

Reading Violence and Postcolonial Decolonization through Fanon: The Case of Jamaica

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the experience of violence in postcolonial Jamaica to explore its relationship to decolonization. Decolonization here is taken, not simply as the removal of colonial structures, but especially, the deconstruction of colonial legacies in the mindset of formerly colonized peoples. I argue that in the Jamaican case, this legacy manifests in racial and class identities and the resultant structures that create order within the state. Emerging out of these identities is the acceptance and tolerance of violence against the poor. This manifest both in the treatment of the poor by the state and elites, and in the poor's quest for recognition within the nation. I employ Fanon's theoretical arguments on violence and decolonization, in *The Wretched on the Earth* and on recognition in *Black Skins, White Masks*, to give insight into the ways in which power and liberation may or may not be affected.

Caribbean Fanonism

Louis Lindsay's seminal piece, *The Myth of Independence: Middle Class Politics and Non-Mobilization in Jamaica* is the main attempt to apply Fanon's understanding of decolonization to the Anglophone Caribbean. Lindsay's project attempted to show that what passed for independence in Jamaica was a sham, symbolic rather than substantive, based on the nationalist leadership's desire to install themselves in the colonizer's place rather than transform the society. Lindsay insists that the failure of the Brown and middle class nationalist leadership was its reliance on compromise with colonizers and their lack of confidence in the capacities of the Jamaican people to determine their own development.

Independence, he argues, was not achieved because it was not fought for, and indeed, there was no mobilization toward that effort. Lindsay's essay was revisited in 2005. Girvan's "Caribbean Fanonism," Richard Hart's commentary and Taitu Heron's view of independence as "A Lost Opportunity" engaged with Lindsay's use of Fanon. Norman.¹ In the main, they take issue with Lindsay's and Fanon's emphasis on violent decolonization and conclude that the realities of conflict did not necessarily produce success stories.² Paget Henry points out, and I concur, that this reading overemphasizes the concern with violence.³ Indeed, both Fanon and Lindsay were interested in mass mobilization and Fanon's understanding of violence stretches beyond physical manifestations. At the same time, it remains important to consider the meanings of violence in decolonization. Of interest among the reviews is Heron's contention that armed liberation would of necessity include violence against women.⁴ I wish to engage with this idea through Campbell's critique of the Zimbabwean liberation process and its masculinist logic, again, to consider what violence does to liberation.

Henry suggests that Lindsay's approach is problematic because it too mechanistically applies Fanon's profile of classes and leadership to the Jamaican situation. I hope to develop on this area, by thinking through the particular consciousness of violence that emerges from the subjectivities of class identities, and to assess what its manifestations mean in postcolonial Jamaica. These subjectivities may be seen as emerging from reaffirmations of colonial understandings of Blacks in Jamaica. In that vein, we may deploy Fanon and the way in which he, according to Henry, profiles and assesses class consciousness in colonialism.⁵ I am here interested in how the perspective of the state, elites and the masses, of the groups themselves, generates or justifies violence in postcolonial Jamaica. Rather than taking the view that there is a natural inclination to violence in Jamaica, I will examine the way the postcolonial experience produces violence that in and of itself is related to processes of liberation. In theorizing Caribbean experiences of violence then, it is important to think through the consciousness produced in the socio-politics of the region.

Citizenship, Depersonalization and Violence in the Postcolonial State

Decolonization in the Caribbean gave assurances that citizenship would be freedom giving. In the main however, the post colony created alienating experiences of citizenship determined by questions of who belongs to the nation, to whom does the nation belong and therefore, who gets rights and privileges within it. Here I draw on Aaron Kamugisha's contention that a legalistic definition of citizenship does not fully grapple with these questions. Rather, he is focused on "a variety of practices, tropes of belonging and identity concerns that Caribbean people experience and the relationship between these and Caribbean institutions."⁶ Of essence is how postcolonial politics of the region is organized to create identities and experiences of belonging and personhood.

According to Mimi Sheller, a review of the racial poli[t]ics of citizenship in the Caribbean brings into stark relief how racial boundaries have delineated the inequitable distribution of liberties, protection and justice, both locally and globally, from the early nineteenth century until today. The struggle for freedom and full citizenship in the Caribbean remains incomplete.⁷

This is complicated in the contemporary context by class and gender.

In examining the gendered nature of Caribbean nationalism, Linden Lewis concludes that a victory of patriarchy in the postcolonial Caribbean was not unexpected, since the nationalist leadership accepted patriarchal notions of nationhood and masculinity and colonialism's racist and class based underpinnings. He argues that in the convergence of the relationship between nationalism and the interests of men, a particular type of hegemonic masculinity associated with conquest, control and the consolidation of power by privileged men was victorious in the Caribbean.⁸ In this configuration, working class Black men have remained alienated from the levers of power.⁹ Middle class and professional men came to assume power over the nation and have maintained their dominance over other, weaker men and over women in general. The Caribbean state, became thus, an agent of the male, middle class and postcolonial politics has been middle class, masculinist politics. As a site of elite consensus, the state rules on behalf of those that sought to and were successful to varying degrees in taking the colonizers' place, a place of dominance.

In terms of the racist and classist underpinnings of Caribbean nationalism, the colonial trope of readiness for self-government was accepted and responded to by the nationalist movement. In the Aglophone Caribbean, the British justified their rulership of Africans on the basis that they were savage, criminal, unintelligent, childlike and incapable of self-government. Indeed the latter would only lead to lawlessness and death to whites.¹⁰ Lewis argues that the nationalist movement therefore had to affirm their status as adult men, as mature and responsible enough to conduct their own affairs.¹¹ They were responding to the way in which, the colonizer, according to Fanon, constructed "the native." In Fanon's understanding, this occurs in a Manichean context, in which according to Nigel Gibson, "the colonizer is represented as everything good, human and living; the colonized as bad, brutish and inert... In this situation, the colonized inhabits 'a zone of non-being'."¹² The native is constructed as an inferior being. The native is racialized, their humanity and personhood are always in question. In affirming their adulthood, the nationalists had to distance themselves from the stereotypes of the Caribbean person and by this re-inscribed the logic of colonialism. Indeed, the African self had to be disciplined into a subordinate position or it had to be annihilated. Citizenship in the postcolonial Caribbean was therefore constructed through skewed understandings of humanness, specifically questioning whether Blacks were truly human and of value, whether they could truly belong and have rights and privileges in an independent nation.

In the Jamaican case, full personhood and citizenship were secured by ethnic minorities, especially hybrids (Browns) but excluding descendants of indentured Indians, and Blacks' personhood remained in question. Browns were differentiated from Blacks in skin color and value systems (they were thought to be better able to assimilate British values), and given the absence of the white settler, they were well placed to assume leadership. Personhood remained on the agenda in independence because of the negating and alienating experiences in the construction of postcolonial citizenship. In the same vein in which the settler constructed the native as a means of self-empowerment, the postcolonial state also constructed the citizen as part of a preoccupation with dominance.

Sheller's reflection on the genesis of Caribbean citizenship begins in colonialism. He argues that, the notion of masculinity was also central to the construction of colonial ideologies of citizenship. Centered on the free white male individual, this version of masculinity was rooted in the bourgeois patriarchal family, Caribbean deviation from the white bourgeois norm of the patriarchal family was used to deny full political freedom to former slaves. When Caribbean women had children out of wedlock, or moved from one partner to another, some Europeans charged that black men were incapable of ruling their families and hence were also incapable of ruling their countries.¹³

In the postcolonial Caribbean, the middle class came to assume the expectations of colonial patriarchy, of the family and the role of men. Those that remained poor however, rarely lived up to these expectations. The Black poor maintained non-bourgeois, non-European traditions of family and African cultural behaviours thought to typify them as uncivilized. Working class men were not able to exercise patriarchy in relation to the society as a whole since they were to be dominated by middle class men, but they could use violence against their women. Their failure to live up to patriarchal expectations doomed them to insecure citizenship. They were not the men who moved freely between family and civil society.¹⁴ In fact they exist in neither space, not in the family (except as a son, to be cared for by his mother given his tendency to unemployment) since he is an absentee father or unmarried, or in civil society, since he is deemed to contribute nothing to the economy. He is on the corner, idle, unemployed, due of course to his perennial laziness. Working class men are also criminalized, to be dealt with differently by the state, including through paternalistic engagement. Their pathologization is tied to their failures to live up to patriarchal expectations of acting as breadwinners.

A disempowering social order was constructed to demean Blacks and the Black poor especially, whose humanity and citizenship remained in a tenuous state. The precariousness of citizenship manifests in abrogation of rights, seen especially in the state's use of violence against the Black poor. For Fanon, violence is necessary to decolonization because colonialism embodied it. Fanon saw colonialism as dependent on overt violence but also on the assaults on/negations of the natives' cultures and their relegation to spaces of squalor. The very questioning of their humanity, especially in racial terms, that came of colonialism was an act of violence. These types of violence were carried over into the postcolonial state.

I wish to consider, firstly, the problem of violence in Jamaica in terms of class. The Black poor are stigmatized on account of both their poverty and their color. Indeed color can substitute for material means, and, there is a presumption of means attached to color in Jamaica. At the same time, when Blacks gain social mobility, money has potential to secure rights for this group. The stigmatization of the Black poor may be seen through Fanon's sterile and explosive, "zone of non-being", which emerges out of a postcolonial context that attaches values of nothingness to their lives and existence.¹⁵ Lewis Gordon argues that the zone of non-being, can be read in two ways. It could be limbo, which would place blacks below whites but above creatures whose lots are worse; or it could simply mean the point of total absence, the place most far from the light that, in a theistic system, radiates reality, which would be hell. His claim that "In the majority of cases, the black lacks the benefit of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell (*Enfers*)" suggests the first read, but Fanon has much in store for the reader. For even if the "majority" of blacks lack such ability, it does not follow that in *this case*—namely, Fanon's unfolding narrative—the descent into *Enfers* cannot be made.¹⁶

In its hellish and liminal character, the zone of non-being is an actual state of affairs – the brutish nature of the lives of the Black poor and also, a way of seeing them – as inferior, meaningless, virtually absent or as *wretched*. In the zone of non-being, the Black poor are then, dispensable, for the state, for elites and for the poor themselves, the latter, through their socialization into racist ideas about Blacks, including a presumption that blackness itself produces poverty. This is the space in which Other-imposed (by the state and elites) and self-imposed (horizontal) violence and the potential for counter-violence (against the state and elites) and revolutionary violence can coexist.

Violence against the poor became "everyday", normative, as a feature of elite consensus around the establishment of a social order that rendered poor Blacks also demeaned. The everyday violence to which I refer is not only to extreme forms of physical violence which occurs, but moreso to the "suspended atmosphere of violence" that characterizes their physical environments and their interactions with agents of the state and the middle class.¹⁷ Jamaica's inner-city slums, which house the poor in cramped, unsanitary conditions, are a reminder to all that *those* people are not worthy of minimum standards of decency. For Fanon, the physical divide between colonized and colonizer was a 'line of force' and decolonization would require reorganization.¹⁸ In the divide, planters, settlers, Browns and the middle class live on hilltops and in gated communities where they may watch or hide from the slaves, natives, Blacks and the poor who are bundled together in huts, in tenement yards and ghettos. It is presumed that in these latter spaces, violence inheres; they are always on the brink of explosion. Not only are the spaces divided, they are also opposed, designed to separate, protect some and control others, including through the use of violence.

The divide establishes the humanness and the value of the individuals involved, who is valuable and who is not, who matters and who does not, who is seen and who is not. Worth, value and questions of humanness are answered through lenses that see the poor as no more than burdens on the state and elites who must contend with their “freeness mentalities” and the social chaos they are presumed to create. On this latter point, this debate is especially seen in the cultural domain. Debates on the value of dancehall culture for instance, occur through the logic that the poor produce little of cultural worth, and worse, inscribe a problematic cultural order which incites moral decay and social disorder based on, explicating Fanon, the notion that they are themselves, “the absence and negation of values.” Through this, the Black poor become the “corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him, (sic) is the deforming element, defiguring all that has to do with beauty and morality.”¹⁹ This is the case, even while their cultural products may be appropriated by the middle class, used on campaign trails to co-opt them into the electoral process and projected in tourist advertisements in an appeal to the outsider who sees the nation through the cultural product it exports.

Violence against the poor has also been a central feature of postcolonial party politics. According to Rupert Lewis, “Jamaica has a long tradition of managing state violence with scant regard for human rights.” He argues that the shooting down of people, to which we have long been accustomed in Jamaica has a long legacy that goes back to slavery, [and] colonialism but one must now add the short but important post-colonial period. In the latter period the shooting down of people is partially a result of developments that have been induced by the transmission belt of politics which is the political party.²⁰

Here, Lewis is referring to the manner in which electoral competition mobilized party loyals into partisan violence, especially in the context of the garrisonization of politics at the community level. The construction of garrisons occurred through displacement and conquest. In the case of the first garrison, created in West Kingston in the 1960s, many of the over 3,600 residents were violently removed from the squatter communities of Back-O-Wall and Moonlight City. These people could be removed, the land could be cleared because nothing of consequence existed there in the first place. In fact, these people did not really exist. The ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) argued that “the area was a slum and ‘a virtual no man’s land for law and order’ thereby implying that residents were criminals and did not deserve government assistance.”²¹ They are vilified on two levels. First, the residents of Back-O-Wall and Moonlight City were impoverished and unemployed, seen to be contributing little or nothing to the state. Second, they were associated with the opposition Peoples National Party (PNP) and vilified in the context of partisan identities. Their displacement and the construction of new housing in the area facilitated the development of the garrison, a party enclave in which party loyals receive clientilistic favours, including housing.²² In this case the communities became known as Tivoli Gardens and Wilton Gardens (otherwise known as Rema). The construction of garrisons and political violence intensified in the 1970s under the PNP.

The garrison is generally a symbol of conquest and specifically of middle class dominance over the poor through the party mechanism. In it, whole communities concede to give their unconditional support to one political party. Garrisons assured party loyalty in the context of authoritarian internal structures in which violence, or the threat of it, maintained order. The political area leader, known as a Don, represented the national politician and did bidding on their behalf, including meeting out reward and punishment. This structure served the larger superstructure of formal politics and the formal economy in that its violence ensured party loyalty and provided cover for illicit economic activity which was tied to the formal economy. Garrisons were protected from political outsiders thought to be enemies by the threat or resort to political violence by those within said communities. Part of the commitment to the party, then, was engaging in violence on its behalf, even while this commitment and political violence have diminished over time.²³ This has been due to a reduction in party based clientilism and also, the collapse of the hegemony of Creole nationalism and its attendant identities.²⁴ The garrisonization of politics was critical to the process of alienating the poor. Garrisons literally imprisoned its dwellers. They became walled in, stationed, militarized by the political process that ironically purported to make them important to the state. Their existence became hinged on their capacity to keep outsiders out and insiders in. It was understood through fear, the justification for violence. The garrison's dwellers dare not step out, cross political borders, venture too far into unknown and hostile neighbourhoods, including those where the rich reside. By virtue of this, they are stuck, controlled, separated from the nation. They become locked-in to the partisan politics that constructs them and they become the politics, the violence. They have no value outside it and must participate in it to be of value. They must guard the guardians and their interests, middle class politicians whose interests they assume as their own. Even when the politician loses their importance, the garrisoned do not lose their sense of themselves as dependent upon violence, as cut off and at risk. They must therefore maintain their stronghold, their places of safety and thus, they also effect their alienation.

The garrison exists not only as a physical place but also has epistemic value. In that context, there has been a garrisonization of the mindset of urban youths. Whether or not, their communities have been garrisoned, they identify with the process as part of their self-identities. Communities have been adopting the identities and characteristics of garrisons independent of the political party mechanism that constructed them in the first place. Ghettoes become identified by their dwellers as garrisons as part of an association with particular masculinities of rebelliousness, authoritarianism and "strongmanism".²⁵ As a response to their powerlessness, they perform or create identities they believe to give them power. Such constructions also allow citizens of these communities to form alternate communities of belonging when the larger state is contemptuous of them.

As shown in the discussion of garrisons, the ways in which the Black poor are seen or not, has consequences for the way they are treated by the state. In a real way, the poor are not truly seen, they are in the “zone of non-being”, they are invisible. Consequently, their experiences of violence are understood as a function of who they are thought to be and the values placed on them. Lewis Gordon argues that invisibility may manifest as one not being seen; or, as a failure to recognize wrongdoing because those suffering the wrong do not meet the expectations of those one recognizes (as people, as kin, as important).²⁶ An examination of the state’s actions in its pursuit of Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke is useful in highlighting how this works. Coke was the Don of the ruling JLP’s main garrison of West Kingston.²⁷ In September 2009, the United States government requested the extradition of Coke to answer to charges of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and marijuana and to illegally traffic in firearms. The government refused the extradition request despite the fact that it was obliged to honor such requests under Jamaica’s extradition treaty with the U.S. After a nine month battle with the U.S and Jamaican civil society, the government finally agreed on May 17, 2010 to extradite Coke. It was thereafter faced with the problem of capturing Coke, who was thought to be hiding in his Tivoli Gardens community which under normal circumstances, the police did not enter. In response to attacks on the police and police stations in Kingston by alleged supporters of Coke and the construction of barricades that cut off access to the community, the government decided to enter by force. A combined police and military operation was carried out beginning on May 23, 2010. Three days of gunfire claimed over 70 lives, and residents thereafter complained that the security forces acted extrajudicially. The middle class especially, applauded the state’s action as a fight against crime, paying little attention to the claims of questionable behaviour by the security forces. While fear had gripped the Jamaican society in response to high levels of violent crime, I would argue that the middle class’ failure to interrogate the state’s actions was partly because no-one they knew was harmed. Of the over 70 persons killed, only one person became known. Keith Clarke, who was killed at his home in the hills of Kingston in a case of what the police called, mistaken identity, was a middle class Black man and brother of a former member of parliament. The victims remained anonymous, because they were unseen. No list has as yet been made public, because it was not important to name them.

Goldberg argues in his contribution to understanding the zone of non-being, that “invisibility may take the form also of people not being seen because one ‘knows’ them in virtue of some fabricated preconception of group formation.”²⁸ The group identities (the garrison identities) in this context of invisibility, made West Kingston residents into criminals or ‘harbourers of criminals’ by virtue of the spaces they occupy.²⁹ This deemed the actions of the state credible, extraordinary and justifiable since what was at stake was the very national security and well-being of law abiding citizens who do not reside in places like West Kingston. As in their original construction, the land could be purged because the people that live there, were not really people at all, they do not actually exist and cannot be made to exist, to become real in the minds of those who really matter – those who live in *decent* places and are themselves *decent*. Indeed, injustices did not occur because the people that experienced them are not real.

And if they come to public attention, they may be passed off as concoctions, lies and untruths, since *those* people have no credibility. Since they harbour criminals, the logic continues, the state's resources ought not be wasted investigating allegations of abuse from 'legitimate' sources of authority, coming from places and people such as *those*. As is commonly said in cases of police excess, 'no innocents died there after all.' These engagements may be seen as engagements of conquest, of purging the land of the unwanted, out of which new communities may be built.

Rupert Lewis posits that contempt for the mass of the population by the upper classes in the Caribbean is not as open as before, "but the ideological core of class and racial prejudices remains intact and has been transmitted down the generations."³⁰ Among the poor, there is a definite sense of alienation. According to a resident of Denham Town seeking to explain the blockades they erected once the government announced their concession to extradite Coke, "it is just that our history has taught us that the state don't rate people in Tivoli and Denham Town, so anything can happen, and we have to protect wi self."³¹ Within the context of prejudices in the society, there is also, according to Lewis, "too great an acceptance of ideas of inherent inferiority."³² This sense of inferiority can provide an explanation into why violence in Jamaica tends to be a violence 'turned inward'. In that sense, violence manifests as an expression of self contempt, as a need to annihilate self.

Violence, Power and Decolonization

At the heart of Fanon's project is the construction of an agenda to reclaim the personhood of the native. Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* is interested in destroying colonialism and by virtue of that, transforming both colonial societies and colonial subjects. The latter comes through the process of decolonization, which emerges in response to the actions and self-recognition of the colonized and is itself affirming in its capacity to raise the "native" from their inferiority complex. Fanon's project of emancipation involves both a redemption of the mind and a reordering of the social world that can be achieved through violence against the colonizer. Anti-colonial violence must therefore be understood as not only a strategy for ridding the nation of the colonizer, but also to restore personhood to the colonized. For Paget Henry, of importance in Caribbean Fanonism is how and the degree to which a people can recover measures of their humanity lost in the colonial experience.³³ If colonialism is depersonalizing, decolonization must involve reclaiming humanity. For Fanon, this occurs through self-recognition in the context of a depersonalizing world, which requires that the native arm himself in defence against the violence of the colonial situation. According to Alice Cherki, "psychological and physical liberation are inextricably linked to the process of desubjugation. Violence is needed to undo the original violence that inflicted the alienation in the first place."³⁴

Violence is liberating at the individual level in that it frees “the native from his inferiority complex, and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self respect”, and hence reverses colonialism’s assumptions about the native as childlike and submissive.³⁵ It is in the arming of oneself against an oppressive condition, against the colonizer, that the individuals’ sense of themselves and their esteem is raised.

New questions about what liberation meant would arise in the postcolonial experience since no longer was the colonizer the enemy within and given the perpetuation of the colonial logic in independence. Fanon believed that liberation depended both on praxis and the cleansing effect of violence of the oppressed against the oppressor. The response to alienation in postcolonial Jamaica has been violence, disorder and indiscipline though not necessarily of a revolutionary nature. Obika Gray in his assessment of the early years of independence, argues that “the labour of self construction among the poor was, in part, a challenge to the colonial idea of how the civilized, disciplined body of the black poor should behave.”³⁶ He contends that while postcolonial politics and aesthetics emphasized virtues of discipline and good order, Rastafarians, rude boys and other rebels sought a different body ethic.³⁷ He argues further that Rastas linked militancy to Black nationalism and rudies combined Black consciousness with social outlawry. This consciousness rested in a view “in the eyes of the alienated young, [that] the cause of the downtrodden had to be affirmed by a racially informed indiscipline against a discriminatory society and its values.”³⁸ Even the criminally employed he says, were therefore “deeply invested in the black poor’s broader quest for respect, status, honour and material well-being.”³⁹

Contemporary violence is not marked by praxis. In fact, Gray argues that while the poor are deeply ambivalent about ideologies such as Black consciousness, their defiance has little to do with organized or revolutionary action, it is nonetheless an act of empowerment.⁴⁰ It is empowering in its capacity to establish personhood and also in terms of its capacity to disrupt the flow of power within the state, in that violence allows segments of the urban poor to exert power over the state. In the converging realities of self contempt and contempt imposed by the state and upper classes, violence emerged as a route to respect and honor as a means to establishing personhood. Criminologist Anthony Harriott sees this as dissing violence which “involves a defence of one’s honour and self image.”⁴¹ This occurred in a postcolonial setting where respect and honor were not guaranteed for most. Violence became in this context, a means to visibility since the problem of alienation is also one of visibility. Goldberg states that “visibility carries with it connotations that tend to be appealing – access, opportunity, ability – in short, power, and invisibility has tended to connote absence, lack, incapacity, in short, powerlessness.”⁴² In the Jamaican experience of violence, it is arguable that visibility is established when acts of violence gain the attention of the nation. The more brutal the attacks, the more press they receive. It is through their misbehaviours then, that those who perform violence are seen. At stake Goldberg says, is recognition, moving from invisible to visible, from non-recognition to recognition. He states:

“Man,” writes Fanon explicating Hegel, “is human only to the extent to which he wants to impose himself on another in order to be recognized by him”. Recognition both presupposes and reinforces the light of human worth, respect, and esteem. Self-consciousness requires recognition by the Other. Indeed, it is an imposition upon the Other, and thus presupposes the assumption of the Other’s existence though not the Other’s equality. But one’s visibility is predicated also on the assumption of self determination. Being recognized – whether as self conscious or as Other, and thus being visible, requires that one be outside of the Other’s imposition, free of the Other’s complete determination. To establish self consciousness, then, to be free, one paradoxically has to engage the Other in combative conflict, to risk one’s freedom, to place one’s very life, one’s humanity, in question.⁴³

Lewis Gordon explains that violence is necessary because of the absence of ethics in the colonial context. In the Self-Other equation, the colonizer does not in fact see a human being. This demands the creation of a “genuine Self-Other relationship through which ethical relations can become possible” and there is “the elevation of those who are ‘nothings’ to the level of the ‘people’.”⁴⁴ Establishing visibility through violence therefore, is a route to power and to humanity. In this regard, Anthony Bogues argues that:

Violence itself is a difficult and slippery subject. Its primary enactment, in terms of physicality and the infliction of pain, involves assaults on personhood. As a practice, violence is also about spectacle. To be effective in imposing order it must first create awe, then fear. Even though it kills or maims, its logic is not about death but about the production of order - There is a commonplace understanding of violence and its separation from power. However, if we rethink power by understanding its capacity to designate a relationship—rooted in a social context—then violence is not a means-end instrument but a logic that accompanies power.⁴⁵

In looking at the relations of power emerging out of the Jamaican manifestation of violence, Bogues notes,

One of the striking features of young men who engage in violence is their queries to each other, asking, "how many *duppies* [ghosts] you mek?" Death is both a form of destruction and an irreversible sacrifice. But it is also a spectacle that haunts life itself; for many of the young males involved in violence, death becomes a substitute for life. In Jamaican nation-language, death is "tek life," a spectacle that affirms their life in the absence of positive alternatives.⁴⁶

It is through their abilities to affect the lives of others through imposing fear and death that they themselves become important, feared, enlivened and empowered.

With regard to their powers over the state, violence establishes those that use it in competition for power within the state. In the case of Christopher Coke for instance, among the fears of the state in their consideration of the extradition request was no doubt, the potential for violence, both in response to the extradition, if it occurred, and also through the absence of a figure such as Coke, since he and others like him played the role of establishing order among the poor and even among gangs. It is incomplete, I believe, to view middle class objection to the initial defence of Coke by the Jamaican government in the nine months leading to the decision to extradite him as a stand against corruption. Indeed, there were alternate readings in which many Jamaicans expressed solidarity with the state in its defence of Coke. Instead, we should consider middle class fear of the powers of the poor over the state, over the formal sphere. Jamaicans had conceded powers to Dons over the informal (spheres of poverty) at the service of the formal (in which the poor are controlled and kept in their place) as a feature of partisan politics and predatory economics. They did not however, anticipate a scenario in which the poor could through these contexts, direct national politics. Speaking on the crisis emerging from the request for extradition of Christopher Coke, Rupert Lewis argued that:

the current political crisis in Jamaica indicates that political control of constituencies is manipulated by dons whose financial and gun power give them influence and put them in a position to influence not only local but national politics as well. These individuals are active players in the party life at the grass-roots level. Moreover, these players have become part of transnational organizations that have more ready access to resources than many members of parliament.⁴⁷

At the crux of this assessment is the manner in which middle class leadership is undermined. The Prime Minister's reticence in extraditing Coke gave testimony to Obika Gray's contention, that the urban poor are increasingly powerful in the Jamaican socio-political landscape. The state's action in West Kingston seemed justified because it reasserted middle class dominance in the frame of a seeming loss of control and governability. Through their competition and collaboration with the state in the use of violence, segments of the urban poor became empowered. This partly explains the adoption of garrison identities by urban youth. It is a recognition on their part, of the power of violence and patriarchal masculinity within the state.

In qualifying the violence that exists among the poor, it is important to state that in the main, it is not violence against the state and elites, conceived of as the Other, but is rather, self-imposed. Nonetheless, it gains the attention of the Other because the Other rules the nation and must contend with rising violence as part of the process of governance of the society and economy.

When violence is self-inflicted or if we kill the Other, what kind of recognition is achieved? What kind of human does the being who imposes violence on another as a route to recognition become? Can they truly be liberated through this process? Gordon notes that objections have been raised to Fanon's emphasis on psychological liberation in the vein that, "violence on another human being does not necessarily create a psychological state that is conducive to a political one."⁴⁸ Gordon responds that there is virtue in the equalizing nature of violence against the oppressor and therefore, "if the colonized cannot make a colonized or colored life as good as that of a colonizer or white one, they can at least make a white one no more valuable than a colonized or colored one; they can, that is, bring the white down to humanity."⁴⁹ Gordon sees this as the potential of Fanon's logic, in that while it is tragic and more specifically while revolutionary violence is tragic, it brings to the fore, the question of the right, as raised by Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. For Gordon, victims of systems of oppression, must respond to their conditions, they must seek restoration in which things cannot be as they were before.⁵⁰ The tragic dimensions and promise of this scenario is according to Gordon, the context in which violence can result in a situation in which, "the last shall become the first."⁵¹

The idea of Jamaica as ungovernable is accepted and projected by its nationals. This may be read as protest against the type of governance postcolonial rulers and elites attempted to effect that was premised on dominance over the Black poor. It questions the very nature of power in the state and the legitimacy of the socio-political structure. Fanon argues that the basic necessity of violence is to turn society upside down. Decolonization "which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously, a programme of complete disorder." The proof of success Fanon posits "lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up."⁵² If we understand upside down differently than Fanon hoped, we have some insight into the subversive character of violence and disorder in Jamaica. It says that if we cannot have a participatory democracy in which the justice of all is at the heart of the construction of the state, then no one will rest easy. The nation becomes then, a place of fear, not only for the poor who have been the victims of state repression and violence, but for all. As Gordon states, there is "a bringing down to humanity" for the privileged within the state. This creates room for consideration of the roots of violence and, more specifically, the role of social transformation in ending violence. If the privileged want peace, they are forced to make concessions. What remains unanswered, however, is whether those who move from the bottom through violence are liberated? What do they become?

The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation and Lessons for the Caribbean

Horace Campbell explores the meaning of African liberation in his work *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*. Inherent in his argument is a questioning of the role of violence in liberation and implied, is that patriarchy had a role to play in African liberation, but it no longer does. In this vein, we can take for granted that Campbell accepts the Fanonian logic that violence was necessary to remove the colonizer, but he is concerned that liberation does not end there.

Central to the process of liberation is the social and economic transformation of ex-colonies.⁵³ In Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, violence is integral to this process in that it is through violent removal of the colonizer that space is created for the last to be the first. Further, it is the consciousness derived from revolutionary violence that is the basis for transformation. Campbell is questioning this latter assertion by looking at the ways in which the anti-colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwean leadership re-inscribed the logic of colonial patriarchy. Campbell ties the reliance on violence to the construction of this order. He leads us to consider whether violent struggle, even if just, is also patriarchal. If this is so, the native does not digress from the logic of colonialism in his violent revolution, but rather uses the language of colonialism, violence, to remove the colonizer. How then can a patriarchal model of liberation exist? What kind of consciousness would emerge in the context of a violent struggle if not simply one that beats the colonizer at his own game? What else could be expected than that which Campbell says obtains in postcolonial Zimbabwe where the African patriarch replaces the white settler, and thereafter, makes himself sole heir to the nation and reliant on violence as the main way of subduing opposition.⁵⁴ Campbell's work implies that violence against the colonizer in and of itself does not produce the social reordering that Fanon demands. Indeed, the colonizer must be removed and violence is the means to this end. While empowerment can occur, liberation does not necessarily follow. While violence against the oppressor is important to self recognition, it is not the same as liberation. While humanity is recognized, liberation requires questioning how humanity can be affirmed.

While the anti-colonial struggle in the Caribbean was not a war against the colonizers, the postcolonial state deployed violence in the same authoritarian ways as its predecessor, shifting the context of who could represent the patriarch. In buttressing the powers of the patriarch, the population became militarized through partisan politics and garrisonization of communities. While working class men are subordinated in the state, they nonetheless exercise power and specifically, patriarchal masculinity through violence, which took on a life of its own, in masculinist battles for respect at the interpersonal level. Consequently, the process of acquiring power, establishing recognition, visibility, humanity, is deeply problematic. It relies on a masculinist understanding of empowerment – the imposition upon another as the basis for establishing one's humanity. While this may be important to forcing the transformation needed, it does not allow for new understandings to emerge about how the nation should be ordered. In Fanon's own assessment, the colonizer constructs the native.

Even when there is self recognition, where the native emerges from their inferiority complex, this does not necessarily imply a consciousness that eschews domination. The humanism of the last shall be the first suggests that the last are not inclined to be oppressors. In this vein, we might ask, if the last emerges as the first self conscious and free of their inferiority complex, what would cause them to shed their understandings of the nation as a place of rulers and dominated? If decolonization is replacement with a new social order, does it necessarily imply a new social logic?

In Jamaica, gains made in the area of transformed self-identities, of mental liberation came not through violence but through reimagining the cultural world away from the meanings that colonialism constructed for the colonized, particularly among sects such as Rastafari. Within the cultural sphere, particularly in the area of music, from reggae to dancehall, we find anti-system ideas readily expressed and performed. Nonetheless, within these cultural forms, while the meanings of Africanness and coloniality were critiqued, masculinity was not. As a result in the cultural complex in Jamaica, violence has a particular place of pride as a route to power. What is required is a new focus on the meaning of liberation, which seeks to deconstruct a decolonization steeped in men's desire for power. It requires also deconstructing those institutions of alienation and domination that became features of the postcolonial state. The ghetto, the garrison and the political and economic processes that managed and manipulated them are forces of violence against the poor. In so far as the poor understood themselves through those spaces, violence became inevitable. Moving away from a violence-filled state requires the affirmations that Fanon invokes.⁵⁵ It requires the nation to say yes to humanity, yes to justice, yes to freedom, no to oppression, no to exploitation and no to alienation.

Notes and References

¹ See Girvan, “Caribbean Fanonism Revisited: A Note”; Hart, “A Brief Commentary on Louis Lindsay’s Myth of Independence”; Heron, “A Lost Opportunity? A commentary on the Jamaican Experience of Independence,” in *The Myth of Independence: Middle Class Politics and Non-Mobilization in Jamaica*, Working Paper 6, Louis Lindsay (Kingston, SALISES. 2005).

² Girvan, p. 34; Hart, p. 55.

³ Paget Henry, “On the Revisiting of Caribbean Fanonism,” *SES* 51, 2 (2002): p. 195.

⁴ Heron, p. 57.

⁵ Henry, p. 196.

⁶ Aaron Kamugisha, “The Coloniality of Citizenship in the Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean,” *Race and Class* 49, 2 (2007): p. 21.

⁷ Mimi Sheller, “Citizenship and the Making of Caribbean Freedom,” *NACLA* Jan/Feb (2005): p. 30.

⁸ Linden Lewis, “Nationalism and Caribbean Masculinity,” in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (UK, Routledge, 2000), p. 262.

⁹ Linden Lewis, “Masculinity, the Political Economy of the Body, and Patriarchal Power in the Caribbean,” in *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, eds. Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie (Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), p. 240.

¹⁰ Lewis cites the findings of G.K Lewis and C.L.R James on the attitudes of the British to Caribbean people, *Nationalism and Caribbean*, pp. 270-271.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹² Nigel Gibson, “Jammin’ the Airwaves and Tuning the Revolution: The Dialectics of the Radio in L’An V de la revolution algerienne,” in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee White (USA and UK, Blackwell Publishers), p. 273.

¹³ Sheller, p. 32.

¹⁴ For a discussion of patriarchy and civil society, see Wendy Brown, “Finding the Man in the State,” *Feminist Studies* 18, 1 (1992): pp. 7-34.

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* (New York, Grove Press, 1967), p. 10.

¹⁶ Lewis Gordon, "Through the Zone of Nonbeing: A Reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday," *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* Fall (2006): p. 3.

¹⁷ Thanks to Greg Graham for his insight in conceptualizing this paper.

¹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched Of The Earth*, (*Presence Africaine*, 1963), p. 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

²⁰ Rupert Lewis, "Notes on West Kingston Crisis and Party Politics," (Keynote Address at the States of Freedom: Freedom of States Symposium, University of the West Indies, Mona, June 16-18, 2010).

²¹ Amanda Sives, *Elections, Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica, 1944-2007*, (Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), pp. 65-66.

²² Carl Stone develops this thesis of garrison/clientilistic politics in Jamaica. See *Democracy and Clientilism in Jamaica*, (London, Transactions Publishers, 1980).

²³ *Ibid.* Stone also focuses on the role of violence in party politics in Jamaica.

²⁴ Creole nationalism refers to the middle class and Brown nationalism that emerged in Jamaica. It relied heavily on the idea that the route to progress was through the adoption of European values and ways of being. It therefore relied heavily on education which emphasized British civilization as the way to progress for the Black majority. For a discussion of hegemonic collapse, see Brian Meeks, *Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives* (Kingston, UWI Press, 2007) and *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean* (Kingston: UWI Press, 2000).

²⁵ The Caribbean has a history of 'strongman' politics in which leadership emerged and was tolerated on the basis that they could control unruly populations. This type of control required a resort to authoritarian tendencies including extrajudicial killings by the police as a strategy in crime fighting. Tolerance of such politics can be understood in terms of the persistence of authoritarian political cultures in the region.

²⁶ David Theo Goldberg, "In/Visibility and Super/Vision Fanon on Race, Veils and Discourses of Resistance," in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee White (USA and UK, Blackwell Publishers), pp. 179-180.

²⁷ This particular garrison and its leader have been associated with heading organized crime in Jamaica around a concept and practise of 'One Order', (a single order). This model sought to unify gangs across party lines and across the nation in illicit business activities that included the middle class and was thereby both useful and dangerous to the state and the middle class.

²⁸ Goldberg, p. 180.

²⁹ When the decision to extradite Coke was announced, residents staged a march in support of Coke, some claiming that they were willing to die for him. Residents of ‘inner-cities’ across Jamaica are known to be reticent about giving information about criminal activity to the police. This occurs for a number of reasons, including distrust of the police and a popular culture that vilifies ‘informers.’

³⁰ Rupert Lewis, “Reconsidering the Role of the Middle Class in Caribbean Politics,” in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, eds. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston, UWI Press, 2001), p. 136.

³¹ *Jamaica Gleaner*, “Tension in Tivoli,” May 19, 2010.

³² Lewis, “Reconsidering the Middle Class,” p. 136.

³³ Henry, pp. 195-196.

³⁴ Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, trans. Nadia Benabid (USA: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 174.

³⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched*, p. 73.

³⁶ Obika Gray, *Demeaned But Empowered: The Social Power of the Urban Poor in Jamaica* (Kingston, UWI Press, 2004), p. 117.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ Obika Gray, “Rethinking Power: Political Subordination in Jamaica,” in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, eds. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston, UWI Press 2001), pp. 224-225.

⁴¹ Anthony Harriott, *Organized Crime and Politics in Jamaica, Breaking the Nexus* (Canoe Press 2008), p. 32.

⁴² Goldberg, p. 179.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁴⁴ Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 88.

⁴⁵ Anthony Bagues, “Power, Violence and the Jamaican ‘Shotta Don,’” *NACLA* (May/June, 2006): p. 23.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Lewis, "Notes on West Kingston," p. 5.

⁴⁸ Lewis Gordon, "Fanon's Tragic Revolutionary Violence," in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee White (USA and UK, Blackwell Publishers), p. 299.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-303.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁵² Fanon, *The Wretched*, p. 29.

⁵³ Horace Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation*, (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, South Africa, David Philip, 2003), p. 268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁵⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 222.