

## THOUGHT PROVOKING IDEAS OF THE GLOBAL ESSAY COMPETITION 2022

### Hegemony, Helplessness and Hope: Understanding Generational Divides and Recouplings

**Dominic Mills-Howell is one of the top 25 contributors to this year's Global Essay Competition Award. He studies at University of the West Indies and attended the 51st St. Gallen Symposium as a Leader of Tomorrow.**

#### Introduction

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian writer and philosopher, coined the term "passive revolution" in his seminal work Prison Notebooks to describe a type of reshaping of political and institutional structures within a milieu that is which devoid of the sway of social influence from aristocratic classes, which is often used, by said classes, for their own self-preservation [12]. This type of revolution is a slow and moderate one which could often take generations to accomplish. Moreover, Gramsci describes it as 'universal concepts with geographical seats' [5] and [6] further expounds on this:

. . . the way it manifests itself and unfolds has differed depending on the particular country or region involved. It is a process, therefore, that has been structurally conditioned by the broader global political economy, yet contingently articulated in various contexts giving the term its geographical seats.

It is interesting to explore this concept, especially in the face of the ever-looming social, political and economic quandaries that we collectively face, such as economic inequality, climate change and political upheaval. Furthermore, it provides a framework for codifying how intergenerational cooperation (or the lack of it) can drastically affect social, political and economic prospects for a given society. It is instructive to limit our discussion to a case study to develop our intuition for how this framework can be used in a broader sense. In this essay, the subject of our case study falls upon the island of Jamaica. Jamaica provides an interesting case study for many reasons: it has, as [13] avers, "delicate ethnic balances to contend with in.. [its] political economy and... [has] done so remarkably well [in that regard]"; much of the populace has essentially been segregated by generational economic and social inequities; and there are many aspects of its political context that are similar to many developed (Western) industrialised countries however much of its social and economic intuitions have failed to gain any similar degree of success.

It thus inhabits a liminal space within the interstices of the so-called "developed" and "developing" countries (at least within the political realm), and as such presents us with the case of a country with a lack of a "passive revolution" .i.e a blank canvas from which we can draw insights and offer recommendations than were drawn from understanding the contexts in different countries or geographical regions as well as past and present data.

### ***Jamaica: A Historical Background***

The island of Jamaica has a rich and expansive history, however we will only be focused on its most recent history spanning from the 1950s to the present, as it is the most relevant for our discussions. Jamaica is often seen through the viewpoint of two distinct lenses, as [7] remarks that there is the Jamaica that "is the holiday capital of the Caribbean favoured by royalty and global vacationers in search of tropical splendour" and the other Jamaica is "urban and gritty.. [and] contains gray narrow streets of oppressive poverty, communities pockmarked by generations of brutal violence. It is the Jamaica that for more than five decades has inspired reggae songs about deprivation, justice, and equal rights." The root of both these descriptions can be traced back to the early 1950s where [13] outlines that "[during] the twenty-year period from 1952 to 1972, Jamaica was an exemplar of successful development. Real GDP grew more than 6 percent a year, one of the best growth records in the world." However, [9] details that during this period:

. . . A study of 1958 income distribution, for example, demonstrated that the top 10% of households received 43% of the national income, while the bottom 60% received only 19%. By the mid- '60s a visiting U.S. sociological team could conclude that "Jamaica had the highest rate of income inequality in the world"

Both of the island's political parties, the Jamaica Labour Party and the People's National Party, regularly use, as [13] notes, "public housing [and short-term work contracts] not only has social and economic value but.. for establishing political strongholds through the careful selection of tenants." In addition, [4] highlights that "some electoral districts have evolved into politically homogeneous 'garrison communities,' dominated by gangsters [dubbed as 'dons'] with partisan affiliations." The social and economic situation in Jamaica has thus been marked by generational rifts rather than generational gains. Much of the populace living in these garrison communities have come to rely on the "dons" that control these garrison communities to provide their basic necessities rather than government officials. In the remainder of these essay, I will provide recommendations on the "micro-scale" (educational reform) and on the "macro-scale" (political reform) as a means to ameliorate the etiological generational losses that have occurred because institutional dysfunctioning in Jamaican society, and assist the development of a passive revolution.

### ***The passive revolution for education***

Education is arguably one of the most important aspects in a given society and this is especially true of Jamaican society. Education is a multifaceted subject and there are many dimensions to consider when speaking about improving a region's or country's educational system, for instance, [10] details the history and impact of educational funding in Jamaica and offers a number of models to maximise educational its impact. We will take a different route in this discussion and speak about remodelling its overall structure and dissemination.

### ***Adaptive learning***

Perhaps the most revolutionary, yet underutilised, innovation to impact the educational system is the introduction of adaptive learning to the ecosystem. Adaptive learning aims to meet the individualised needs of a specific learner through the use of computer algorithms that provide immediate feedback, and as the name suggests, adapts to the distinctive needs of each learner [17]. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, many schools across the world have opted to use tablets for remote learning [3], and this creates enormous potential for digitisation. Furthermore, it allows for the inclusion of adaptive learning to be leveraged to great effect. One of the upshots of using adaptive algorithms is that it addresses teacher shortages and inequitable education a meaningful way. In many ways, adaptive learning fits very well in inculcating the ethos of a passive revolution, especially if the algorithms used in it are imbued with a strong civil education and critical thinking components.

A more concrete example of how an adaptive algorithm works is as follows: Imagine a student trying to do their math homework which is distributed through an application on a tablet or computer. If the student misses a question then this would signal to adaptive algorithm that the question is too hard and it then would offer a simpler question to the student that is related to some necessary background information for completing. Conversely, if a student is performing well then the questions would become incrementally harder to gauge the level the student is at. Taken as a whole this would allow these systems to gather meaningful statistics for the respective strengths and weakness relative to the individual and the group. Also, this would enable these kind of systems to make greater predictions over time as it incrementally builds upon the data it has acquired to build its future predictive power.

Giving learners their own agency which, at the same time, augers well for economic development and generational gains, in the long term.

### ***The passive revolution for politics***

If we are to go by the hallmarks of a liberal democratic society, that is, the strength of a country's civil liberties and trias politica, Jamaica scores quite highly: its freedom of press is frequently ranked among the top ten countries in the world<sup>1</sup> and it is consistently labelled as a 'free' country according to Freedom House rankings<sup>2</sup>. A reasonable question to ask is: why is Jamaica closer to resembling (from a socio-economic point-of view) countries which either have none or very little of the features embedded in their political system? Werlin [15] notes that: "In the case of Jamaica, political disorder clearly results from bad governance, rather than from such common causes of political instability as racial, religious, or tribal differences." Generational gains are difficult to acquire if the political system (super-structure) which citizens live under inhibits or impedes their development, as in the case of Jamaica. More thought needs to be put in to restructuring modern systems such that the intuitions in place are able to adequately serve the needs of its citizens and not only a select few, as is in the case of Jamaica. Rather than basing the "well-being" of a society on precepts which are not universal absolutes for growth and development, it is more productive to use more rigorous metrics, such as how much of the population has access to adequate housing, the rate and frequency of crime and violence, and social well-being than an amorphous and ill-defined concept such as "freedom" which has become the cornerstone of unfettered liberal democracy.

In the same vein, [14] argues a distinction between classical and liberal democracy, with classical democracy being defined as "the Athenian conception of community or polis: emphasising statesmanship and consensus-building" [16] going on to note that "in the absence of statesmanship, elections appear much like an Olympics without the necessary conditions for sporting events and rules for participating, competing, and officiating." Rothstein further compounds this in [11] bringing forth the concept of "Quality of Governance" (QoG) which as [1] notes "QoG concerns the way in which policies are delivered rather than features of the policies themselves and is best understood in terms of the principle of impartiality" and "is a better predictor of the things that people really care about, i.e. economic prosperity, quality of life and adherence to the rule of law than any of the measures used by organisations like the IMF and the World Bank that seek to promote economic and social development." The former quote in the previous sentence echoes what Guy Debord calls the Spectacle [2] in which appearances take on a disproportional influence and can come to replace the substance of material reality. In other words, people become less interested in the policies being put forward and more interested in the panem et circenses of it all. This Spectacle rings true for many events in contemporary society, from Brexit to the rise of Trumpism. The problem is exacerbated because we live in an age where we often feel inundated in a miasma of misinformation, where part of the problem stems from the way information is encoded and passed on; it is essentially a one way channel that has come to sensationalise instead encouraging a meaningful exchange of ideas. Perhaps the Achilles heel of the way we intake information is the lack of a meaningful notion of right of reply. We lack mechanisms to challenge ideas actively and in a dynamic manner. Does a free press mean one free of falsehoods and biases? These all actively inhibit the conditions necessary for a passive revolution to take place.

The lesson to be learnt here is that governance needs to be in accordance of the needs of the people being governed. Moreover, the form that governance should take needs to be moulded by taking in the historical and cultural factors into account. In the case of Jamaica we see a country that has all the appearances of a healthy, well-functioning democracy with very little of the actual substance. Career politicians become so caught up in the *déformation professionnelle* of their job that the modern political sphere seems to be so dominated by continual spin-doctoring and superficial public appeasement and not the actual substance (but rather the style) of the policies themselves. Of course, it is easy to speak of a counterfactual situation like Jamaica as a "what-if", however [8] provides convincing evidence that Jamaica did indeed have the substantial capacity to develop in an even-keeled manner, where they note that the state formation in Singapore was deeply influenced by a key economic planning document<sup>3</sup>—described as the prose of passive revolution—originally intended for the development of Jamaica. Thus, underscoring the detrimental effect bad governance has had on Jamaica in creating generational rifts.

### **Conclusion**

I have pointed out various issues that impede a Gramscian passive revolution and provided concrete solutions through educational and political reform. Regarding the latter, let me be clear that I was at no point advocating for authoritarianism of any kind. But rather, simply asking that we re-examine many of the systems in place to be more effective at executing their intended purpose. Through the examination of Jamaica as a case study we see that we need to be more rigorous in implementing the systems that we may, at times, take for granted to work for us and delve deeper into the internal structures at play.

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