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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Black Police Power: The Political Moment of the Jamaica Constabulary

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Abstract

Contemporary debates on policing trace the rise of "law and order" populism and police militarization to colonial histories and imperial boomerang effects. In a time marked by the renewed imperative "to decolonize," however, few studies examine what decolonizing policing did or could look like in practice. This article draws on oral history narratives of Jamaican police officers to recover their ideas about transforming the colonial Jamaica Constabulary Force in the 1970s. Born out of black power mobilizations and under a democratic socialist government (1972–1980), police decolonization was viewed as part of broader transformative effort to rid the country of colonial inheritances in economics, culture, and politics. Jamaican policemen, radicalized since the early twentieth century, then began revising their social mandate and ask who the police should serve and protect. Ultimately, due to internal contradictions and external pressures, the experiment failed, giving rise to police populism and increased violence against black men and women in the ghettos. The episode reveals how populism emerges out of a failure of emancipatory campaigns and how radical critique can turn into ideological justification. It also highlights the need to distinguish between diverse, contradictory, and overlapping demands to decolonize societies and institutions today.

Keywords: policing; police militarization; decolonization; violence; Jamaica; Black Power

Senior Superintendent Reneto Adams is Jamaica's best-known policeman. Part of a generation of so-called "crime fighters," he retired from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) in 2008 after forty-one years of service. Adams was made to retire by international police reformers representing donor states after he was implicated in extrajudicial killings in several high-profile cases. Despite his controversial approach to policing, or perhaps precisely for this reason, Adams is highly respected among some segments of the Jamaican public. Regularly invited to speak on radio and television, he always appears in dapper suits and his signature aviator sunglasses, clearly cultivating his persona as a no-nonsense top cop. The media, in turn, treat him as part expert, part curiosity—a peculiar mixture of despot and jokester characteristic

of contemporary populisms globally. Around the time I came to interview him, in March 2018, over eighteen thousand people signed a petition to appoint Adams as Commissioner of Police. The petition said that only he was capable of reducing the level of violent crime and especially murder in Jamaica—which suffers one of the world's highest homicide rates (Yagoub 2017; UNODC 2019)—because he alone was capable of driving fear into the hearts of gunmen (Jamaica Star 2018).

Men like Adams, who present themselves as bold protectors of society and state, have long caught the attention of publics, critics, and social scientists (Simon 2009; Caldeira 2006; Kyed 2018; Comaroff and Comaroff 2016). Often associated with the rise of neoliberal penality and the advent of the "exceptional state" (Hall et al. 1975; Agamben 2000), what may be called "police populism" is one glaring symptom of the present. Police populism and vocal "law and order" campaigns are generally viewed as responding to the condition of "waning sovereignty" and the demise of the nation state (Brown 2010; 2019). In other words, they are understood as over-compensatory reactions to globalization and erosion of social, geographic, economic, and political borders, expressed in moral panics and excessive performances of authority (Caldeira 2013; Jauregui 2016; Comaroff and Comaroff 2016). Viewed from this angle, Adams's persona is generic. Yet, he stands out from the global crowd of police populists by presenting himself as a champion of Afro-centrism and Black Power militancy.

Adams spoke to me at length about his experience in the Jamaica Constabulary Force over four turbulent decades. He joined the Force in 1971, nine years after independence (1962), and lived through the rise and fall of Jamaica's experiment with "democratic socialism" followed by neoliberal austerity. In recent years, his public persona had become a widely debated symbol of the violent and authoritarian institutional culture of the JCF and as a major obstacle to reform efforts. The current wave of police reforms in Jamaica began in 1998, under the title of "police modernization," but is increasingly understood by scholars, reformers, and some policemen as a campaign to rid the Force of enduring colonial inheritances. The stated goal of reform is to turn the JCF—a colonial police force established by the British shortly after the abolition of slavery—into a modern, liberal, and democratic "police service" (Harriott 2000; MNS Jamaica 2008; Welsh 2012). For Adams and many of his colleagues, however, the police reform advanced by foreign governments and international financial institutions like the IMF represents a continuation of foreign domination rather than a true path to decolonization.

Adams has personal biographical reasons to be angry. The men who compelled his resignation were "International Police Officers" (IPOs) who came to Jamaica to implement and oversee police "modernization." As I learned during our interview, though, his analysis of the Jamaican situation was neither predictable nor superficial. He presented a nuanced and convincing critique of law enforcement in the island, stressing its colonial inheritances and continued tendency to overlook elite corruption and target "the small man." For Adams, "decolonizing the police" meant something quite different from what it means in liberal reformist circles. Understanding this divergence compels us to pay attention to diverse and contradictory claims promoted under the renewed imperative "to decolonize everything" (Stoler 2021).

My interview with Adams was part of a broader ethnographic study of policing in Jamaica, which seeks to understand policing as a site for negotiating colonial legacies. In this paper, I draw on my interviews with Adams and a few of his colleagues to explain the rise of "police populism" and consider shifts in the meaning of

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decolonization over recent decades. The interviews, contextualized with archival sources and secondary historical research, reveal the evolution of Jamaican police officers' anti-colonial consciousness, and shed light on an extraordinary and admittedly perplexing police ethos: one of anti-colonial policing carried by Black policemen in one of the world's most violent police forces, which draws upon and reconstitutes colonial inheritances but cannot be simply understood in terms of "false consciousness" (cf. French 2013).

The officers I interviewed are part of a generation that came of age in the 1970s, a time marked by what Adams called "revolution in all areas." Third World nations were rebelling against colonial domination and the English-speaking Caribbean saw mass Black power mobilizations. In 1972, Michael Manley's People's National Party (PNP) won the elections on a platform of democratic socialism, and quickly began implementing reforms for economic and social development. Policemen, already radicalized and affiliated with the PNP through their trade union, the Police Federation, were swept in by the movement and began asking themselves what decolonizing the police force might look like in practice.

This article focuses on Jamaica's "political moment" (Meeks 2000) in the 1970s to consider whether, and under what circumstances, police officers may question and even challenge the social order they are functionally bound to protect. Under what conditions might police become partisan on the side of "the people," and does this make them potential partners in a broader decolonial project? Taking police ideology seriously raises difficult questions: How can policemen's progressive ideology be squared with their exceptionally authoritarian and violent practice? How do officers who call themselves "radical policemen" justify exceptional violence against the Black lower classes?

In the process of exploring these questions, the article makes several interventions. Its first claim is that police populism, like populism more generally, is a result of failure of socially progressive programs of social reform and the *reimposition* of neocolonial relations. By focusing on police practice and ideology it also suggests that the advent of conservative "law and order," in Jamaica and perhaps elsewhere, is dependent upon undermining any rebellious potential brewing within security forces. Indeed, political radicalism within the Jamaican police offers an interesting counterpoint to the more conventional theme of military coups and revolutionary armies or brigades. Police forces are normally treated as unproblematic servants of "the social order" and the ruling classes (Reiner 2010), and seldom approached as sites of political agitation, which they seem to be in this case.

As we shall see, Jamaican policemen were drawn to democratic socialism because it offered a vision of total social transformation, which promised to resolve acute contradictions they endured as Black policemen. Anti-colonial police ideology can be traced back to the early twentieth century, and it became more pronounced in the years preceding independence. Here I will follow the development of police consciousness and examine its evolution in the 1970s. I tease out the meaning of decolonization promoted by Jamaican policemen. I focus on how policemen reconstruct their past efforts to remake the police force or rethink its mandate to protect the people against local and foreign elites, which they call "the plantocracy" or "the criminal syndicate." I then turn to the way in which police officers associate crime and counterrevolution today. This illuminates contemporary justifications of police violence against the Black lower classes, but also highlights structural impediments to meaningful decolonization and the foreclosure of emancipatory horizons.

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Policing and Decolonization: Past and Present

Contemporary debates about police reform, defunding, and abolition—in the United States and elsewhere—are rooted in the conjuncture that may be called "neoliberal coloniality." Since the 1960s, and increasingly over the past decade, scholars, critics, and activists have repeatedly traced links between colonial violence, police militarization, and the post-welfare security state (Baldwin 1966; Garland 2002; Harrison 2002; Wacquant 2009; Singh 2014; Camp and Heatherton 2016; Davis et al. 2018). In the Global North, the replacement of social security and full employment with brute repression is often understood as a "colonial boomerang effect": the transfer of technologies and epistemologies of counterinsurgency from peripheries to the center (Arendt 1973; Cooper and Stoler 1997; McCoy 2009; Alliez and Lazzarato 2016; Schrader 2019). A necessary point of passage here is Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1975), written while police forces on both sides of the Atlantic were increasingly militarized. Stuart Hall and his collaborators argued that "crime" was becoming an object of moral panic, used to strengthen exceptional state powers and curb social unrest in the forms of the civil rights movement, Black liberation, student rebellions, and labor unionization (see also Balko 2014). Against this focus on hegemonic reconstitution and counterrevolutionary reaction, recent mobilization against police terror suggests a more linear historical progression. Studies have correctly traced the evolution of racialized policing back to colonialism and slavery, but they sometimes downplay how progressive social mobilization has threatened powerholders and compelled institutional and ideological change (e.g., Rios 2006; Camp and Heatherton 2016). Further, despite the crucial focus on "the coloniality of power" (Quijano 2007; Wynter 2003), contemporary debates seldom address peripheral locations, such as Jamaica, to investigate colonial policing as a historical phenomenon rather than static backdrop for processes happening at the center.

Jamaican sociologists and anthropologists pioneered the study of colonial policing at a time when nations that had recently won their independence were coming to terms with colonial inheritances (Arnold 1986; Chatterjee 1993; cf. Thomas 2012). A major concern was how to undo years of foreign domination that shaped every aspect of colonized society—state institutions, legal codes, subjective desires and tastes, categories of race and gender, interclass relations, and political consciousness—to name but a few key challenges. Accordingly, most studies of the JCF have explained their excessive use of force, as well as police corruption and low professional standards, by its colonial formation (Harriott 2000; Dalby 2008a; Thomas 2011; 2019). They thereby suggest that reforming policing in Jamaica means decolonizing the JCF.

Initially radical in its aspirations, the decolonization imperative has gradually shifted into the police reform mainstream and is accepted by foreign police reformers, consultants, and development specialists (MNS 2008). In this sense, Jamaican police reform prefigured a broader trend, evident today in the United States, which Ann Stoler recently called "colonial defraction": the capacious use of "the colonial" as a designator of deepening inequalities under the neoliberal-illiberal dispensation. This has given rise to many conflicting and contradictory calls to "decolonize everything," often without clear political aims (Stoler 2021). In Jamaica, this shift produced an uncanny situation in which foreign white reformers charge Black Jamaican policemen of harboring a "colonial mentality."

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The story this paper tells of the rise and fall of anti-colonial policing highlights contradictions and reversals in colonial power. It grapples with a paradoxical situation, in which neocolonial policing is promoted under a "decolonial" imperative. Thus, instead of treating history as progressing in a linear (evolutionary or devolutionary) fashion, it is concerned with inheritances and burdens that mutate over time, in part in response to local agency, however ambiguous and problematic. At the same time, without overstressing the scope and viability of policemen's experiment with "Black police power," and without obfuscating its many limitations, my account seeks to "blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history" (Benjamin 2007: 262) and recover its fragments in order to contemplate what did not come to pass.

My approach to Jamaican police radicalism is inspired by two attempts to think about political policing. The first is Jean-Paul Brodeur's notion of high policing, genealogically traced to absolutist France in the sixteenth century. At that time, *haute police* was understood as a means to protect the sovereign king against conspiring noble families and was distinguished from "low policing," centered on crime, disorder, and social emergencies. Today, "high policing" remains concerned with defending the state against political enemies and is institutionally located in various intelligence and national security agencies (Brodeur 1983; 2010). While we do not typically associate high policing with anti-colonial sentiments, we shall see that Jamaican Black policemen saw themselves as protectors of the state and the nation from foreign infiltration and from the small circle of families comprising the ruling class. This relates their ambiguous ideology and practice to the notion of high policing and raises broader questions about police commitment to defend "society" from elite conspiration.

Despite public concern with corruption and elite lawbreaking, and the formation of a new "high policing" agency to investigate systemic offenses (Harriott 2016; Broadie 2017), contemporary debates on policing in Jamaica focus mainly on "low policing" in the urban milieu. This is understandable given staggering rates of police killings—the second highest in the world according to some estimates (Osse and Cano 2017)—which have received increasing attention in recent decades. In 2010, a massive security campaign into one of Kingston's ghettos, Tivoli Gardens, ended in the death of seventy-three civilians, some of them executed in cold blood while unarmed (Jamaica 2016). The "Incursion," as it became known, was both experienced and theorized as a reenactment of colonial emergency and extralegal imperial violence, which demanded active witnessing and new documentary strategies (Thomas 2019). Yet, policing—the central problem—while amply criticized, was not subjected to radical rethinking beyond liberal-reformist horizons.

To pursue such a rethinking, I draw on the notion of political policing developed by Julia Hornberger following her study of police reform in South Africa (2011). Noting the limitations of human rights frameworks, Hornberger asked what it would take for post-Apartheid police to uphold their constitutional promise. She argued that, rather than remaining "neutral," a democratic police must adopt an active stance and become partisan on behalf of citizens (2014: 17). Here, instead of treating political policing as an aspiration, I probe "the political moment of the JCF" as a historical experiment in remaking democratic socialist policing in the era of post-colonial independence. My goal is neither to vindicate the police nor castigate their failures. Instead, I approach the story as a knot of dilemmas which compel us to seriously reflect on policing—and publicly organized violence more broadly—through the lens of revolution and decolonization.

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History provides many examples of revolutionary armies and brigades, but the idea of revolutionary police seems like an oxymoron. Police are invested in protecting "the social order" on behalf of the ruling classes and are rarely champions of radical social change. If anything, the idea of revolutionary policing is associated with social cleansing and state terror. This is especially true within an ideological context that categorically denies the legitimacy of violence as a means to any end whatsoever (Balibar 2016). Yet, for the police interviewed here, considerations pertaining to the ends of violence—rather than simply to its means and regulation—do matter. How did their vision of police decolonization differ from contemporary police reform efforts? Do these police officers have anything to teach us, without absolving them of responsibility for state terror? To begin answering these questions, I turn now to the historical setting where police anti-colonial mobilization started brewing, in the early twentieth century. I will then turn to Jamaica's political moment in the 1970s and give interviewees the stage to explain the substance of their experiment and reflect on its failure. A final section will return to the present to show how, since the 1980s, police populism has emerged from counterrevolutionary affront.

Jamaica's Political Policemen

To understand police consciousness in Jamaica, it is necessary to delve into the JCF's social history and its place within the broader colonial state architecture. Jamaica was conquered by the British in 1655 and gradually evolved into a nearly "pure plantation colony" (Best 1968). In 1838, the year slavery was abolished, over 90 percent of the population were enslaved Africans and 8 percent were free "coloured" ("mulattos" or "brown"), ruled by a tiny minority of white planters, accountants, and merchants (Dunn 2007). Whites governed themselves through a legislative assembly and maintained a volunteer militia against rebellions. A second line of defense, the British army and navy, was mobilized in emergencies (Brathwaite 1971).

Modern policing was introduced to the colony on the eve of abolition (1834). This reflected the imperial campaign for "free labor" and the liberal desire to wrest ultimate control from the hands of planters. Part of new disciplinary apparatus, an archipelago of prisons and workhouses, the new police received mixed responses from the local ruling class, which resented their loss of power (Paton 2004). A crucial turning point came with the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. This peasant uprising indicated severe social economic pressures and marked a novel alliance between the Black peasantry and the bourgeoning "brown" middleclass (Holt 1991; Heuman 1994). Its repression through a campaign of exceptional terror sent ripples across the Atlantic and convinced the imperial center to subject the colony directly to the Crown (Hall 2000; Hussain 2003). The Colonial Office then decided to introduce the Irish colonial police model to Jamaica: a paramilitary force, trained to maintain order and quell rebellion, centrally organized, armed, and housed in barracks (Harriott 2000). But while the colonial model imported to Jamaica was rather conventional, the decision to recruit police locally contrasted with the established practice of drawing colonial policemen from other parts of the empire so as to keep them distinct and alienated from local populations (Jeffries 1952; Brogden 1987; Ahire 1991; Arnold 1986). In Jamaica, rank-and-file corps were drawn from the Black peasantry, which likely emerged out of the customary use of Black overseers and headmen during slavery (Dalby 2008b; Paton 2004).

Jamaica's Black peasantry formed out of the massive flight from plantations in the years following emancipation, as the emancipated sought to establish themselves as

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free independent cultivators. Their success was mixed and uneven. While smallholding expanded dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century (Holt 1991), external dependency—the colony's reliance on exporting sugar and importing many primary wares—conditioned internal dependency of peasants on landowners and merchants. Smaller cultivators continued to rely on seasonable wage labor on plantations, since they could hardly survive without cash, whereas the more successful famers relied on planters to facilitate export and credit, and as a social insurance plan against periodic market depressions (Thompson 1966). Relations between peasants and the landowning classes were therefore marked by conflict and accommodation, which congealed into political clientelism with urbanization and the advent of universal suffrage in the twentieth century (Scott 2000).

Throughout most of the colonial era, no Black constables were promoted beyond the rank of sergeant. This led to obvious bitterness, not unlike that experienced by Black Jamaican soldiers recruited to the British West Indian Regiment (Dalby 2008b; Bowling 2010). But while soldiers enjoyed the prestige of serving the empire (as they still do), policemen's daily dealings with the people brought little pride or satisfaction. Tasked with quelling periodic riots and exacting legal violence on their social equals, policemen were feared and resented. Their condition was not improved by the fact that, already in the nineteenth century, crime was becoming organized in Jamaica. As recorded by Bryan, prominent offenses during that era, such as predial larceny, were often related to organized smuggling networks managed by wealthy Kingston merchants. In this sense, smuggling logwood and pimento were nineteenth-century precursors to more recent drug trade. But although crime was wielded by the upper classes, punishment was exacted on the Black peasants: laws against larceny, trespassing, and the vending of crops were enforced only on Black people, punished by hard labor and the lash (Bryan 2000).

Jamaica's colonial policemen were thus situated amidst a twofold contradiction: between the imperial state and the local planters, and between the colonial state and the population. The second contradiction is vividly captured in poems by Claude McKay, a Jamaican who became one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. McKay was born in 1890 to a peasant household in central Jamaica, and in 1911 joined the JCF for a short period of service. A slim volume he subsequently published, *Constab Ballads* (McKay 2016), provides exceptional insight into the consciousness of a Black Jamaican policeman, torn between his official role and his social affiliation. McKay wrote of "'tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within" and his sense of being a race-class traitor, voicing the fear that "my people won't love me again […] my people … my owna black skin" (ibid.: 62–63). In a short introduction, explaining his decision to leave the Force due to his "unadaptive" character, he surprisingly commended the JCF: "As constituted by the authorities the Force is admirable, and it only remains for the men themselves, and especially the sub-officers, to make it what it should be, a harmonious band of brothers" (ibid.: 8). Addressing sub-officers in this way, McKay was prefiguring a wave of fraternal police mobilization over the coming decades, increasingly cast in anti-colonial rhetoric.

The Anti-Colonial Police Federation and Black Power

The development of Black and national consciousness in Jamaica began in the 1920s. Waves of return migration and rural displacement brought many peasants to Kingston, where they settled in slums marked by increased immiseration, and were

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drawn to redemptive visions of all sorts: Black messianic, Garveyite, Rastafarian, socialist, nationalist, and Pan-Africanist. The 1938 cross-Caribbean labor rebellion gave rise to Jamaica's modern political spectrum, uneasily shared by two political parties: the People's National Party (PNP) led by the Fabian socialist Norman Manley, and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), a conservative alliance led by his cousin Alexander Bustamante (Stone 1974; 1980; Robotham 2000). Clientelism, already rooted in customary relations between landowners and peasants, was reproduced in this new setting, as both parties developed networks of patronage to consolidate power. Given few options for capital accumulation, control over the state apparatus—the site of brokerage, mediation, and concessions—was crucial to the ruling classes. It was also matter of life and death for their constituencies, especially in the poorer sectors, who relied on public works and partisan distribution for subsistence (ibid.). Violence thus became a feature of the Jamaican political process starting with the first general elections (1944) and grew more intense with the growing proliferation of weapons (Sives 2003; Figueroa and Sives 2002).

Given high levels of poverty, social change, and widespread rebellion, street crime was also extensive. Both political parties recruited strongmen from the ranks of slum-dwellers—men who brandished themselves as "rude bwoys" and popular bandits (Gray 2004). The police, still under direct control of the Colonial Office, let incipient political gangs quarrel among themselves, creating a void of where the state might have imposed "third party" arbitration (Sives 2003). Even after independence in 1962, the state failed to establish monopoly on violence. The Jamaica Defense Force (JDF) remained an extension of the North Atlantic imperial domain, under direct and indirect control of British, American, and Canadian military experts (Lacey 1977). The JDF also continued to command respect and admiration, and was, for the most part, shielded from partisan interference.[1] The police, though they, too, were trained by foreigners, were resented by the masses. Popularly known as "Rex" and later called "Babylon" by Rastafarians, the JCF was associated with imperial corruption and despotism rather than progress and civilization. They were also increasingly challenged by political enforcers in the ghettos.

Jamaican policemen were unionized in the Police Federation, which unlike the Officers' Union represented the predominantly Black "ungazetted" ranks. The Federation underwent radicalization in the 1940s when the British, in an effort to reorganize their colonial police forces at the end of empire (Anderson and Killingray 1991; 1992; Thomas 2012), embarked on a plan to "decolonize" and "civilize" the JCF. They sent a London Metropolitan Police Superintendent, W. A. Calver, to advance a series of reforms, but the effort ignited anti-colonial rancor. The conservative *Daily Gleaner* commended the introduction of new technologies—"the microscope, the spectroscope, the laboratory, and careful filing systems"—and the new spirit of "service" (*Gleaner* Correspondent 1945), but failed to comprehend why "for some unexplained reason, local policemen are apprehensive" (*Gleaner* Correspondent 1946a). It later turned out that Jamaican policemen thought Calver would undermine their demands to become commanding officers and strengthen white supremacy. At the Federation's annual conference, policemen protested by declaring their disaffiliation with the "officers' paper" and announced the publication of a new magazine for "sub-officers and men" (*Gleaner* Correspondent 1946b).

[1]The 1978 Green Bay Massacre, discussed later, is an exception that proves the rule.

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By 1951, anti-colonial mobilization among police ranks carried over to parliament. Willis O. Isaacs, a colorful parliamentarian (PNP), promoted a formal inquiry into the police force and accused Calver of promoting corruption, unprofessional conduct, and even homosexual behavior. "My activities have been to show that this (Police) is an outcome of imperialism. My whole idea is to get charge of the State. When I get full self-government in my country, I will reform the Police Force," he declared (Jamaica 1951: 14). The Police Federation, like all unions, was politically affiliated. While not all policemen were party members, they, like nurses, teachers, and the low-ranking civil servants, formed part of the PNP social basis, along with rural farmers and the brown middle classes. The JLP, by contrast, was stronger among sugar workers and Jamaican white, Jewish, Arab, and Chinese sectors. Both parties were trying to secure their control over constituencies in downtown and West Kingston, which often determined elections (Stone 1974).

Independence brought hopes for reform in all areas, but those were quickly dampened. "Industrialization by invitation," promoted by the United States, failed to deliver social development. Though exports of bauxite increased, and tourism expanded, these sectors, like banking, communication, agriculture, and infrastructure, remained in foreign hands. The top 20 percent of the population held 90 percent of the wealth, compared to only 2.2 percent held by the lowest quintile. At the top of the social pyramid stood twenty-one white and light-skinned families (Reid 1977). As the demand for labor decreased, wider availability of guns led to growing rates of violent crime during this decade (Lacey 1977).

The structure of the JCF remained unchanged. It employed some three thousand men and kept seven thousand auxiliaries on reserve (ibid.). After independence, policemen experienced a decline in pay and status. Their conditions deteriorated due to budgetary restraint. Armed with British military rifles, they were being outgunned by gangs. In 1966, during the pre-election West Kingston State of Emergency, policemen besieged in their stations had to call on the army to rescue them. Then, in 1968, when the government dragged its feet on work contract negotiations, the Police Federation went on an informal strike, known as a "sick out" (ibid.).

Police mobilization intersected with major popular mobilization under the slogan of Black Power, inspired by the banning from Jamaica of Guyanese socialist militant and intellectual, Walter Rodney. Rodney, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies (UWI) at Mona, was influential among students, activists, and Rastafarians. The government's decision to prevent his reentry to the island, in October 1968, inflamed demonstrations uptown and downtown and opened an era of popular mobilization marked by growing solidarity among Caribbean and African American social movements and anti-colonial struggles of liberation (Lacey 1977; Bogues 2009).

At the same time, the founding fathers of both political parties were replaced by a new generation. Norman Manley was succeeded by his son, Michael, who was elected as leader of the PNP in 1969. JLP powerful Minister of Finance, Edward Seaga, challenged and ultimately succeeded Hugh Shearer. Both leaders found their power-bases in downtown Kingston. Both politicians became notorious for their construction of "garrisons," housing schemes devoted to party loyalists, run by informal brokers-enforcers, and engaged in incessant urban political warfare. Both sought to control Black rebellion—Seaga through investment in cultural institutions, celebration of traditional "folk" culture, and various symbolic gestures; Manley through his endorsement of "Black Power" before the 1972 elections (Meeks 2000; Bogues 2009).

Although the two parties were interclass-interracial coalitions and began as supporters of "Jamacanization," their ideological stances became increasingly polarized as the Caribbean became a Cold War theater. As the PNP moved further to the Left and associated itself with Third World radicalism, Seaga's JLP began positioning itself as a representative of Western anti-communism (Campbell 2019).

Democratic Socialism as Decolonization

The PNP won by a landslide in the 1972 elections and immediately enacted a series of reforms aiming to spur economic development and alleviate social pressures. The government increased state ownership in productive sectors, and introduced pro-labor legislation, a minimum wage, equal pay for women, and recognition and protections of unions. The party initiated a mass literacy campaign and free education across all levels, reformed family courts and recognized children born out of wedlock, expanded access to healthcare, built social housing, and introduced food subsidies, among other efforts. But the 1973 global oil crisis served a harsh blow to Jamaica and impelled the government to raise levies on bauxite exports. The move, accompanied by increasingly militant rhetoric, caused alarm among American mine owners and their Washington, D.C. representatives. Manley did not bow to American pressure, however, and instead, in 1973, declared "democratic socialism" in Jamaica (Stephens and Stephens 1986).

In hindsight, democratic socialism appears as an attempt to foster economic development along a non-market path; namely, to use the state as a major instrument of capital accumulation, as in the Eastern bloc (ibid.). At the time, though, it was considered an exciting experiment in practical decolonization through economic independence and Third World solidarity. This is evident, for example, in the participation of left-wing intellectuals in economic and social planning. The approach, advanced by the Caribbean plantation school[2] and adopted by the government, was based on an analysis of how Jamaica's specific position in the world market hampers economic and social progress and is manifest in deeply engrained colonial cultural values. Remaining well within the constitutional framework, PNP's professed political program was to undo clientelism by increasing the collective power of workers vis-à-vis employers and landowners, while mobilizing productive efforts to rebuild the national economy. Black Power provided cultural glue to this nationalist effort, by helping direct tastes, desires, and aspirations away from the metropole toward what can be locally produced.

How did the JCF fit into this revolutionary era? I have already noted police radicalization, the alliance between the PNP and the Police Federation, and the concerning rise in political and criminal violence. Responding to discontent in the ranks, the government initially raised salaries, expanded recruitment, and renovated several stations. It also encouraged citizens to volunteer for Home Guards units, but

[2]This was the New World Group, formed in 1962 by West Indian scholars committed to the decolonization of knowledge informing social, economic, and cultural life in the Caribbean. Led by economists Lloyd Best and George Beckford, the group is known for its studies of plantation economies and societies. The group's journal, *New World Quarterly* (now available online: https://newworldjournal.org/) published a mixture of scholarly and creative works across disciplines. In 1976, members of the Group participated in writing Jamaica's "Emergency Production Plan." The plan, devised through public consultations that solicited over ten-thousand responses from citizens, was an alternative to IMF's austerity and liberalization plan (Stephens and Stephens 1986: 150–51).

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the rate of crime kept rising and the public, especially the middle classes, became increasingly anxious. As a result, drawing on colonial institutional memory and promoting a state-centered agenda, the government introduced exceptional police powers and established the notorious Gun Court, in which those suspected of illegally possessing firearms were tried *in camera* (ibid.)

That same year, the Police Service Commission appointed Basil Robinson, a Black Jamaican, as Commissioner, which caused great excitement among a whole generation of Black cadets, as retired sergeant Ellsworth Johnson, who joined the Force in 1966, explains: "Prior to the 70s most people who worked in banks were very-light skins and Chinese. Blacks were seldomly seen, the most you could see Black people as teachers and nurses, but there were some other professions that you would definitely see the classicism and the racial biases. Policeman were Black, the rank and file, but the Commissioner was always white and [so were] many senior officers who came from England."

Several officers recalled training in Port Royal, still under white and British commanders. "Them did drive big black cars, that we, as young recruits, were told to clean until they sparkled." True, the promotion of a Black officer to the rank of Commissioner did not make the JCF any less hierarchical and even authoritarian. Many harsh disciplinary practices introduced in the colonial era remained intact, and the split between officers and ordinary cops was still gaping. However, on a symbolic and material level, the appointment did make a difference for an entire generation of Black policemen who, for the first time, could imagine themselves being promoted to the highest ranks.

For young recruits and the sub-superintendent ranks, nationalizing the Force was intended to advance individual and collective interests. Promotions meant higher pay, improved conditions of service, access to vehicles, and higher social status. Symbolically, the replacement of white British commanders by native Black officers was part of a broader movement for "Jamaicanization." It was the police equivalent of the plan to replace foreigner capitalists with local owners and managers.

Policing and "Revolution in All Areas"

Retired ACP Leon Rose grew up in rural St. Elizabeth and joined the JCF in 1974, in the midst of this transformation. Ultimately, Rose climbed the ranks and became head of the Mobile Reserve, an infamous paramilitary unit associated with extrajudicial executions and recently disbanded. I met him for a couple of interviews at the Police Officers Club in Kingston, where, dressed in a tropical shirt and with "a man of the people" flair, he recounted what joining the Force as a Black "country bwoy" meant to him:

> After the 1972 election, the political order in Jamaica echoed a new social cultural consciousness among the Jamaican people … we spoke of inequities in employment, in education, in housing, in the criminal justice process, and in policing also.… It was a dynamic time of social revolution, persons [were] becoming more socially empowered, you know, and resistance. You had a lot of resistance movements, resistance movements to challenge the status quo.… I felt that as part of policing I had to be part of the change process. What motivated me to join the Force was not only this sort of social consciousness, but it was the whole process of redefining … the Jamaican state.

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For Rose and many of his colleagues, arriving in Kingston in the early 1970s, provided their first encounter with urban milieus. They were used to rural life, where policemen were treated with "respect and admiration"—always receiving a share of the crop and invited to social gatherings. In the city, they found themselves under fire, ridiculed, and rejected. Nevertheless, as young men, some cops were quickly swept up in the revolutionary spirit of the day and, like policemen of former generations, tried to square their professional role with newfound political consciousness.

The advent of democratic socialism meant that the government now echoed popular demands for change. For policemen, this implied the potential for radical transformation in their own social position, releasing them from the contradiction between the people and the state. The fear of being seen as race/class traitors, so vividly described by McKay, was ever present, but when the government embraced Black Power, policemen were drawn to a hegemonic project that spoke for and to them. This project redrew the lines of social conflict, positing a division between colonizers and colonized, masters and servants, capitalists and workers, planters and peasants, whites and Blacks. It offered a vision in which the police and the people might hold shared interests. This vision, though rife with tensions, promised to redeem individual policemen from subjective alienation, which they had endured privately for decades. Like most ideologies, this emergent one was devised to fill a gap, characteristic of societies based on a capitalist division of labor, between what one believes and what one does, between abstract morality and concrete everyday practice.

The association of the movement with resistance and rebellion is noteworthy because the postcolonial national narrative increasingly gravitated toward associating popular uprising with the birth of the nation. As evident in Rose's recollection, policemen began to understand their institutional position within the larger architecture of the state, which had to change. They saw police reform as one in a series of reforms spanning political, social, economic, and cultural domains. This required not simply the introduction of new technologies and a revision of training, but also a wider "process of redefining the state." The police were certainly not alone in trying to reimagine the state. As Rose recalled, the process encompassed many groups and sectors, including teachers, health professionals, labor unions, and university professors: "It was part of the political atmosphere of the time, where nations began to rebel against colonialism, against systems that they see were unjust, systems that they felt did not create the type of social and economic empowerment for them, and so you have intellectuals coming out of the university to advise the government. And unlike the conservative Jamaica of the 1960s, the 1970s created a more liberal Jamaica, a Jamaica that became very vocal in terms of questioning the international order."

Popular rebellion in Kingston was seen as part of an international upheaval of colonized nations, which gave birth to a new kind of social planning: planning for "empowerment" and decolonization. Although Jamaica was formally independent, it had yet to overcome traditional colonial frameworks, which continued to shape policy as well as culture and morality. Underneath their pressed uniforms and old-fashioned caps, policemen identified with this generational claim for more personal autonomy as well. Younger cohorts were excited about new music and fashion, dashikis and afros, even if they could not indulge in these styles themselves. The sense of the world being turned upside down filled people with hopes of being

heard, seen, and represented, on the national and international stages. Adams's recollection:

> There was a spirit of revolution in all areas: Education, living standards … we wanted to become self-reliant, to produce our own means of subsistence, to be in charge of our factories, our universities, and so on […] and we [the police] at our own levels, from below, started creating police youth clubs,[3] started radicalizing the minds of these people towards self-reliance. We motivated them to get a good education, make sure that you think along the lines of your own culture, how you see yourself. We were taught that we were people to be seen and not heard. This was the traditional colonial thinking, right? So, we would say there is nothing wrong with my hair, it's the most beautiful, there is nothing wrong with my nose … and so on. Our own activism, socialism, but it goes further than socialism, was that you are defining now your color, your culture, your African-ness, your own history and from whence you came.

This outstanding quote highlights, once again, the relationship drawn by politicized policemen between police reform and wider social transformations. Adams is not speaking in abstract terms but is enumerating some specific reforms that were being sought in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. Self-reliance in production, for example, was an important aspect of the plan to reduce dependency on import and foreign currency reserves, while "our factories" and "our universities," like the police, were undergoing nationalization. In addition to a strong affective identification with the project of forging Black pride after years of colonial degradation, we find here a commitment to transforming popular consciousness by embracing African history, culture, and aesthetics. For Adams, "going beyond socialism" meant learning about things African, not as a substitution to economic reforms (as in many neoliberal programs), but as an essential aspect of independence. Transformation from above was echoed from below, through community associations and youth clubs, as Adams mentions. This is how the police "at our own levels" become involved in decolonization.

Under these historical circumstances, policemen interpreted popular protest as a demand for a new kind of policing, adequate for the new era. "People were demanding the police change their attitude from protecting the powerful and the colonial masters. It was never accepted at the top but the middlemen, the sergeants the inspectors were talking about change," Rose said. Difference in rank continued to play a fundamental role in police consciousness, as in prior generations, but among younger recruits, class and race consciousness was widespread.

If there were militant university professors, activist social workers, politicized doctors and teachers, why not political policemen? The question compels us to ponder the meaning and raison d'être of policing, its necessarily political nature—ideologically denied but, in fact, often conceded. It also compels us to think about partisan policing: whether, and under what conditions, partisan mobilization can make claims to universalism. Without pretending to solve these questions on an

[3]Police Youth Clubs were formed in 1954 by social workers and policemen to offer extracurricular activities to youths in impoverished areas. In 1972, they were brought under the newly formed Police Public Relations Division and were one of several nation-wide projects meant to address youth unemployment and social alienation.

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abstract theoretical level, let us see how they were negotiated by Jamaican policemen. Rose recalled that, in the 1970s, some policemen became "activists," openly affiliated with the democratic socialist project:

> There were a number of police officers who were activist who were part of the new social order and social empowerment.… So, there were those who challenged the established status quo in terms of how we look at our disciplinary process, how we look at training, at what stage should one be elevated. We also did speak of the question of what the self-interest of a police force should be. Should that self-interest be to protect the plantocracy, to protect the status quo, to protect the particular … or should it be to protect the Jamaican state and the people?

The term *status quo* appeared repeatedly in my conversations with policemen, referring to that "social order," which goes without saying. What does it mean? In Jamaica, the status quo, the way classes are woven together through everyday social exchange, takes the form of client-patron relations. As noted earlier, democratic socialism was, at least declaratively, a program for breaking clientelist networks and replacing them with modern mass party and union structures that make claims to universal representation. Note how Rose links partisan activism to a universalizing effort to transform the state. This activism drew legitimacy—at the time, and in retrospect—from its attempt to dismantle the plantocracy as a power structure, undermine its particularistic interests, and wrest state power from the hands of a tiny, privileged elite and return it to "the people." According to Rose, the ultimate goal was to make the police force itself independent from powerholders that used their control over it to protect their power and assets. This was a question of the "self-interest" of the Force, closely related to its ability to become "more Jamaicanized … designed to serve the people and not protect the plantocracy." Thus, political radicalization compelled policemen to ask serious and surprising questions about their social mandate. It inspired them to examine police attitudes and allegiance, and to ask who they should ultimately serve. Adams again:

> The history of the Force comes out of the landed aristocracy from England, the masters, the slave owners, people with the means of production […] In 1865 came the Morant Bay Rebellion, when the Black people marched and protested and created what the whites called "terror." These people were caught, tried, and hanged by the hundreds. So, evolving from that, they formed the Jamaica Constabulary Force in 1867, with the same job description as before, only in a more organized way, with commissioner and all the ranks. And the job description given then, as far as I'm concerned, where the JCF is concerned now, remains the same. To protect the rich against the poor.

I will return to Adam's provocative concluding statement, but first let me turn to the question of historical narrative. It is evident that this recounting of the history of the Force renders it inherently problematic, as an institution of racial domination and repression that maintains its old colonial mandate. Again, this is a conventional way of understanding the police in Jamaica, shared by the public, many policemen, and most academics. However, there are ways to turn the story subtly around by pointing out that the constitutional reform that followed the Rebellion and turned Jamaica into a crown colony marked state supremacy over the planters. While the abolition of

the assembly was in some ways a process of "de-democratization" (Sheller 2001), one must remember that most assemblymen were white landowners who represented just 10 percent of the population and ruled over mostly disenfranchised, landless Black people. Thus, for Rose:

> After that revolution [Morant Bay] England started to take note that there was a tremendous amount of social injustice taking place in the colonies. We had a Royal Commission that came out, and Britain understood the need to have centralized government and authority. […] Governor Sir John Peter Grant was sent to the island and his mandate was to restructure to reorganize the Jamaican state and to have created institutions that would represent the needs of the people. For instance, a police force known as the Jamaica Constabulary Force was established, the National Public Works Agency, the National Postal Service.… So, it began a process of national institutions that would form the Jamaican state.

Rose points out that crown colony reforms initiated a process of state formation, which materially improved the condition of Black peasants. He is correct: The nineteenth century's second half is known as a period of considerable diversification in Jamaican crops and in the amount of land held by peasants (Bakan 1990; Holt 1991). Relating the formation of the JCF to *this* process allows Rose to challenge the notion that government is categorically malevolent and introduce variation even into the colonial state. Situating the birth of the Force in this way, Rose seems to be suggesting, again, that police as a public agency can play an important role in suppressing the ruling classes. Whether it actualizes this potential seems to depend on historically specific power relations, not only within the state itself but within a wider imperial constellation.

Crime and Counterrevolution

Police officers I spoke to insisted that their experiment was subverted by imperialist interests that intervened to halt and even reverse democratic socialism as a process of decolonization. As Johnson relates:

> In the late 70s the police force suffered immensely because economic hardships began to grow, and this became more pronounced when Jamaica established diplomatic relationship with Cuba. So, the police force started to suffer in terms of lack of resources, and the maintenance of critical components to support that, the procurement of vehicles, arms, and other encroachments. There was no doubt that Washington was not pleased with the fact that Jamaica in the company of other nations was turning left, and there was no doubt that the police force did not escape this whole East-West divide, in terms of the economic capacity of the country to support the Force.

Jamaica's economic hardships were the result of its dependence on foreign currency, needed to import fuel, foodstuffs, and other necessities. Global economic contraction depressed the price of bauxite, Jamaica's main non-agricultural export. Disruption in the balance of payments meant rising inflation and food and energy shortages. In this already turbulent context, Manley radicalized his rhetoric and

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aligned himself more closely with the Cuban government. Although his government never sought a full nationalization of assets, its increasingly radical rhetoric and anti-imperialist stance antagonized local and foreign ruling classes. Many wealthy Jamaicans left the island with their capital, while investments and tourism revenues plummeted as a result of an orchestrated effort to portray Jamaica as unsafe on Western media outlets (Stephens and Stephens 1986).

Criminal violence continued to grow before the 1976 elections. In addition to partisan warfare, some peculiar criminal offenses—setting fire to a Kingston retirement home and oiling roads with dangerously steep curves—could not be traced to or easily explained as politically or criminally motivative. Attacks on the security forces increased as well. Policemen were shot on guard and police stations were attacked. In 1976, growing factionalism in the Force led the JCF Commissioner to declare that there was a calculated plot to demoralize police officers. The Minister of National Security claimed there were plans to divide the police and the military (Harriott 2000; Jaffe 2019). Johnson recalled, "Manley's democratic socialism moved away from communism, giving it his own definition, 'socialism is love.' But with political violence and propaganda people were afraid, they thought Manley would take their possessions. The CIA was likely involved, once America realized the influence on the whole Caribbean, they sent CIA agents attached to the embassy … African Americans who blend in and knew everything that was going on."

Here, Johnson contrasts Manley's attempt to indigenize socialism by working Christian love into his political idiom with the violence and propaganda of imperialist maneuvers. He pinpoints CIA covert operations, devised under President Carter, to curb Soviet and Cuban influence in the Caribbean and install a U.S.-friendly government (see Thomas 2019). The counterrevolutionary affront tapped into fears of totalitarianism and expropriation, which spoke to widespread devotion to personal freedom, no doubt due to slavery's historical memory, and it played a major role in the JLP's campaign. In addition to associating the JCF with totalitarianism, the JLP also insinuated that a communist contingent had infiltrated the police.

Accusations of partisan violence by the security forces was not unfounded. A case in point is an incident known as the "Green Bay Massacre." On 5 January 1978, ten JLP activists from a constituency bordering on Manley's Central Kingston garrison were lured by the army into an artillery range to be executed. Five survived the shootings and told the press what had happened. This sent shockwaves through downtown ghettos and led to a historical peace treaty between PNP and JLP gangs. Recognizing they were being instrumentally used by politicians to fight against their neighbors, leaders of the peace treaty vowed to desist from partisan violence and began socializing and cooperating. This promised to radically alter the social organization of violence, transforming the colonial state architecture in which gangs had long been integrated, and intensifying the political moment's revolutionary potential. Yet peace did not last. Its leaders were killed by the police in a series of shootouts, which were never fully investigated, and partisan violence quickly returned with a vengeance.

The demise of the peace treaty confirms that both parties were united in waging war through and against the masses, but the policemen I spoke to insisted that not all violence is the same. Distinguishing violence aiming to further decolonization from that of counterrevolutionary offensives, they challenge contemporary hegemonic sensitivities, which regard all forms of violence as equally bad, and remind us of a time when violence was judged by its ends, a time preceding the U.S. hegemonic

dispensation when violence can be justified only as "anti-violence," namely, as "wars on crime" and "wars on terror" (Balibar 2016). As Rose said:

> The PNP was a socialist party, [that] led the whole movement of social revolution. That social revolution saw international relations being redefined, closer relations with USSR and Cuba, and the whole non-aligned movement. The JLP government that was a conservative party was more aligned with the United States, and they saw the police force as having been manipulated and infiltrated by these sorts of social ideas, and so was the struggle to reestablish what the Jamaican Labour Party would call the "recovery" of Jamaica from the brink of socialism or quote-unquote "communism."

Policemen emphasized U.S. concerns that it was losing its grip on the situation. Given the historical role Jamaican security forces played in maintaining imperialist trading routes and the colonial order, one could certainly see a substantial threat in a sudden awakening of revolutionary consciousness among policemen and soldiers. Regardless of their actual ability to seize state power, anti-colonial national consciousness brewing in their barracks poses a substantial threat to power. A pledge to protect the people from exploitation and plunder by foreigners and local ruling classes, romantic and naïve as it may sound, is a radical stance. This is true even if, in retrospect, it appears disingenuous. For it creates a kind of norm, a standard, against which police action may be democratically evaluated and which may even elicit a hope, a desire, to achieve a better state. And this, Johnson says, is precisely what had some people worried: "The whole policing perspective should be around inclusion, motivation, everybody is equal. And there were certain classes in society who didn't like that because the policing now was being diverted from protecting the interests, the police perspective and psychology was diverting from protecting them. And seeing everybody now as equal … they didn't like that!"

Leading up to the 1980s elections, the JLP changed its stance on the JCF. This shift meant that, by then, it had already consolidated its power base. Now praising the security forces as defenders of the nation, the party raised concerns of a communist minority, trained by the Cubans to carry out paramilitary terror (Stephens and Stephens 1986: 132). The same year, the Police Federation issued a call to remove Minister of National Security Dudley Thompson from office due to government neglect of deadly assaults against policemen. This vote of non-confidence, just before the elections, marked the ultimate break between the PNP and the Police Federation.

The JLP under Seaga won 59 percent of the vote in 1980, increasing its support across all sectors and indicating Jamaica's return to the path of dependent capitalism. Jamaica, like most of the world, then fell under the sway of structural adjustments and liberalization that brought steep economic and social decline, mounting sovereign debt, and a veritable reversal in development indicators (Bullock 1986; Johnston and Montecino 2011). Jamaica's realignment with the West was manifest in its military support for the United States quashing of the 1983 revolution in Grenada, and the restoration of tourism as a leading sector, selling "sun, sand, sea and sex" (Robotham 2000: 317). Tourism recovered the wealth of local whites weakened by the decline of plantations, and reinvited foreign capital to invest in Jamaica.

With regards to policing, Johnson noted, "After the 1980 elections, there was a tremendous influx of resources to the Force in terms of motor vehicles and firepower," partly facilitated through the new "Caribbean Basin Initiative" promoted

by Reagan and Seaga. Foreign aid to Jamaican policing continued despite growing rates of extrajudicial police killings, which peaked in the mid-1980s with over 250 murders a year on average (Harriott 2000). By 1989, when Manley returned to power, neoliberalism was in full power, and ideological differences that only a decade earlier had ignited social warfare now vanished. Johnson reflects on what followed: "In the 1970s people came out to question how the country should be governed. This diminished. People lost all hope in politics. As we speak, two parties fight to take state power … but the question is not how the country is governed, because none of them have a plan. Both parties work very hard to mobilize their own base and garrisons. None of them ask how to make citizens, as a whole, powerful."

The fall of the Soviet Union did little to reduce foreign funding and involvement in the JCF. Since 1998, donor states and development agencies have made multi-million-dollar contributions to the Force, and provided equipment and training, often under the heading of reform and modernization. The UK alone provided over £12 million to the JCF between 2000 and 2012 (UKAID 2022) and sponsored British police officers' secondments in Jamaica. In a unipolar world, the main object of Western security apparatuses had become the international arms-for-drug trade, itself an unintended consequence of Cold War support of covet militias and small-arms proliferation (Bowling 2010).

Former acting Commissioner of Police Novelette Grant is the highest-ranking policewoman of the 1970s generation. She retired in 2018 after her bid to become commissioner was denied, likely due to international involvement in bidding. Foreign police reformers portrayed Grant as part of the "old guard"—a vocal anti-colonial contingent that objected to foreign reforms and resented the appointing of British policemen in the JCF (a program funded by the British foreign office and the Jamaican private sector). In my conversation with her, Grant did not deny Jamaican responsibility for its social and economic challenges. To the contrary, she argued, "Post-independence Jamaica maintained […] the same kind of doctrine that ran the colonial establishment, the same approach towards the poor and dispossessed." She agreed that it "persisted in the draconian legislation in the 70s, which did not address the root causes of crime and violence," and went even further by providing a cultural explanation for the persistence of the "colonial mentality": "Perhaps there is something that runs in the society in terms of how we solve problems, maybe it is a result of history, the harsh punitive approach on the plantation, where justice was distributed immediately. This is a society that has not successfully processed its history."

For Grant, Jamaica's problems run deep, all the way back to slavery, which "undermines almost every institution of the state and of society—the family, and by extension communities, and entire societies." Still, Grant, like others quoted in this paper, is determined not to forget that "what happened in the 1970s was the ascendance of a political ideology that was unacceptable to the West. This is supposed to be a sovereign nation, but maybe political independence without economic independence is a fallacy." She added that although decolonization failed due to foreign interference and some "political posturing without backing," the challenge is "to make a shift in our mindset.… Borrowing from international lending agencies puts us in a problem. It leads to underdevelopment of our human capacities." As a leading expert on community policing and gender-based violence, Grant argues that two of the most significant reforms Jamaica can make today are formalizing land titles in squatter areas and pursuing women-centered community development. Her point, like that of her colleagues, is that decolonizing policing demands more than

altering institutional culture, training, and regulations. It must be rooted in through-going social reforms and a renewed commitment to independence.

Justifying Violence: From Politics to Populism

Despite the insistence of these police officers that violence be judged according to its ends, difficult questions about the transformative potential of anti-colonial policing remain. Given their apparently sincere revolutionary commitments, how to make sense of the fact that police violence—then and now—is mostly directed against young Black men of the lower class? How do we square Adams's and Rose's words with their actions as heads of police units that operate as death squads? Recall that Adams, as the head of the Crime Management Unit (CMU), was personally linked to the killing of at least forty Jamaican citizens, while Rose, as the head of the Mobile Reserve, was responsible for extrajudicial executions of unarmed civilians during a 2010 security operation in Western Kingston. I suggest that part of the answer can be found in policemen's understanding of crime as part of an imperialist revolutionary offensive, ultimately wielded by the ruling classes. According to Adams:

> Politicians involve, government involve, business involve in it. Crime! And the gun [flow] from America. You gonna tell me that a place like America that has all the means of investigation and the power of investigation with all the tech and all that find [more than] one hundred guns come into Jamaica and they don't know who was planning that? Hahahaha! [laughs, kisses his teeth to express disaffection:] It's just because, if it was the wrong person, you would have heard. But if it is part of the syndicate, it dies out.

Adams presents organized crime as a conspiracy, what he calls a "syndicate" involving politicians, businessmen, and even foreign governments. The latter, he reckons, surely have the capacity to locate who is sending guns to Jamaica, and what appears as failure serves their economic interests. He continues to insist that the police should be partisan on behalf of the nation but says this is almost impossible in practice: "We have a Jamaica Constabulary Force that is made of only peasantry. So we no have no Jews, we no have no Arab, we no have no gentiles.… And you know all the ethnic group you can talk about. There is no policeman in Jamaica who could have the audacity now […] to go and search [a leading businessman's] house. Even if you have the audacity, you don't have the will, and circumstances do not allow you to do that."

Race and class differences are explicitly spelled out in this statement: There are no Jews, Arabs, or "gentiles" in the JCF. There are only Black peasants. While factually true, this is a classical populist argument since, by exposing elite conspiracy and siding with the lower classes, Adams is occluding the role of policemen in upholding the current structure of power. Yet, his claim also makes pragmatic sense in pointing out that, given immense polarities of privilege and power, policeman cannot enforce the law against the elites, no matter how corrupt and criminal they are. Adams even accuses the highest ranks of the Force of collusion:

> They [the rich] can see you when you drive out of the Commissioner's Office. They can see you. They get a Telephone. When you go to them house you have to take a plane, you have to take a helicopter fi reach over the fence. Many of them have them helicopter parked on their housetop, so if them get a hint that

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> police a come search them place they load up their money or their drugs or their guns or customs goods and fly off and go a Montego Bay, by the time you reach there it is destroyed or hidden or whatever. If you start investigating, the bank manager will call Mr. X and tell him the police start investigating, get your act together. The small man now, police can just go kick down him door and go in the house and do what him wan do and pick up and even if him complain pon radio and bawl "we want justice," the next night you don't see it on TV and the next week you don't hear anything more about it.

Again, Adams appears to share popular criticism of law enforcement that it is "downward directed," falling disproportionately if not exclusively on the "small man." He even expresses his sympathy with the poor who shout "we want justice" on television. Still, when I asked him why he, who appears to know better, also targeted "small men," he said: "I went after many big men too […] but when I was there, we had to deal with many of the small men, and that goes down to logic. If you are stung by a bee or a mosquito, what is the first thing you do? You don't want to go look for the mosquito's grandfather and grandmother. It's the actual one you caught, the one that is piercing you skin, that you are now going to … [slaps his wrist], no so?" Adams seems to be saying that "high policing," policing the elite, is currently out of the question. The police have neither the resources nor political backing to target corruption in high places. "Logically," it must therefore limit itself to dealing with those who it can put its hands on—immediate offenders—even if they only carry out the role assigned to them by social superiors. Adams added, "The police must make the small man fear for his safety," as if to prevent the poor from going astray and offending. In this sense, for Adams at least, police killings serve a disciplinary aim, and may be used after other means of deterrence or persuasion fail. Commenting on a case where his unit executed four men in Linstead, St. Catherine, he explained that the deceased used to "rob people going to market to sell … and I warned them and told them we know and get intelligence and dem fi stop it! I did the warning on Tuesday and my God, I regret that thing so much, Thursday morning they went and did the same thing again, and Saturday my men were on patrol, four of them were shot and killed, so closely after they were warned."

It is easy to poke holes in Adams's narrative and scoff at his *crocodile tears*. Yet, his popularity suggests that many in Jamaica continue to see him as a defender, and as an incorruptible, if brutish, Dirty Harry type of policeman. At a time when politicians do not even bother to dress their particularistic interests in ideological fanfare, Adams and other "crime fighters" are at least seen as serving a national aim. They may be feared and resented but seldom are they accused of being corrupt or self-serving.

Although many commentators relate political corruption to political violence of the 1960s and 1970s, some scholars see it as a result of "hegemonic dissolution," or disillusionment from unfulfilled promises of emancipation (Meeks 2000; 2018; Bogues 2006). Following the latter view, one might suggest that police corruption, as well as police populism that refracts and counterintuitively sustains it, is at least partially the result of failed decolonization and the demise of emancipatory projects since the 1980s. Can it not be said that the violence that followed the breakdown of democratic socialism and failure to decolonize the JCF indicated to police officers—in terms all too clear—that the sole police mandate was to serve and protect local and foreign ruling classes? And given this, are we to expect Jamaican policemen to uphold public virtues when the very idea of "public" has lost its meaning? We saw that

officers openly admit to turning a blind eye to elite lawbreaking and conclude—with more than a hint of melancholic exasperation—that the JCF, and the whole Jamaican state, are neither sovereign nor independent. The failure of their experiment, misguided and problematic as it appears in retrospect, means that individual policemen have few alternatives but to succumb to dominant currents or become opportunistic criminals themselves.

Rose argued that high levels of corruption and political intervention in law enforcement led him to considering quitting his job and ultimately to question whether political violence was ever legitimate: "There were times I thought I ought to leave because I questioned [whether] our political war was a just struggle.… I want to say the violence could not be justified, there were no justifications to the violence. I could see, based on my own understanding of history, the rebellion of Morant Bay and even activities of 1938 were quite justified, but not this level of political violence that were fighting and pitting against each other. I could see that this was not just at all and that the politicians were responsible for it."

Rose admits political violence cannot be justified, but worries that the dominant image of the Force "as one that never respected human rights" is overstated. He and others are especially enraged when foreign human rights activists and liberal reformers imply that Jamaica's police culture expresses some Jamaican cultural defect or a rejection of civilizational standards. Policemen seem ready to concede that the police inherited colonial mindsets and practices, but they are unwilling to let counterrevolution's triumph over decolonization relegate their experiment to some forgotten past. Whatever we might feel about that experiment, there is still much to learn from the decolonial moment of the Jamaica Constabulary and from the paradoxical, even tragic, attempt to assert "Black police power."

Conclusion

How do we understand colonial inheritances and neocolonial relations that continue to shape policing in Jamaica and elsewhere? As calls to transform policing travel from margins to center, the need to specify the meaning of decolonization becomes ever more important. This paper has contributed to this effort by recovering a forgotten attempt to remake Jamaican policing in the 1970s, revealing its significance to local agents, and assessing its implications. It has shown that the coloniality of policing was actively reconstituted and refashioned in response to anti-colonial challenges, which foreclosed emancipatory horizons and gave rise to populist sentiments.

As an effort at decolonization, Jamaican democratic socialism was capacious. It worked to sever external dependency by fostering state-led development, thereby undermining white economic privilege and structures of political patronage. Black Power, a chant circulating among the masses, provided an idiom for this momentous transformation because it advocated shifting local tastes and aspirations away from the metropole and toward local goods and Third World solidarities.

Police were attracted to this vision because it promised to resolve tensions between their social position, hailing from the Black peasantry and working classes, and their social function as policemen invested in protecting white power. Evidence of political radicalization among the JCF rank-and-file can be traced back to the early twentieth century and became especially pronounced in the Police Federation, during the late colonial and early postcolonial periods. Then, during a brief political moment, a new hegemonic project promised to resolve contradictions that were acutely felt by

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individual policemen. It offered a vision of complete social reformation and made room for a utopian vision in which the Black policeman would no longer be an enemy of the Black people.

As presented here by some of its agents, the historical experiment of decolonizing the JCF sought to realign the goals of policing, away from protecting the ruling elites and foreign interests and toward protecting the people and the state. This vision was expressed in novel ideas about police organization and training, and in recasting the birth of the Force as the birth of an independent state. Despite such lofty and even inspiring aspirations, though, in practice, police and political violence in the 1970s continued to target the Black lower classes, and this disrupted their efforts to forge unity against dominant forces, which treated them as expendable.

When asked to justify their violence today, police officers apply two rhetorical tactics. First, they continue to distinguish violence based on its "decolonial" ends, associating crime with imperial domination and the corrupt ruling classes. Their justifications thereby depart from contemporary views of violence as categorically bad and remind us that "nonviolence" often serves those in power. Furthermore, some policemen justify killing young men as a disciplinary measure, compensating for a lack of resources and any political mandate to pursue the real offenders: the elite criminal profiteers protected in their uptown mansions. In these senses, we can see police populism in Jamaica not only as an inheritance of colonialism per se, but as a consequence of the reimposition of colonial domination in the neoliberal era.

We cannot escape the troubling paradoxes revealed by this case and must remain aware of our own desire for theoretical and ideological purification. As I have shown, the contradiction and tensions embedded in contradictory social relations here cannot be easily expelled. They require that we refigure the present into the past, and vice versa. Past ideas about decolonizing policing may seem insignificant, forgotten, or misguided to us now, but we need to let them inform our contemporary thinking. At the very least, this might help us to distinguish among different meanings and uses of the term "decolonization," and reconsider the social organization of violence as an aspect of liberation.

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