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VIOLENCE AND RESILIENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN CITIES

Edited by Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt

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7 | KINGSTON: VIOLENCE AND RESILIENCE

Rivke Jaffe*

Introduction

The Jamaican capital of Kingston is known as one of the world's 'murder capitals'. The Caribbean island's highest homicide rates are found in the inner-city areas of Kingston as well as in secondary towns such as Spanish Town and Montego Bay. While, in recent years, the homicide rate has been near 60 per 100,000 inhabitants, the rate in inner-city areas is estimated to be over 150 per 100,000 citizens (Figueroa et al. 2008: 99).¹ Much of this violence is associated with the politically affiliated gangs that control these areas, but high rates of violence and an accompanying sense of insecurity are pervasive beyond these marginalised areas, throughout Kingston and more broadly in Jamaican society. Kingston can be understood as a fragile city, where high levels of urban insecurity are associated with problems relating to existing governance arrangements (see Muggah 2014).

This chapter gives an overview of Kingston's vulnerability and resilience to violence and insecurity. It explores the factors commonly identified as explaining Kingston's extreme levels of insecurity. In addition to factors found more generally throughout the region – government disinvestment under structural adjustment, poverty and social exclusion – Kingston's urban violence has political historical roots that are specific to Jamaica. Longstanding connections between party politics, electoral violence and organised crime shaped the current situation in which criminal leaders known as 'dons' rule over large sections of Downtown Kingston.

To understand how urban resilience takes shape in contexts of pervasive insecurity, the chapter discusses recent government and popular responses. Government responses have been increasingly repressive and include militarised policing tactics. Jamaican law enforcement

* Sections of this chapter have been published previously in the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* (Jaffe 2012) as part of a longer article on security privatisation in Kingston.

tends to rely on 'tough policing'. High rates of fatal shootings by police officers have led to persistent accusations of extrajudicial killings on the part of human rights organisations. However, there is broad popular support for this use of excessive force on the part of the security forces. In addition, there have been a number of attempts to incorporate a community policing philosophy. The success of these attempts has been limited, probably because their scope was narrow and wider concerns regarding police corruption and brutality remained unaddressed. Also, beyond security policies and in conjunction with various bilateral and multilateral partners, the government has invested in broader social policy aimed at crime and violence prevention.

As well as such public policy initiatives, we can distinguish various private strategies developed by citizens to protect themselves, strategies that can be understood as forms of resilience that develop outside government. These include a reliance on private commercial security and neighbourhood watch organisations among elite and middle-class Kingstonians. In low-income inner-city areas, non-state security initiatives have involved the emergence of extra-legal 'self-help' law and order provided by dons. These various public and private responses to violence can be read as forms of resilience and attempts to overcome urban fragility. In 2010, a violent government 'incursion' led to the extradition of one of Jamaica's most prominent dons and a nationwide debate on the links between Jamaican politics and organised crime. Yet despite many political pledges to 'dismantle the garrison', this nexus is still largely intact, and the root causes of the island's violence and insecurity remain largely unaddressed.

Understanding the roots of urban violence

Kingston dominates the island politically, culturally and economically. With a population of around 650,000 people, the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), which comprises the administrative districts of Kingston and St Andrew, is a sprawling agglomeration that accounts for about one-fifth of the Jamaican population. During the twentieth century, rapid rural-to-urban migration and a lack of effective urban planning led to the emergence of numerous informal settlements. Commercial and residential areas for the wealthier classes developed in the north-eastern part of the city, known as Uptown Kingston, while poverty and poor-quality housing and services became spatially concentrated in the southern and western areas of Downtown.

The border between these two halves, which is often located across the hubs of Cross Roads and Half Way Tree, is a strongly symbolic one, reflecting the city's polarisation in terms of class. The legacy of slavery is evident in the extent to which this broad socio-spatial divide is inflected by race. The connections between skin colour, class and urban space still reflect a racialized spatial order. Downtown Kingston and the inner-city communities found there remain associated with low-income, darker-skinned 'black' Jamaicans, compared with Uptown Kingston or 'upper St Andrew', which is seen as the domain of the wealthier classes and of lighter-skinned, mixed-descent 'brown' Jamaicans (Howard 2005; Clarke 2006).

Kingston's deep socio-economic inequalities have been exacerbated by over three decades of neoliberal policies. Following Jamaica's independence from Britain in 1962, the two main parties, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP), both actively pursued developmentalist policies and programmes that dramatically increased popular access to public education, housing and healthcare. However, starting in the late 1970s, structural adjustment as mandated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) severely curtailed many of the initiatives that these successive governments had developed. Structural adjustment involved massive budget cuts and the privatisation of many public services, resulting in restricted access to formerly public goods, a move that affected less affluent Jamaicans in particular. Informal sector employment increased as formal sector employment, and specifically public sector employment, contracted sharply, while the labour force participation rate dropped in general and in particular for women (Gordon et al. 1997).

Over the same period, crime rates began to rise dramatically, as for various reasons the state security forces became less effective in preventing and tackling crime (Harriott 2000; 2008). Beverley Mullings (2009) draws explicit connections between 'the processes of neo-liberalization taking place in the Jamaican economy, the spatial transformations in social reproduction and the rising levels of social disorder since the 1980s'. She notes two new sources of income that alleviated the crisis in social reproduction, following neoliberal withdrawal of the state in the 1980s and 1990s. The state's disinvestment in education, health, housing and food was somewhat compensated, first by remittances sent home by (female) Jamaican migrant workers, and second by 'gang welfare', which was also fed in part through

(illicit) transnational economic flows. She argues, however, that both trends can be associated with the increase in disorder and violence, as the trans-nationalisation of the household meant that children grew up with limited supervision and care and gangs took on a state-like role in welfare provision.

While authors such as Mullings have associated the steady increase in violent crime in Jamaica with structural adjustment and increasing inequality, it is more often explained through reference to the particular features of the country's political system. While the connection between insecurity and neoliberalism is a more general one that resonates with the situation throughout urban Latin America, much of Kingston's contemporary violence has its roots in so-called 'garrison politics'. This is a specific type of electoral turf politics achieved through communal clientelism. Politicians use state resources to secure votes, and supply loyal communities with material benefits such as housing or employment, concentrating supporters in politically homogeneous enclaves known as 'garrisons'.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the JLP and the PNP both created party-loyal garrison communities through inner-city housing schemes where units were allocated to party supporters. Local strongmen (who later became known as dons) received money and weapons from their political patrons, and oversaw the distribution of these and other clientelist benefits. In return, they operated as neighbourhood-level enforcers, who ensured that residents would vote for the 'right' party. In the 1970s and 1980s, the enmity between PNP and JLP gangs in Kingston's garrison communities led to frequent eruptions of violence, especially during elections, resulting in hundreds of deaths.² The combination of political tribalism and garrison politics, as Figueroa et al. (2008: 119) note, has been:

the incubator for the promotion of and legitimization of criminal perpetrators of violence as well as those who have become embroiled in inter and intra-community violence and its seemingly endless cycle of reprisal and counter-reprisal.

Much of the current insecurity can be traced back to these links between political parties, organised crime and electoral violence. Since the 1980s, however, the relationship between politicians and dons has shifted (Sives 2002). As politicians had reduced access to material resources

to distribute to their constituencies, the dons found other sources of income in the international narcotics trade as well as in local extortion rackets, the construction business and the entertainment industry. While the influence dons wield varies considerably across inner-city neighbourhoods, in many Downtown areas they are important local leaders and critical mediators in state–citizen relations. The association between organised crime and politics continues, despite the increased financial independence of the dons. Dons can mobilise voting blocs around election time as well as suppress urban unrest; in exchange, their illegal activities may enjoy protection from judicial scrutiny.

Many inner-city Jamaicans perceive state services to be available only to privileged segments of the population. The more successful dons, however, can provide services such as financial support, employment and security, sometimes by linking to formal state actors and sometimes by replacing them. Dons' own financial resources and access to the means of violence allow them to provide services directly. In addition, their connections to political parties and local members of parliament (MPs) remain important. Many dons hold regular 'treats' around holidays or at the start of the school year, during which they distribute food, school supplies and various other gifts. They may also assist residents in gaining employment by pressuring either the MP or locally operating businesses to give them a job. They are also central to the informal provision of security and justice, outlined in more detail below. While many politicians have pledged to sever the ties between party politics and organised crime, the connections have remained. Dons and their organisations play a strong governance role in Downtown Kingston and other marginalised urban areas throughout Jamaica, resembling state-like entities in their assumption of public service provision. However, given their enduring entanglement with state actors such as politicians, bureaucrats and the police, they are not so much parallel politics as part of an emergent and unstable hybrid state (Jaffe 2013).

In May 2010, however, the Jamaican Prime Minister Bruce Golding agreed to extradite Christopher 'Dudus' Coke to the United States on drugs and weapons trafficking charges. Dudus was the country's most prominent don and leader of the JLP garrison of Tivoli Gardens. Soon after Golding had signed the extradition request, armed men began to barricade the entrances to Tivoli Gardens in an apparent attempt to prevent Dudus's arrest. Elsewhere in the capital, gunmen

attacked police and police stations. In response, Golding declared a state of emergency for Kingston and adjacent areas, and a joint police and military operation forced its way into Tivoli Gardens. In what became known as the Tivoli incursion, the security forces killed over 73 civilians. Dudus was not captured until a month later; he was extradited immediately and is currently serving a 23-year sentence in a US federal prison.

This incursion and the state of emergency appeared to be a sea change in the relations between the Jamaican state and the dons. Given the historically tight ties between the JLP, the garrison of Tivoli Gardens and Dudus, few people would have expected a JLP government to attack the don and the neighbourhood so violently. Following Dudus's extradition, the security forces began a large-scale campaign to remove dons and to 'dismantle the garrisons' in the inner-city neighbourhoods, with some initial signs of success. However, a few years later, dons seem to be slowly regaining their initial level of power.

Responses to urban insecurity

A range of government and popular responses to violence and insecurity can be noted. On the part of the government, national and urban security policies have tended to rely on the repressive policing tactics popular throughout the region. In addition, starting with the 2010 Tivoli incursion and the state of emergency, we can recognise an interest in a form of policing that combines repressive and preventive elements. There is, however, a less dominant but still consistent interest in 'softer' policing, propagated in the form of 'community policing'. In addition, Jamaican policing has been subject to privatisation and pluralisation (Loader 2000), and so, as well as state responses and public security provision by the police and the military, various types of private security providers also play a role in policing urban space.

Mirroring developments in many other cities in the wider region, many wealthier citizens no longer rely on the state for the provision of security, turning to private security companies and retreating into gated communities and other types of fortified enclaves. In inner-city neighbourhoods, an informal, extra-legal form of privatised security has emerged. Increasingly, residents have turned to the dons for security and dispute resolution. This don-based, private form of 'self-help' law and order, which generally relies on violent retribution, is relatively popular among marginalised urban residents, who feel that the formal

justice system is biased and inaccessible and who may also benefit from the broader social provisioning role dons fulfil.

Public policing Starting with government responses to urban insecurity, there has been a marked tendency to focus on a strong-arm, zero-tolerance (*mano dura*) style of policing. On the whole, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) has displayed a predilection for repressive forms of policing. In recent years, police operations – especially those in inner-city neighbourhoods – have become increasingly militarised, and the tasks of the military increasingly include internal security and law enforcement. JCF police officers are regularly joined on patrols by Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) units, who provide armoured vehicles, communication technologies and surveillance helicopters.³ This regular military presence in Downtown Kingston can be understood as what Stephen Graham (2011) calls the ‘new military urbanism’, a tendency for military technologies and logic to become a seemingly normal part of everyday life and civilian space.

This militarisation of Jamaican policing is distinct from similar trends in Latin American countries that have recent histories of democratisation following military rule under authoritarian regimes. However, Jamaica’s contemporary military urbanism has retained some of the elements of colonial policing. As Anthony Harriott (2000) points out, the JCF underwent limited reform following Jamaica’s independence from Britain in 1962. This meant that the constabulary retained many of the characteristics of a colonial police force. The police have continued to function in a largely punitive style and are still broadly seen as upholding a highly unequal social and political order; consequently, their operations tend to enjoy limited legitimacy, especially among the residents of low-income neighbourhoods.

Rates of police brutality, including extra-judicial killings, have been consistently high, suggesting a police culture supportive of summary executions (see Amnesty International 2008). Despite the establishment of an Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) tasked with investigating police abuses, very few officers have ever been convicted. There has also been widespread public support for these seemingly state-sanctioned killings. This was apparent in the popularity of ‘badman’ police officers such as Isaiah Laing, Keith ‘Trinity’ Gardner and Renato Adams. Adams, for instance, led the JCF’s special Crime Management Unit (CMU); after multiple allegations of extra-judicial

killings, the CMU was disbanded, but Adams was acquitted following a controversial trial.

There have been some attempts to introduce 'soft' policing. Starting in 2003, a major USAID-funded 'community policing' pilot project was implemented in Grants Pen, an inner-city neighbourhood located (perhaps not coincidentally) in Uptown Kingston. In a much publicised effort, the US \$3.5 million Democracy and Governance project involved the construction of a new policing and service centre in the area, while selected JCF officers received training in community policing philosophy from US police trainers. While the project was intended to increase trust between police and residents, another objective was to encourage residents to share information on crime as a more efficient way of allocating scarce police resources. Despite initial successes, the project foundered following concerns over integrity within the JCF; even among the hand-picked community policing officers, there appeared to be links to organised crime (Harriott 2009). Beyond these attempts at community policing, within the broader security strategies there have also been various types of social welfare projects, often aimed at preventing inner-city youth from becoming involved in violent crime. Such community development projects, implemented by organisations such as the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) and funded through partnerships with bilateral and multilateral agencies, emphasise social programmes, mediation and conflict resolution and social support services.

In the wake of the Tivoli incursion and Dudus's extradition, a more repressive type of preventive policing became evident. During the state of emergency, the security forces implemented 'curfews' in inner-city neighbourhoods during which they indiscriminately rounded up hundreds of male residents. While these men were never charged with any crime, they were detained and 'processed', arrested without charge and held overnight in the National Arena. These men were photographed and fingerprinted before being released. This collection of biodata and visual identifiers, permissible only through the suspension of the law that the state of emergency entailed, was apparently aimed at creating a database of potential criminals.

This practice is suggestive of what Lucia Zedner has termed 'pre-crime', a type of policing that 'shifts the temporal perspective to anticipate and forestall that which has not yet occurred and may never do so' (2007: 262). This involves a move away from post hoc

crime-solving to a pre-crime society, in which crime is seen as a risk that can be understood and managed through actuarial calculations, similar to those that insurance companies make. Policing increasingly becomes pre-emptive, aimed at crime prevention and future offenders, rather than necessarily engaging with actual perpetrators or victims. Given that these statistical calculations of risk are inherently repressive, they can be seen as involving 'prepression', a combination of prevention and repression (Schinkel 2011). The databases that form the actuarial archive produce images of risky subjects and risky geographies that criminalise and legitimate intervention in certain groups and spaces.

In Kingston, the criminalised populations and areas in question are clearly dark-skinned, low-income men and inner-city neighbourhoods. The security forces clearly engage in place-based policing, reflecting and reproducing ideas of criminogenic spaces, where residence plus gender equals future crime risk. Citizens are framed as potential criminals based on their location in Downtown Kingston and 'suspicious' markers such as skin colour or styles of clothing.

Another form of repression also emerged during the 2010 state of emergency, when the police began to publicise lists of 'persons of interest' who were summoned to police stations. These persons were alleged dons or gang members, who were listed by their real names but sometimes only by their aliases. The newspapers and television news shows put out calls for people known as 'Killer', 'Glasses' or 'Titty Man', stating their general or exact address. Those who showed up at the police stations were held for a little while, processed and generally released as the police had no evidence on which to detain them beyond what the state of emergency allowed: they were not suspects, just persons of interest. Some of those who did not attend were killed in alleged 'shootouts' in the months that followed.

Private security provision As in other cities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, Jamaica's increase in criminal violence and insecurity has given rise to a proliferation of private security firms. Companies such as King Alarm, Guardsman, Marksman and Hawkeye are highly visible throughout Kingston, both on the billboards advertising their services and in the uniformed armed response units that race through the city on motorcycles. The gated luxury condominiums and exclusive commercial plazas that have been developed by private investors in Uptown Kingston over the last few decades rely heavily on these

private security firms. Over 15,000 private security guards patrol the island (Chan 2010), compared with the 8,364 members of the JCF (JCF 2010).

In some other contexts, private security guards are relatively privileged in comparison to police officers, with higher wages and access to better equipment (patrol cars, weapons and communication systems, for example). In Jamaica, however, many private security officers are paid less than the minimum wage and work in conditions forbidden by Jamaican labour law. They work double shifts, are denied leave and are often armed with no more than a baton. Many of these guards are men from inner-city communities who have difficulty finding employment in other sectors because of area stigmatisation; however, their association with high-crime areas is seen as a benefit in security work. Their place of residence does have other repercussions, as it limits cooperation between private security companies and the police. The fear that inner-city residents have of being branded an 'informer' – someone who talks to the police – means that guards who live in don-doned communities have a strong incentive to avoid cooperating with the public security forces.

Extra-legal 'self-help' security While significant work has been done regionally on formal private security, much less is known about the dynamics of informal security provision. Private security services and the fortified enclaves they protect are not accessible to the majority of the urban population. Whereas wealthier Kingstonians have the option to select a gated community to live in and a security firm to work for them, the options of the urban poor are much more limited. They cannot afford the services of private security firms, nor do they expect much from the police, who are perceived to be unresponsive and corrupt. Many residents of Kingston's inner-city neighbourhoods have little choice but to turn to the forms of security offered by dons. Jamaica's dons are both the source of much violence and the only form of protection many of the urban poor have against this same violence. They offer a form of 'self-help' law and order known as 'community justice' (or, more disparagingly, 'jungle justice'), providing both security and dispute resolution. There are many differences between the formal and informal privatisation of security, from the agency of those receiving security services, to the concrete ways in which these services are rendered.

While media representations often depict dons as ruthless autocrats, many dons can rely on a significant level of support from residents. This is related in part to their social provisioning role in terms of social security and employment, as outlined above. However, their most important function to residents appears to be the provision of physical security and an alternative form of justice. They provide protection and punish offenders in neighbourhoods where many residents perceive the police as unreliable, uncaring and corrupt. Dons scare off potential violators both within and outside their area by punishing perpetrators swiftly and often violently. The offences they punish include theft, rape, domestic abuse and physical assault within the community. Other types of behaviour that contravene the don's order are voting for the wrong party or 'informing' (talking to the police). First offenders or those whose transgressions are slight may get off with a warning. More serious infractions lead to violent punishments ranging from beatings to a gunshot in the leg to execution, as well as non-violent sanctions such as fines or expulsion from the neighbourhood (Charles and Beckford 2012).

Dons such as Dudus were lauded for maintaining order and 'splitting justice' in an impartial manner. One major difference with the formal justice system is, of course, the fact that one man determines what is fair and just, rather than an institution. There are indications, however, that community justice is undergoing codification and institutionalisation, with standardised punishments for certain crimes and a system of local courts in which groups of elders preside along with the don (Duncan-Waite and Woolcock 2008: 27–9).

The informal justice system – crime being prevented and punished by criminal leaders – can be seen as a somewhat perverse form of resilience to a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity. However, the system of community justice is not only a grassroots response to high levels of crime. There are strong indications that the JCF encourages the informal provision of security and justice, for instance by referring both victims and perpetrators to this system.

Conclusion

The persistently high levels of violence that have been plaguing Kingston for decades are concentrated in the city's poorest neighbourhoods. This spatial concentration of insecurity both stems from and exacerbates the social exclusion of those who live in these

'criminogenic' areas. The inability of the government to address these issues is related to the enduring ties between state officials, politicians and organised crime. Given this combination of insecurity, social exclusion and ineffective governance, Kingston can be considered a fragile city. However, these interconnected problems are not restricted to the urban scale: such issues are obviously embedded in the national polity and its history of garrison politics, but also in transnational flows of illegal drugs, weapons and money.

This chapter has addressed the various strategies that government agencies and citizens develop to cope with crime and urban violence. In addition to repressive and social welfare responses on the part of government agencies (often at the urging of bilateral and multilateral donors), citizens also develop their own coping strategies. Kingston's middle-class and elite residents tend to retreat into fortified enclaves and rely on private commercial security, with similar effects on the urban landscape as have been documented throughout Latin America. Less attention has been paid to 'perverse' coping strategies such as the community justice system, where criminal dons punish a broad range of transgressions – some of which are illegal under Jamaican law, some illegal only under their own system of rule. While dons are an important factor in causing violence, their local legitimacy demonstrates the extent to which Kingston's marginalised populations rely on them in coping with this same violence.

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1 The comparative average homicide rates per 100,000 are 12.5 for Africa, 16.3 for the Americas, 3.0 for Europe and Oceania, and 2.9 for Asia (UNODC 2014: 22).

2 For more on garrison politics, see Figueroa and Sives (2002), Harriott (2008) and Sives (2010).

3 See www.jdfmil.org/jdfTask/tasks.php.