subtle forms of colour discrimination that has led numerous persons to bleach their skins; confront the blatant homophobia that has grown in the past decade; and give due respect in appropriate institutional ways to patwa, the despised but irrepressible language of the majority which is simultaneously and ironically the gold sealed signature of Jamaica to the rest of the world. It would have to consider an entirely new definition of the nation that is sensitive to the fact that half of all Jamaicans live elsewhere while still considering themselves integrally part of ‘The nation’. This ‘long distance nationalism’<sup>39</sup> packed with cultural, political, social and economic implications and contradictions, is critical to understand in any conversation surrounding the renaissance of a vibrant Jamaican and Caribbean project.
5. Such a conversation would lead to a discussion of the necessary reforms in the political system that would learn from those successes that already exist, such as the Electoral Commission of Jamaica, which has been successful in finding a way to bring together the dominant political parties and members of civil society in a common programme that has largely ended corruption and violence in the electoral process. It would have to address matters associated with the deepening of democracy, such as phasing out the

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Powell and Balford Lewis, *The Political Culture of Democracy in Jamaica 2010: Democratic consolidation in the Americas in Hard Times*, Vanderbilt University 2011, p.117.

<sup>39</sup> See Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2001.

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unelected Senate and introducing principles of recall for non-performing members of parliament.

6. Similarly, the conversation and its resolution in a clear political direction for the future, would lay the foundation for a parallel economic discourse that would explain structural and fiscal limitations, propose democratic approaches to the balancing and sharing of sacrifices across social sectors and suggest an economic path for the next fifty years.
7. The regional agenda is closely tied up with this. Gilbert Roberts, Bishop and Payne and many others have lamented the failure of Caribbean states to shed island sovereignty more rapidly in favour of a shared regional sovereignty that would enhance prospects for autonomy and development.<sup>40</sup> If the argument advanced here is substantial, then it is evident that in order for Jamaica to participate effectively in a shared arrangement of sovereignty at the regional level, it must resolve critical matters related to domestic sovereignty in the national space. While one agenda need not be stalled until the other is completed, it is fair to say that the national takes precedence over the regional and will bring it crashing to the ground as in the past with Federation, if it is not largely resolved before the latter.

## Conclusion: Guerrilla Sovereignty

The flaw in most discussions on globalisation and the demise of the state and sovereignty is the failure to properly account for the pesky persistence of states in the contemporary world. While

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<sup>40</sup> See Terri-Ann Gilbert Roberts, *The Dynamics of Regional Governance: The Caribbean Community (Caricom) Experience in a context of Sovereignty Paradox*, PhD Thesis Department of Politics, Sheffield University, July 2010 and Matthew Louis Bishop and Anthony Payne, *Caribbean Regional Governance and the Sovereignty/Statehood Problem*, The Centre for International Governance Innovation, Paper no.8, February 2010

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it is true that there are states that reasonably qualify as failed and others that barely survive without aid and international assistance of various kinds, many more persist with varying levels of prosperity within the world system. If this is true it would be neglectful, to say the least, to end the discussion at the point of recognition of the severe obstacles in the path of small resource poor states in the contemporary global order. Instead, what is required, is the necessary discussion as to how to build the appropriate alliances within the state; consider the philosophical questions that might be appropriate in forging a common ethos, in forging a new, inclusive notion of the nation, cognizant of the importance of long-distance nationalism, advance for the widest discussion and national approval a suite of achievable mid-term objectives; forge the appropriate alliances with regional neighbours that face similar obstacles and share common objectives and proceed to bob and weave through the underbrush of the globalised world, using a sort of guerrilla sovereignty to seek, against the odds to improve the social and economic lives of the majority within the national space for Jamaica and beyond a future Caribbean alliance.

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