The People of Jamaica

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Summary

The People of Jamaica are in many ways different from the people where I come from, Iceland. Even if the people in Jamaica are generally warm and friendly, there exist huge inequality as well as other problematic social issues that are alien in Iceland. Class division, violence, poverty. Writers are often quick to cite history as the cause for those problems. They blame colonisation and, most of all, slavery. The claim is that slavery had such an enormous social effects that those effects reverberated through history, still to be felt in the present. Society that was built and maintained by violence was bound to remain violent and not easily change. Attitudes towards race, role of the sexes, and the right to the spoils are still shaped by this past. This applies to practically any aspect of society, including arts. Going through the history and matching the social challenges in contemporary Jamaica with respective challenges in the past, one is easily persuaded: the problems have its roots or at least contributing cause in the distant past of the darkest times in human history.
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Introduction

Cape Verde is formed of several islands. Once a friend explained to me that violence is much more common on the islands where slavery was common than on those where it was not. The more prevalent the slavery was, the more violence there is today, a century and a half after it was abandoned. For me it was a novel thought; could an institution so far back in time have such effects today?

My work took me to Jamaica for the first time about three years ago, and since then I have been there several times. My venue has not been the idyllic tourist resorts with their paradise-like beaches and excessively fit and smiling staff, but Kingston, the nation’s capital. Being an executive from an international company I have been invited to various types of events where the rich and powerful meet. I started bumping into the same people again and again and noticing that many of them were on very friendly terms, hugging and kissing and so on. It felt a bit like a community; a community of the elite. It reminded me of home, to be honest, even if I cannot say that I have a standing invitation to Friday evening meet-up of the main “boys” in Iceland. I have also dined with ministers and business men, together, in other former colonies; Malta and Cyprus come to mind. Could it be that once the colonial power leaves, the stronger (in some sense of that word) among the locals step in and fill their place?

On the streets, outside the gala events and the high rise hotels, people sleep. They might ask you for some change or just bid you good morning, but generally they don’t mind you and you don’t mind them as you walk by. In the old part of Kingston, just a few miles away from where I go for a walk in the morning, gangs control some areas and the police have not much control, should it even try. This is the murder capital of the world. This is not like home, nor anything I have seen in Europe. Why is the difference between the haves and the have-nots so great and why does it seem so normal to the people of Jamaica?

Literature covering contemporary issues in Jamaica keep going back to history, explaining much of what is going wrong with events that took place perhaps centuries ago. Is this just an excuse? How can high rate of children growing up with others than their parents be explained by so distant past, or the violence and the unequal distribution of wealth? Some say that the colour of your skin still matters, is this true and if so, why?

The objective of this thesis is to try to answer those questions, more precisely to trace through time the historical events that were of greatest importance for contemporary Jamaica
and see how they shaped Jamaica of today. I will then connect these events with particular social phenomena and institutions. The thesis will draw up some of the defining aspects of the culture of the people of Jamaica and seek historical explanations, where slavery and colonialism will keep popping up. It is about the role of slavery and colonisation in the formation of the Jamaican people.

Thesis will start with historical narrative, from the time of first settlement till today. Particular emphasis will be given to the time of slavery and colonisation. This will be followed by chapters about the economy of Jamaica, its people, politics, about violence in Jamaica, colour and class and about art. My approach is reflexive in the sense that I allow myself to be present in the text. Theoretical background is from critical social sciences, rather than positivism or complete relativism; I try to understand the historical paths leading to the place we find ourselves at. And that place is in many ways deserving of criticism.

The “discovery” of the Americas, including Jamaica

The first people arrived in Jamaica sometime between 4000 and 5000 B.C., coming from mainland America. The island was, however, inhabited by later arrivals, the Taino, at the time of European contact. The Taino arrived in Jamaica sometime between 650 and 900 A.D. (Woodley, 2001) and were native Americans, part of the broader group of the Arawaks (Robinson, 2007). Black (1991) says that by the 15th century, a warlike and cannibalistic tribe, the Caribs, were spreading over the Caribbean (from which the name of the area comes). He suggests that the Spanish, who arrived at the end of that century, were in fact completing the work of destruction already started by the Caribe.

And come they did, with Columbus arriving in the New World in 1492 (Mann, 2012). They were not looking for America at all, but an alternative trade route to China, who at the time was by far the biggest economy in the world and had products that Europeans coveted, among them silk and porcelain (Gills & Thompson, 2006, p. 213-215).

Catastrophic loss of life followed when Europeans came into contact with the native inhabitants of the Americas and in a few decades the Arawak population had been practically wiped out. According to Sherlock & Bennett (1998) the destruction of the Taino was a gruesome affair indeed. The conquistadors were clear in their intention to treat the islands of the Caribbean as their own and saw the indigenous as not much more than nuance in their
way. One account, for example, describes how 80 Tainos were invited for a meeting with the Spanish. Instead of discussions, they were taken and tied to wooden posts in the building where the meeting was supposed to take place. The building was then put to the torch, killing them all (p. 59). The biggest role was though played by diseases and among them were malaria and yellow fever. Due to those diseases alone, areas that had millions of inhabitants before 1492, were uninhabitable not long afterwards (Mann, 2012, p. 103). According to Wolf (2010) Hispaniola, the initial landing place of the Spaniards had about a million inhabitants and by 1520, only insignificant number remained alive. In many instances over 90% of the indigenous population perished (Wolfe, 2010, p. 134). The Taino were previously believed to have disappeared rather quickly after the arrival of the Europeans, but it is now believed that some of them survived long after the Spanish came to Jamaica. They have now melted into the general population, but some of their words still survive with us today, such as tobacco, hurricane, canoe and barbecue (Woodley, 2001).

Why did the Europeans sail to America and subjugate the continent, rather than the Americans conquer Europe? It sounds convincing that it was a case of geographical luck that was instrumental in putting Europeans in the said position, such such Jared Diamond (1997) has claimed. What matters though is that from the discovery of America and until, at least, the end of colonies, the colonial powers were then actively engaged in removing valuables from the less developed countries. Indigenous people were disposed, subjugated, and exterminated as the colonial powers scrambled to get their share in the loot. This was perhaps most blatant in the scramble for Africa (Meredith, 2006, p. 2). Plundering followed all over the continent and commercialisation of colonialism was perhaps clearest in Congo, with the country being the private property of King Leopold II, not excluding the people living there (Reader, 1998; p. 518). This was however not only true of Africa but also of the West Indies and Jamaica can be seen as a poster-boy of colonisation at its worst (Black, 1991).

Spanish Jamaica

All the 39 men that Columbus left behind on his first voyage died; some by the hands of the natives as retaliation for rape and other crimes, and others from disease. The meeting of the two continents was thus not only dangerous for the inhabitants of America but for the Europeans as well. Most of those who followed in Columbus’s footsteps for the next two hundred years died (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998, p. 64). Black (1991) relates the account of
1,600 colonists who came to Jamaica in 1656. Within three months, 1,200 of them had died (p. 37).

A team of 60 men arrived in 1509 to take control of Jamaica. They did as planned, mercilessly massacring and enslaving the Taino, much of it in the name of the Roman Catholic faith. The best land was eventually taken over by Spanish settlers, often held by big estates. With the native population dwindling, the first request for African slaves was made to the Spanish Crown in 1517. Permission for 4,000 slaves was promptly granted, however it is uncertain how many arrived in Jamaica and when (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998, p. 67-69).

According to Wolf (2010) attempts to use the indigenous as labour, initially by enslavement, were not very successful as the labourers kept dying while the Europeans had much lower mortality rates. Although they were in an alien environment, while the natives were not, the Europeans were more used to the diseases, endemic as well as epidemic, which were the main causes of fatalities. Diamond (1997) has explained this with the fact that the Europeans had been living in much closer proximity with animals, forming immunity to diseases that came from them, while the Americas had almost no animals that could be domesticated. According to Mann (2012) casualties among the Europeans were though also very high, including deaths from malaria. This, he believes, contributed to the importation of enslaved Africans. Slavery was however nothing new to us humans. One only needs to consult his Bible to see that it has been around for at least 2,000 years. Black (1991) points out that slavery was part of all ancient civilisations. However, the scale of enslavement that followed and accompanied the establishment of haciendas and plantations in America was unprecedented. Black (ibid) adds that the Spanish colony was a failure from the start, was always poor and of limited benefit to Spain. The island was mainly of use as supply base while Spain was settling other areas in the region. Once that was done, the role of Jamaica dwindled even more. It was not a peaceful state, with even governors as objects of serious internal violence. The colony was also under continuous external threat from competing colonial powers and from a group of people often associated with this area and time, pirates. In the end, the lack of development of the colony inevitably ended with an invasion. In 1655 the British invaded it with a force of 8,000 men, attacking the relatively small Spanish force stationed there (Robinson, 2007; Read, 2006).
British Jamaica

The struggle for Jamaica between the British and Spanish took about 5 years. In 1660 the Spanish finally left, ending their occupation (Robinson, 2007) and the island was officially ceded to England in 1670 with the Treaty of Madrid (Black, 1991, p. 39). Many blacks fought initially on the Spanish side and even if many shifted sides when the outcome became inevitable, it has been said that the treatment of slaves must have been much better at the hands of the Spanish, than it later was. Sherlock & Bennett (1998) say that with the English, slavery became more evil and the slaves were herded and dehumanised like animals. During the British invasion a group of locals of African ancestry formed, later to be called the Maroons. The Maroons did not accept British rule and created their own villages and homesteads deep in the interior of the island. Beating the Maroons turned out to be more difficult than the Spanish. It took decades and was concluded with a stalemate rather than a British victory. The Maroons had created their own identity, being the first society of free men of African descent in America. Their story is most interesting, including the story of those who were transported to Nova Scotia and from there to Sierra Leone. In Jamaica, Maroon villages still exist, retaining some vestige of autonomy (Robinson, 2007).

The English had an innovative approach to deal with the threat of freebooters. A group called the buccaneers had originated in Hispaniola, but was allowed to base themselves in Port Royal, Jamaica. They were further contracted to harass the Spanish in the region. The high and low point of that episode was the sacking of Panama in 1670 by Captain Henry Morgan (Black, 1991). Following that, the age of buccaneers came to an end, even if pirates were to remain on loose in the region. But while it lasted, the buccaneers brought a lot of wealth to Port Royale, which became a city of 8,000 inhabitants with real-estate prices on level with London. The place was said to be the wealthiest and at the same time the wickedest, with violence, drinking and whoring, not to mention it being a slave market. In 1692, Port Royale was destroyed in an earthquake, with half of its area sinking in the sea (Black, 1991; Robinson, 2007). I have heard Jamaicans say that this was the work of God and it does sound a bit like a story that could have come from the Bible. Today, Port Royal is a sleepy fishing village.

The political history during the time of colonisation by the British was marked by the will of the legislative power in Jamaica, the Jamaica Assembly, to be as independent as it could. On the other hand, the Crown was particularly interested in the benefits for itself in terms of tax revenue and advantages for its English citizens. The Assembly was, of course, not looking
after the interest of inhabitants of Jamaica, rather that of the rich ruling class. There were strict conditions on membership of the Assembly and also for voting (Black, 1991). Compton (2009) explains how the objectives of politics in the West Indies was not at all about the people living there, rather about how the English owners of the plantations could make most money from their holdings. He says that all the wealth which made England the richest country on the earth in the 18th century came from the West Indies. This huge wealth was therefore generated with slave labour (p. 36). According to Black (1991) the fact that some Africans had been slaves in their home countries was used as justification for slavery. By moving them into the hands of white owners, they would have better conditions and access to the right faith; Christianity (p. 99). This is mentioned in this context to underline what is going on here. Unprecedented wealth was being created based on slavery. The main excuse offered was that it was actually for the good of the slaves. The fact is though that even if the first African slaves had been enslaved before the Europeans came, the slave trade became very much demand-driven. People were being hunted down far into the interior in Africa (Reader, 1998). This is, in fact, mind boggling; colossal wealth was being accumulated in England based on people kidnapped in Africa and enslaved in America. In this context Black (1991) says that one needs to keep in mind though is that the age itself was brutal, for example, in the mid-18th century, a child in England could be hanged for stealing a handkerchief (p. 75).

With constitutional changes in 1884, the legislature became partly elected. This can be said to be the start of power in its own affairs moving to Jamaica. In 1938 there were riots related to strikes, which resulted in the foundation of the first lasting labour unions and then political parties related to them, Bustamante’s Jamaica Labour Party and the Peoples National Party of Norman Manley (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). Those parties fought not only for increased labour rights, but political reform as well. They remain the dominant political parties in Jamaica today. Constitutional changes were again made in 1944, creating an Executive Council, which later was changed into Council of 8 Ministers. The 1944 constitution had universal adult suffrage. Due to conditions related to literary and property-holding, only about 20,000 people could vote before those changes and about 700,000 after them (Black, 1991, p. 156). This is worth repeating; more than a century after Emancipation, only a fraction of the population that could vote. The power was, in theory at least, being moved from the elite to the people, of the power which resided in Jamaica and not in England. Further changes were made in the late 1950’s and the experience of the federation of Anglophone Caribbean
countries started in 1958. The Federation crumbled after Jamaica and then Trinidad both left the federation, wanting to achieve full independence by themselves (Black, 1991).

**Slavery Under British Rule**

According to Sherlock & Bennett (1998) the greatest agony for the slave was not physical but psychological, the people being stripped of rights of personality and essentially their future. According to Reader (1998) as many as thirteen million people left Africa enslaved, heading for America (p. 370). Out of those it has been estimated that close to 2 million were brought to Jamaica (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998, 14). Other estimations are more conservative; Deason, Salas, Newman, Macauley, Morrison, & Pitsiladis (2012) estimated this number to be 922.000. Up to half died within the first three years (p. 13). And if there was a famine, the slaves would be the first people to starve, for example in the 1790’s, some 15.000 slaves died of starvation in Jamaica but there were no news of whites dying in numbers (Black, 1991, p. 85).

Throughout the years, the slaves often revolted or conspired to do so, with the most serious revolt breaking out in 1760. These were dealt with very harshly as there was a threat that with coordinated effort, the slaves could overthrow their masters. In this context it is good to mention that in 1775, there were 200.000 slaves in Jamaica but the number of settlers was only 12.737 (Black, 1991, p. 80). The main industry of the island had become sugarcane cultivation. This was very labour intensive and the result was large scale slavery. This led also to consolidation, with huge estates forming and Jamaica became the world largest producer of sugar (Williams, 2005). There was not much recreation for the slaves, but they still were allowed to produce some food of their own and sell in a market on Sundays, which were days off. The conditions generally improved with time as the realisation of what slavery was about was sinking in among the public in Europe and the Americas (Black, 1991). The plantation owners and their influential friends fought back, but it was inevitable that this monstrosity would end. An episode that showed well the cruelty of the slave traders happened in 1783, when slavers threw 132 slaves overboard alive to get an insurance for the cargo paid (Compton, 2009, p. 22).

Emancipation led to the freedom of 311.000 black and coloured people. Some of them stayed at the estates but often the owner tried to take advantage of them or wanted them out. Free villages were established on large scale, nearly 200 in five years. Many former slaves also became smallholders, some acquiring land in former plantations that had been cut up
Many things contributed to difficulties after Emancipation, including old habits; the planter being used to absolute authority and irresponsibility a habit among the labourers. The government did very little for the former slaves. Many of them were backward and undisciplined and could have used more support than the Christian missionaries were able to provide. The circumstances in general in the country did not help. The plantation system crumbled in the years to follow, partly because of bad management but also due to changed laws on tariffs in the England. As a result of this Jamaica had to compete without protection against countries such as Cuba or Brazil who still had slavery. Importing immigrants was not successful and both the sugar- and coffee plantations collapsed. What also awaited the newly liberated population was repeated outbreak of epidemics, drought and earthquakes, for example cholera in 1850 that killed 1 in 13 of the whole population (Black, 1991, p. 116-118).

While slavery was abolished in 1834, there was a special apprenticeship-period, whereby the people, slaves no more, were obliged to remain on the plantations, working three quarters of the week in exchange for accommodation and food and were free the rest of the time. This period was troublesome with the two groups finding it a challenge to adapt to the changed role. This was however, believed to be needed, both for fear that the plantations would be without labour and for fear of what the people would do. The apprenticeship ended on 1st of August 1938 with Emancipation (Black, 1991).

Difficulties that people had in maintaining themselves and lack of government support led to a rebellion in 1865 which can be said to have turned into battle of colours and which the authorities used as an excuse to boycott the constitution (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). On the other hand, at the same time there was a change of governor and improvements started to be made, partly as a result of the plight of the people who had started the rebellion. Health programs were started, both related to medical care and to sanitation. Education also received an overhaul. This was particularly needed in the case of the black population. They were basically prevented to learn to read before Emancipation and this did change only slowly after that, with only about 22,000 out of black population of half a million literate in 1892 (Black, 1991, p. 140).

Even with the abolition of slavery in 1834, the African-Jamaicans did not have much to say about their affairs and the British ran the country based on the colonial principles of the superiority of the white race. The British actually owned the land for the most part as three quarters of the island´s property were owned by British absentee (Williams, 2005). This had
significant effects; the said properties became just an instrument for wealth creation. In contrast, the slave systems in the Iberian colonies and the American South had a ruling class with pioneer spirit who did have interest in the development of the community. The result was, as Sherlock & Bennett (1998) say, a society that was totally immoral, founded on and ruled by violence. After Emancipation the Crown took on the responsibility of education, but this took only to primary school for the black majority. More than a century later, Marcus Garvey complained that money and colour still accounted for everything (in ibid).

Economy

As previously stated the Jamaican economy was built up on plantations and slavery. The dominant product during the heydays of slavery was sugarcane. Sugar was much sought after and brought enormous wealth to the owners of the plantations (Compton, 2009; Williams, 2005). The good times for the economy can be said to have started in the beginning of the 18th century. The first printing press was set up, the economy was good and entertainment for the rich developed (Black, 1991). As already mentioned the plantation system collapsed following Emancipation. Big estates were split up and area of smallholding started (Williams, 2005).

The next economic development that is of importance in the context of this paper was in the 20th century. In the post-war years there was exceptional economic growth in Jamaica, both in manufacturing and in bauxite export as well as aluminium smelting. This changed in the 1970 due to a combination of factors, including rapid population growth, increased social costs and effects of the global oil-crisis. The government moved further to the left, establishing close links with Cuba and the Soviet Union at the cost of relations with the U.S. (Black, 1991). Dunkley (2011) talks about the “charismatic authoritarian leader” as description of Jamaican politicians (p. 4). Michael Manley, the leader of Jamaica in the 1970’s was perhaps such a person. He wanted to address the serious issues of race and class with democratic socialism. The result was not as he hoped for and his strategy stared off foreign investment, which has been said to be instrumental in the low economic growth of only 1% from 1975 to 2005 (Palmer, Palmer, & Payne-Borden, 2012). Brown-Glaude (2007) concurs about the low growth, but puts part of the blame on structural adjustment policies and says they have had devastating effects on the Jamaican poor. The brown middle and upper class have though fared better and even improved their positions, he says.
After independence in 1962 many Jamaicans moved to Kingston, seeing it as the only hope for prosperity with many of them formerly engaged in the agricultural sector. Only 2% of the population aged between 20 and 24 were enrolled in tertiary education and in five decades this has changed to 6%, a rather modest improvement. There is abundant unskilled labour and adding to that is high labour cost, the result inevitably being continuous unemployment (Palmer, Palmer, & Payne-Borden, 2012). According to United Nations (2011) report, male participation in the labour force is 70,2% while that of women is 54,9%. The unemployment rate is however 9,3% for males and 16,7% for females. So while males participate much more in the labour market, women are much more likely not to find a job. On the Human Development Index, Jamaica ranks 79 out of 187 countries. Central Intelligence Agency (2013) says that after having finally started growing again, the economy of Jamaica was much effected by the global economical events of 2008. In 2006 and 2007 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at rates of 2,9 and 1,4% respectively, but contracted for the next three years. In 2011 GDP growth was again positive by 1,5% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2011). GDP per Capita is 8.900 USD, placing Jamaica as a middle income country, ranking 117 out of 228 listed countries.

Slavery was legitimate in the past. Even the clergy saw slavery as a political institution rather than a moral one, teaching submission and thus maintaining the system (Compton, 2009). Politics and economics are not separate things in such a society and apparently the same applies to religion. Politics and business are still connected in Jamaica. According to Gray (2003), among those consolidating politicians’ power after independence were “... patronage-seeking big entrepreneurs.” (p. 83-4). Perhaps this is no surprise and no different than in other countries. According to Transparency International (2012) Jamaica scores 38 out of 100 on their corruption scale, resulting in them being in 83rd place out of 176 countries.

It does look like there are historical processes that have resulted in the economic situation. Jamaica’s failure to progress has been explained by lack of social capital. Forbes (2010) believes the seeds for poverty were sawn in the days of slavery. What seems to be a fact is that the various parallel factors at play influence each other, for example economic situation and crimes. Poverty can increase at least certain types of crimes and crimes can also influence the economy. For example, Jamaica is heavily dependent on tourism. It has been showed that crimes do discourage people, particularly from Europe, to take their holidays in Jamaica (Alleyne & Boxil, 2003). The level of violence also has indirect effects on business. According to the United Nations & World Bank (2007), a study showed that 37% of business
managers said that violence discouraged investments that would increase productivity (p. vi). Further, it has been said that economic growth could increase by many percentage-points by lowering homicide rates (ibid, p. vii). Then there is inevitably cost associated to protecting one against crime. For example, majority of businesses in Jamaica have installed some crime protection mechanisms, protective grills, alarm and such but also armed guards. Many firms opt to close before dark (United Nations & World Bank, 2007). Also one needs to count the cost of those directly affected, including those injured, but violence is the chief source for injuries in Jamaica according to hospital data (Francis, Harriott, Kirton & Gibbison, 2003). Another thing that is likely to effect the economy negatively is the underutilisation of women in the economy as will be examined further below.

People

There are about 2,7 m. inhabitants in Jamaica, with a population growth rate of 0,2% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2011). Ethnically (genetically), Jamaicans are not so diverse as a vast majority of them are of sub-Saharan ancestry. According to Deason et al (2012), 97,5% of a sampled people, analysed by mtDNA, belonged to haplogroups from sub-Sahara, indicating maternal lineage from there (p. 14). This does not mean that such high percentage of Jamaican ancestry is from that region, as it is possible, if not likely, that paternal ancestry would be more European. One assumes that the odds of a black woman having a child of a European man were higher than the other way around. In fact, Compton (2009) tells us that it was quite common that white men in Jamaica had black or coloured mistresses. Being of sub-Saharan ancestry is though perhaps not saying very much. There are of course very diverse groups of people living in that huge area and the fact is that the people who were kidnapped in Africa and ended up in Jamaica came from different regions. During the first 75 years of British colonisation of Jamaica, there was no one area of origination of the slaves that were imported to Jamaica. Having said that, almost all came from the western part of Africa, from Sene-Gambia, down to West-Central Africa (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). Some have gone further, believing that majority of the slaves who ended up in Jamaica came from a relatively short (as small as 200 miles) stretch of coast, close to where Ghana is now (Richardson, Tibbles & Schwarz, 2007, p. 142-4).

Those who are not of African ancestry are much dispersed, some European and some Asian. Jews came en masse to Jamaica in the 16th century and East Indians, Syrians and Lebanese in the 18th and the 20th century (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). They are, however, all
Jamaican. I believe I detected some disapproval when asking about peoples’ ancestry. I asked two gentlemen that I met at an event if they were Irish; they looked the part, read hair, freckles and all. They replied to me that they were Jamaican and their demeanour showed that they did not want me to ask further stupid questions. As a matter of fact, Irish people started arriving in Jamaica over 350 years ago. The first ones came willingly, but later prisoners were also shipped to the West Indies. The last group of Irish arrived in 1841 but in total it is estimated that the Irish who had gone or been sent to Jamaica by that time numbered as many as 80,000 (Tortello, 2003). So, Jamaicans are not only black, even if that is the image that comes to mind. There are all sorts of Jamaicans, even if it sounds a bit strange to hear a person who looks very much far-Asian to be talking with heavy Jamaican accent.

Language and customs were usually quick to die out once the slaves were in Jamaica. They had to take up the language of the master (Black, 1991). Compton (2009) says that the plantation operators even took care never to have people working together who spoke the same language. The result was that the slaves took up the language of their overseers who were often uneducated and with limited vocabulary (Deason, et al., 2012, p. 18).

Jamaicans have been migrating for a long time. The first waves were to Panama in the 19th century in an attempt to build a channel across the isthmus and later to complete it. Most of the labourers which built the Panama Channel came from Jamaica. Migrants also went to Central America to help develop banana industry, which was by then advanced in Jamaica. Already in the 19th century the highest number went though to the United States. Initially there were no emigration restrictions there, but when they emerged during the recession years, more Jamaicans went to Canada and then to the U.K (Black, 1991). Still, close to 20,000 with Jamaica as the last place of residence gain permanent resident status in the United States each year (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011, p. 10). In the year 2011, 13,636, including family members, received temporary workers admission in the U.S. (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2011, p. 85). One more interesting statistic is that in 2011, 100 Jamaican orphans were adopted by American couples, 86 of them 5 years or older (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2011, p. 35). It sounds a strange that those orphans are so old, perhaps an explanation lies in the relation of the adopting parents to the orphans; further data could not be found.

A lot of Jamaicans moved to the U.K. after World War II, both as the result of difficult times in Jamaica and because of need for labour in the U.K. The numbers do not agree, but it
has been estimated that as many as 800,000 people Jamaican born, or their descendants, live now in U.K., majority in London (International Organization for Migration, 2007, p. 8-11.).

The nuclear family is not typical in Jamaica, with 41% of children living with their mother only, 35% with both parents, 5% with father only and the remaining 19% with neither (Blank, Cameron, Planning Institute of Jamaica & UNICEF, 2002, p. 50). What surprises me in particular about those numbers is the fact that a fifth of all children live with others than their parents. According to Forbes (2010) this is because fostering and child shifting is very common, for example when the parents migrate. The structure of families is related to class, with the children in lower classes less likely to live with both parents. Overall, 44% of households are headed by women. A connection has been shown between the absence of a father and the start of sexual activity. Also, such homes are disproportionally poverty-stricken (Forbes, 2010).

Dunn (2007) says that historical forces have fashioned the sociological of the Jamaicans and “… continued their fragile self-image and continue[s] to define their still unsettled identities.” (p. xii). According to Forbes (2010) the society is generally riddled with mistrust and families are fractured. This she traces back to the time of slavery when family life was fractured and rebellion bred. Compton (2009) mentions the same as he tells the tale of the stud farm, which basically was the arrangement that the strongest slaves were encouraged to take many women and have many children. There were no slave families and he believes that this arrangement still has effects today. This is in lines with what Forbes (2010) says above about family life, adding that about 20% of births are from teenage mothers.

Jamaicans are religious people. There are more than 20 denominations of religion, with over 80% Christian. Church attendance seems to have positive effects on Children, including at school (Forbes, 2010, p. 12). Jamaicans often pray together openly. It is common that business related meetings start with a prayer, often the Lord’s Prayer. Also at public institutions meetings often start with a prayer, as well as conferences and seminars. When my company officially inaugurated its offices in Jamaica, the Lord Bishop of Jamaica came to bless the space with holy water.

Jamaicans have felt ashamed of being descendants of docile slaves (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998, 10). When trying to understand and explain Jamaica, many have used its colonial history and legacy as the starting point. The British came in the 17th century and stayed for approximately 300 years, so perhaps it is understandable to start by considering their influence. The legacy of the Spanish who preceded the English does not seem to have lasted,
nor that of the Taino who disappeared hundreds of years ago. However, the Brits were indeed preceded by other people as well, the Africans. People of African ancestry were in Jamaica some 150 years before the English came. And with overwhelming majority of Jamaicans being descendants of people born in Africa, claims have been made that it is Africa and not Britain that is the true motherland of Jamaica (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998, p. 2).

In addition to the colonisation, the slavery and related calamities, there has been abundance of natural disasters in the history of Jamaica. Episodes of famine, hurricanes and earthquakes have been frequent (Black, 1991). What additional effect can this have on a country’s culture, including the economy?

**Politics**

In Jamaica, as might be the case with other former slave colonies, violence and politics are still not completely separated. Emancipation or not, the black population newer was on equal footing with the brown or white population (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). In a colony that is run on slave labour, politics and violence stop being separate things. Violence or the threat of using it is the foundation of the society. With such foundations that had not been completely destroyed its remnants lasted past independence, till this day (Compton, 2009). As it turns out, politics and violence are so important subjects in contemporary Jamaica that it calls for coverage in at least two chapters.

Gray (2003) describes the politics of the post-independence era as being parasitic, leading to failure, including social crisis. He describes how politicians of the two main political parties engaged in relationships with criminal elements among the poor to gain their votes. Politicians affirmed so called *badness honour* and took up slang language in those efforts. Thus they moved into hostile social spaces with the objective of winning the poor over, rather than oppose them politically. They succeeded, with the result being gunmen doing the bidding of political parties with intimidation and murder. Gray calls this “... fusion of warlordism, political gangsterism and democratic politics.” (p. 84). He believes that Jamaica thus somehow found an alternative to dictatorship or civil war, which befell many countries in similar position. One manifestation of this arrangement was the so called dons or drug king-ping operating with a “wink-and-a-nod” from politicians, dispensing of their own “justice”. The government did though, from summer of 2010 engage in actions to curtail the power of the dons (Palmer, Palmer, & Payne-Borden, 2012). The situation is though still such that the dons are regulating daily functions in most inner-city communities. They have acquired power
and wealth and appear to the youth as having done well in life, seeing them as role models (Brodie Walker & Mogan, 2011).

Violence

The then Prime Minister of Jamaica, P.J. Patterson, said in his New Year’s address in 2006 that Jamaica’s most pressing and troubling problem was high level of violent crimes (United Nations & World Bank, 2007, p. i). The level of violence in Jamaican inner-cities is very extreme and murder rate is among the highest in the world. For example, in 2011 there were 1,133 murders committed in Jamaica (Henry, 2012) meaning that the murder rate in Jamaica is around 40 people per 100,000 inhabitants. According to UNICEF (2005) violence is very much part of everyday life of a large number of children in Jamaica, many had seen a dead body and witnessed group violence. In 2004, 117 children were murdered in Jamaica. According to United Nations & World Bank (2007) among the main reasons for the violence are lack of education and available work. Other reasons were exposure to violence, with corporal punishment being the main form of disciplinary action, lack of self-esteem and frustration over ones situation. Final reason mentioned was insufficient parent-child attachment.

What about Jamaicans in other countries? I have a few times waited for the check in to start for Kingston, at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. I have noticed that a lot of the people being dropped off have been delivered in very expensive cars. I made a comment about this with a friend in Jamaica, adding that many Jamaicans seem to be doing pretty well in America. My friend was quick to counter that Jamaicans liked to show off wealth and that in addition the money for such expensive cars could as likely come from illegal activities. It is not new to me that people like to show wealth off, perhaps particularly so when they have had to climb a long ladder to get to such position. The other point was more startling; were some of the best off Jamaicans in New York perhaps criminals? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to research that topic in details. Some interesting facts were though readily found. According to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2011), a total number of 391,953 foreigners (“aliens” they call them) were removed from the country in 2011. Out of those, 188,382 had criminal status or 48%. That year, 1,474 Jamaicans were removed, out of which 1,219 had criminal status or 82,7% (p. 112-113). This does tell us that an unusually high percentage of Jamaicans that are removed from the country are removed because of their criminal status, in comparison with the average country. However, this does not exclude the possibility that
Jamaicans are simply allowed to stay unless they are criminals. And there are reports of Jamaicans doing well as immigrants in new countries (see for example Malaki, 2005, p. 1, who is contributing that success partly to an informal lending system the Jamaicans in UK had between themselves).

It is also a wide spread belief that those deported from the U.S., U.K. and Canada are responsible for the increased violent criminal activity in Jamaica and other Caribbean countries. This does not seem to be supported by the data. Firstly, most of the deportees have been committed for non-violent crimes, for example 81% of the deportees a few years ago. Also, a study of criminals returned to Barbados between 1994 and 2000 showed that only 13% were subsequently charged for committing a criminal offence (United Nations & World Bank, 2007, p. vii-viii).

There is some marijuana production in Jamaica, but the country’s main role in the international drug business is to act as a transit location for cocaine coming from Columbia on its way to America. There is no cocaine production in Jamaica (United Nations & World Bank, 2007).

Some groups seem to be targeted specifically and there have been incidents of violence against homosexuals (Amnesty International, 2007). In the space of just two years, two gay activists were murdered and the crowd celebrated over a mutilated body (Padgett, 2006). Also a research among 13 and 14 year old girls conducted in the early 1990 showed that, 17% of them had been raped or suffered an attempted rape. In addition, 33% reported to have been victims of inappropriate sexual contacts or been enticed to have sex verbally (Walker, Grantham-McGregor, Himes, Williams & Bennett, 1994).

The risk of crime has effects on individuals, relationships and the community as a whole. A study shows that the risk of violence affected how often people met with other people and they were afraid to leave their homes (United Nations & World Bank, 2007). Qualitative studies have shown that crime has cost for social capital, eroding relationships, causing tension and etc. (Moser & Holland, 1997). Looking for the reasons for high level of crime, one might look toward poverty as an explanation. This is the economical explanation, seeing crime as a rational way and considering costs and benefits to enrich oneself. This does though not make much sense if a comparison is made between Caribbean countries. For example in Dominica, there are 20 times more burglaries and 30 times more thefts than in Jamaica, even if it is much richer than Jamaica (United Nations & World Bank, 2007, p. 14). Poverty alone is not the deciding factor.
About one quarter of violent crimes are committed by teenagers. Children and teenagers are exposed to a lot of things that would be difficult for even adults to handle. The result is a very dangerous environment in the inner cities (Forbes, 2010). Various researches have been done to try to understand the reasons for violence. One conclusion, perhaps expected, is that crime breeds crime; countries with high level of crime in one period tend to have high levels of crimes during other time periods as well (United Nations & World Bank, 2007, p. 28). There is correlation between income levels and crime rates, despite it not at all being universal, as per the example above. The effects of income varies also according the type of crime; increased national income levels tend to lead to decreased number of violent crimes but increase in property crimes. Other factors include uneven income distribution, high proportion of young men and low level of education. Crimes are much more common in urban areas. Those factors then reinforce or influence each other. But why, then, is crime rate in the Caribbean so high? The United Nations & World Bank (2007) suggest that this is because of those countries being transit points for cocaine smuggling.

One can assume that high crime rate can impede economic growth, keeping in mind what is said above about this subject. And perhaps this can affect those vulnerable more than others. That would result in lower national income and more uneven income distribution. Could that not lead to lower education and higher birth-rates as a result of that? In other words, the main explanations for crimes could also be the result of crimes, which would be an alternative explanation to correlation between crime and the factors in question. A third option would be that there are other factors influencing both. This is the view I subscribe to. Of the explanations offered, I accept readily the one that says that crime breeds crime. Violence today can be the result of violence committed 200 years ago.

**Color and Class**

“Out of Many, One People” is the national motto in Jamaica, indicating at least the will to believe in egalitarian principles and common identity regardless of history of discrimination based on skin-colour, classes and other background. As mentioned, there are some grounds to believe that discrimination based on those factors exists. The city of Kingston came into existence after Port Royale, the former capital, had been destroyed in the earthquake of 1692. After this the city was in effect moved onshore, becoming Kingston or what is called Old Kingston (Sherlock and Bennett, 1998). New Kingston is a more recent part of the city, built further from the coast. Those two parts of Kingston represent the two very different cultures
that exist there. The Old Kingston has poverty, drugs, unemployment, violence, dons. New Kingston has the good hotels, headquarters of leading companies, homes of the better off, surrounded by fences; Private security forces patrolling the streets. For someone coming from Iceland, this looks very strange. As does the fact that there are streets in Kingston that Jamaicans from other parts of the city would not even drive through, believing them to be too dangerous.

There are, and have been, different ways to define classes. Marx and Engels emphasised the economic aspect. Your class is defined by your relations to the forces or modes of production and those relations are categorised in just a handful of classes (Marx & Engels, 1908). Max Weber on the other hand saw class as having more to do with status and less with political affiliations (Weber, 1978). Of course, those men were analysing very different societies. And after them, the class concept has continued to develop (Eriksen, 2010). Looking at Jamaican society today it can be said that there are definite different classes as per later definitions. There is very poor ranging to very rich. Michael Read (2006) in his guide in the Lonely Planet series describes Jamaica’s culture as “… a mish-mash of extremes.” and that the visitor “… cannot escape seeing the uncomfortable inequities of the island’s wide-spread depredation.” (p. 35). He says there is a substantial middle class that exhibits preference for shopping trips to Miami and New York.

An interesting historical fact is that the elite and the lower classes also had an affinity way before independence. According to Rosenberg (2010), the middle-class was in the late 19th century systematically denied financial capital as well as political right, by the planter and merchant classes in cohorts with the labouring masses. The class in between those two consisted mainly of mixed-blood people as well as some others, including Jews, blacks and whites.

Who you are matters a great deal in a colonial country; you are in or out with the elite of the colonial power. What happens when the elite goes home, at independence? In Jamaica, according to Obika Gray (2003), groups of people received recognition after independence in line with what they had before. Light skinned or “brown” people took over political power. The founders of both the major political parties in Jamaica were light-skinned and both were succeeded by men to which the same applied. So at least some of the serious colour divisions that existed before independence survived after its arrival (Dunkley, 2011; Brown-Glaude, 2007). The brown elite dominated both business and politics for the first 30 years of
independence and still control the economy, even if the black population is around 90% of the total (Brown-Glaude, 2007, p. 40).

Race is still an issue in Jamaica. According to Brown-Glaude (2007) many connect the colour of skin to success. Bleaching ones skin is common and seems to be means to an end, those practising it believing it will make it easier for them to find work. Most condemn it though, even calling it treason to one’s race. Sherlock and Bennett (1998) say that to this day [at the time] the political and economic power is in the hands of the white and brown, a product of British racism. Forbes (2010) agrees, stating that “Colour, class and gender ensure different lived realities.” (p. 31). The past is ever present with traditions from the time of slavery and colonialism persisting. Attitude towards sex are among those, another the view that it is natural for a man to run loose and to dominate women (Forbes, 2010).

It was Marcus Garvey who first popularised the idea of the Africanity of Jamaicans. He centralised Africa and blackness, rather than Europe and Whiteness. The change, coming into effect between 1920 and 1945 was radical. One aspect of that was affinity towards African rulers. This culminated after Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, with many taking up the name of the emperor Ras Tafari (the man who later became Haile Salassie, the Ethiopian emperor) and starting to worship the emperor, the black god (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). Rastafarianism as the movement became known as is a kind of religion and life-philosophy. The rastafari believed that the emperor would lead the black man back to Africa, where golden age of peace, justice and prosperity awaited (Sullivan, 2005). The rastafaris had certain customs, did not use alcohol, but used marihuana for religious practices. Their dominant colours, green, gold and red come from the Ethiopian flag (Llosa, 2002).

The rastafaris do not cut their hair and so are still easily recognisable in the streets of Jamaica. One comes across them also in other Caribbean countries. One does see people in all parts of the world with dreadlocks, the way rastafaris usually carry their hair, but I do not think one can assume that those people are adhering to Rastafarianism, particularly white people. “A Rastaman” my friends say when they want to point one out to me. It seems that there is some form of respectability attached to being rastafari, manifesting itself in the fact that others acknowledge them as such. Why point out rastafaris in downtown Kingston, where there is abundance of them?

Jamaica can be said to be socially stratified or class divided. But does it go even further? The theory of plural societies is historically linked with structural-functionalism. Plural societies are composed of groups that are discreet socially and culturally, to varying degrees.
There is lack of shared values or “common social will” Pluralist states are held together with force and are very unstable (Eriksen, 2010, p. 57). What about Jamaica in this context? Perhaps one can see the private security forces patrolling the streets as part of the force that is keeping society stable? One of the gentlemen I befriended in Jamaica owns a security company employing 7,000 people. There are several such companies in Jamaica. Assuming the services of those are rather bought by the rich then the poor, Eriksen’s view becomes interesting.

In the 1950’s there was growing development of nationalism and of the awareness of what it meant to be Jamaican. Until that time, the people of Jamaica, as others in the Caribbean, had had their story told by outsiders, from the outsiders perspective (Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). Jamaica was influenced by external wars and catered to the demands of the global economy but the country was not an influencer. Even Emancipation came from the outside, just as had the plantation economy itself and the slavery. The underlying force behind the development was the identification of Jamaicans with their country, which was being expressed in many ways, including art (Black, 1991).

Education has also been connected to race, as well as gender, colour and class. Forbes (2010) traces educational stratification back to the time of slavery. At that time there was a dual system, whereby the children of the rich white plantation owners were educated in private schools in England. Still blacks rarely go to private schools and the poor are more likely to attend schools that are not highly regarded (p. 13).

Overall literacy rate in Jamaica is 91.7% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2011). In 1999 there was a comprehensive literacy survey done and among the results were the following literacy rates (from United Nations Development Programme, 2004, p. 23):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19 years</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24 years</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that there is quite a difference between the sexes. The absolute difference seems to be shrinking somewhat with the younger age group. Another way would be to say that in the lower age group, males are four times more likely to be illiterate.
Art

Black competence became, after the late 1970’s, a political religion for the poor (Gray, 2003). Black ancestral figures had previously appeared as monuments, aimed at inspiring national pride in the new nation (Dacres, 2009). This was felt in art. When you think of Jamaica and art, for most people I would assume that music would first come to mind. According to Forbes (2010) the music in Jamaica is a mixture of African rhythm and European lyrics. It is the mixture of various local influences connected to ideas about class-division, skin colour and religion. Hebdige (1987) says that there are influences from American jazz in reggae, with the jazz itself being influenced by African music as well. According to Edwards (2001) reggae is based on the history of conflict and struggle for social recognition between the middle class and the political elite. The most famous Jamaican musician, Robert Nesta Marley (1945-1981) believed that one of the consequences of slavery was mental slavery, which he challenged people to beat. The idea to throw off oppression is still dominant in people’s minds (Lewin, 2007).

Even if reggae is the more internationally renowned of the two indigenous music genres, dancehall is more popular in Jamaica. Its proponents are, for example, Shaggy and Sean Paul. Dancehall is, in fact, an interesting social phenomenon. It is perhaps similar to what has been termed “gangsta-rap” in the United States in that the lyrics are full of violence and music videos full of guns, scantily dress ladies, “bling” and such. Forbes (2010) says that the importance of dancehall to Jamaicans cannot be underestimated. She mentions that origins of dancehall have been traced back to the time of slavery (p. 26). Once again distant past still influencing the present. Contemporary dancehall is though only a few decades old. It is a track or two or three musical notes, with words chanted by a DJ. Some of the DJs have become known even internationally, mostly men, but also women. Both sexes claim badness-honour; the entire culture of dancehall harks back to history of colonisation and slavery. Male sexual prowess is underlined, while for some the women their body is their social capital (p. 28).

A local musician told me that reggae was invented by accident. It was in the 1970s and a guitar player who was working in a studio was testing a machine that delayed tones played. Striking a cord in his guitar, the machine “replied” a moment later. He realised that this was not bad beat at all and this is what distinguishes reggae till this day, the double beat going on throughout. Reggie got mixed reception in the beginning and it was not until with the
international recognition of Bob Marley that reggae was really accepted at home (Gilroy, 2005).

Black music also played a role in maker of ideological projection (Mathes, 2010), how could it not have, with Bob Marley singing Exodus, to give an illustrative example. Emphasis on folk-culture was though older, dating from the 1930’s, and free from political ideology (apart from nationalism), according to Dunkley (2011). The conclusion, then, was that black competence impacted music, who, in turn helped in forming ideology.

But music is not the only form of art in Jamaica. In fact, for anyone who comes there the creativity of the people quickly becomes apparent. The West Indies, including Jamaica, have for example many good writers. Like writers in other countries they, of course, write about very disperse topics. What many of them have in common, though, is that they write about their heritage with emphasis on slavery and colonialism. In the case of poets, all of them have at some point dealt with this subject. Many writers have looked towards Africa for their spiritual renaissance, rejecting the Western culture and its influences and claiming Africa to be their cultural and spiritual home of the (Compton, 2009). A major recent trend in arts is in literature is the so called Yardie, a raw narrative originating in the “yards” in Kingston’s ghettos, concerned mainly with the world of gangsters (Farred, 2001). Again, art is reflecting ideology, while being a formative factor on it at the same time.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have traced the main relevant historical events that have shaped Jamaican contemporary society to a great extent. The events that rise above all other are slavery and colonization. Following this narrative, took a look at different aspects of the society, class, race, politics and so on, and connected the state of relevant social institutions with the said historical events. The connection is clearly visible and it is direct; the roots of Jamaica’s social faults are slavery and colonization.

It is, of course, impossible to give a full picture of a nation’s history and culture in a short paper. Even less so possible to determine all the historical factors which have contributed and led to current society and culture. Also, in this paper attention has rather been given to negative things in history and culture, things that could deepen understanding of the huge inequality that you see on the streets of Jamaica today. A completely different approach could have been taken. For example, it seems that the Jamaicans are much more relaxed and even happier than us people in many other countries. The guy sleeping on a cardboard in the street
will give you a smile and, perhaps the thumbs-up and address you as if you know each other. Friendliness and kindness the Jamaicans have in abundance, no less the poor than the rich, perhaps even the opposite. But this paper is about the inequality and what is dysfunctional. This is what I wanted to understand better.

There is a common thread in literature that seeks to explain the main social phenomena covered in this paper. This thread leads straight back to slavery and colonisation. I hope this is clearly displayed in the paper. The question I asked myself in Cape Verde has a clear answer: Yes, events in history can have effects for centuries. We know this is true of positive things, such as the Information or the Renaissance, but this is clearly the case as well with the darker side of our past. Some might assume that slavery was bad only for those directly affected. And that later generations, after Emancipation, had full opportunities to live as free men in a free country, unencumbered by the past. Not so. The whole society, economy, politics, racial relations, relations between the sexes was founded upon the most grotesque violence and maintained thus as long as possible. Authors convincingly trace particular social phenomena straight back to arrangements existing two hundred years ago. Dysfunctional families, politics of the strong for the strong, inequality in economic terms; all seem to be reverberation of the past arrangement. Male attitudes towards women, and vice versa. Badness honour. Lack of respect for authority. Class and race relations. Violence. And on top of everything there is, if authors are to be believed, shame on behalf of those who are rather victims of the legacy.

My conclusion is affirmative that the dreadful things done by ancestors of us Europeans are still playing a role in contemporary Jamaica. This is not to say that it is the only reason. Neither could one say that it would be better for today’s people if none of it would have happened. Or worse. Such mind-exercises are fruitless, the history is what it is and we can neither change it, nor imagine how things would have turned out for individuals if some things would have been different. What we can do something about is the present, thus contributing to a better future. My main conclusion from doing this paper is that the shame should be the European’s, not the Jamaican’s. Not because of something that happened in the past, but rather what is not happening today. The former colonisers have to do give back what they took, to the extent possible. Recognising this would have immediate effects and perhaps accelerate the development of Jamaican society.
Bibliography


