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# Jamaican Dons, Italian Godfathers and the Chances of a ‘Reversible Destiny’

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For close to 50 years, so-called ‘dons’ have positioned themselves as civic leaders in Jamaica, gaining acceptance among poor urban communities and (tacit) political recognition in the wider society. The dons’ systematic, coercive organisation of the ghetto community and the counter-hegemonic, executive-style bureaucracy and culture entrenched here resembles the ‘godfather’-led criminal culture and power of the (Italian) Mafia. However, over the last ten years the Mafia has faced a considerable decline in its omnipotence, due to increased state intervention and resistance within civil society, particularly by women in the local Italian communities. This article attempts to ascertain if such a ‘reversible destiny’ is also thinkable in Jamaica.

International concern in recent years with a range of deviant political and social phenomena (terrorism, organised crime, migration) has coincided with scholarly anxiety over emerging threats to world order and the consequent risks to the power and authority of the contemporary state. Political challenges to the exclusivity of state authority have mainly arisen from a wide assemblage of ‘rogue actors’ – Mafias, terrorists, criminal gangs and warlords. Many of these groups not only establish large informal organisations and governing structures with their own economic, security and administrative apparatuses, but they pervade whole territories within the border lands of many countries throughout the world. Examples include al Qa’eda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the spread of organised crime inside and outside Europe (Italy, Russia, Albania, China and Japan), drug cartels and rebels in Colombia and Mexico, the private militias operating in places such as Sudan, Solomon Islands, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti, as well as the criminal gangs in the Brazilian favelas. On account of existing within a subculture with their own norms, rules and ways of dispensing justice, these networks of ‘outlaws’ are seen as powerful ‘alternate authorities’ which are giving a social basis to political order (and disorder) in many societies (Kaplan, 2000; Mason, 2005; Rapley, 2006; Soeters, 2005; Strange, 1996; UNDP, 1994).

In this vein, social science scholars in Jamaica have been increasingly preoccupied with the emergence of ‘community dons’ and their significance for the public safety and security dilemma confronting the Jamaican state (Charles, 2002; Harriot, 2003; Price, 2004; Rapley, 2003). Jamaica’s dons are considered to be a prime example of ‘rogue leadership’ in the civil sphere. ‘Rogue leaders’ in civil society evolve where and when the state is too weak or too involved with other



priorities to control the monopoly of violence and ensure good governance, safety and public order in everyday life. Within the global context, Jamaican dons are therefore not unique in using illegitimate violence to gain power and exercise control of the everyday life and politics in their communities. To get a better understanding of Jamaican donmanship, Jamaica's dons may be compared with the 'godfather'-like extra-legal culture of the Mafia in Italy and elsewhere, the USA in particular.<sup>1</sup> In this article we aim to elaborate this comparison. By delineating the culture of donmanship in Jamaica within the context of the global Mafia phenomenon, we argue that the character of the social organisation over which Mafia dons preside handicaps 'civil' leadership at the local community level, foregrounds 'rogue leadership' and frustrates the development of civil norms and civil politics.

However, pursuing the comparison a bit further may also offer some hope of a better future. Over the last decade, the Mafia in Italy – and in the USA – has encountered a serious decline of its power (Jamieson, 2000; Reuter, 1995; Schneider and Schneider, 2005; 2003). One even speaks of a 'reversible destiny' for the communities in those nations, for instance in Italian regions like Sicily and Calabria. One may wonder if those fairly new developments in Italy and the USA may show the way to future improvements with respect to 'rogue leadership' in Jamaica. This is the fundamental question we address in the article. To reach for a substantiated answer, we first analyse the rise of the Mafia, subsequently define Jamaican donmanship, then scrutinise the conditions that led to the decline of Mafia power in Italy and the USA, and finally we attempt to appreciate if and how these conditions may apply to Jamaican society, now or in the near future.

As a point of departure, we make a short methodological note. This article uses the commonalities and differences in culture, political dynamics and leadership which exist between the Mafia and Jamaican dons to theorise the development of outlaw governance in the civil community. Although there is a multiplicity of Mafia groups in existence – Russian, Albanian and American – we rely heavily on the data of the Italian Mafia to carve out parallels with the Jamaican case. This is not only because the Mafia had its origins in Italy, but – for a long time – it has also been the 'winning model' of organised crime in the world (Blok, 2001; Jamieson, 2000; Spotts and Wieser, 1986). This article therefore deals with the emergence of alternative sovereign spaces, outlaw forms of community governance and their apparent institutionalisation in different national and political contexts. No two societies are more different in terms of size, political institutions, political culture, economic structure and history than Jamaica and Italy. Consequently, even while we draw comparisons between these two settings, which is a so-called 'most dissimilar' comparative strategy (Przeworski and Teune, 1970), we are aware that this comparative effort is far from robust. Nonetheless, we think that this approach will help us to understand the patterns that enable 'rogue leadership' in civil society to occur and also to be marginalised and repressed. Such patterns may point to developments occurring on a worldwide scale.

## The Politics of the (Italian) Mafia

The 'Mafia' originally referred to a loose confederation of Sicilian 'families' or 'brotherhoods', who established themselves as law enforcement squads in western Sicily, tenuously during the reign of the Neapolitan kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the early nineteenth century, and forcefully after the Unification of Italy in 1860. The Mafia claimed to be a force for law and order that the governing authority in Naples and after 1870 in Rome could not ensure. Members of the Mafia did not consider themselves as criminals; indeed they were regarded by the populace as 'protectors', hence their entrenchment in the social fabric of a local area. The most affected locales were the rural towns of the interior zone of large estates or latifundia and the villages and hamlets near Palermo, the regional capital, given over to the commercial development of orchard crops (Blok, 2001). This 'protector' role has persisted until very recently in the Mafia's 'guardianship' over large sections of southern Italian territory. The contemporary Mafia is characterised by two significant developments: (1) its geographic spread not only throughout Italy but its transnational linkages throughout Europe, North and South America as well as Asia (although their presence here is recent and minor by comparison); (2) the organisation's infiltration of legitimate business activities. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, drug trafficking alone garnered staggering sums. These monies have been channelled into legitimate enterprises: vacation resorts, restaurants, construction firms and transportation companies (Blok, 2001; Jamieson, 2000; Spotts and Wieser, 1986).

In general, the Mafia's activities include the gamut of extra-legality: extortion, usury, skimming public works contracts, trafficking drugs, arms, contraband cigarettes, money laundering and the reinvestment of the illicit profits. Indeed, although it directly or indirectly acquires the management of businesses, concessions, authorisations, public contracts and public services, extortion is at the heart of the Mafia's trade and the key to its power (Spotts and Wieser, 1986, p. 188; compare Blok, 2001; Jamieson, 2000; Stille, 1995). The Mafia operates protection rackets over almost every sort of commercial activity, extorting pay-offs from some 10,000 large and small enterprises. This 'revenue' provides employment for the lower cadres (of the Mafia structure), a stable income to support the families of those imprisoned and, crucially, represents a form of social control through which economic and political influence can be exerted over a given territory. Of analytic purchase here is not so much the tight grip that extra-legal forces have on national economies, but the hegemony they claim over crucial areas of social life.

The Mafia's construction of enduring social structures outfitted with its own laws, policing and justice systems is a case in point. This development underlines what some scholars now characterise as organised 'counter-government' and/or 'counter-society' (Strange, 1996; compare Mason, 2005; Charles, 2002). These 'counter-societies' often stand in direct competition, or attempt to supplant – in a peculiar mirror fashion – the legitimate authority of the state. While it may

indeed be argued, as Christopher Charles (2002) and Susan Strange (1996) do, that there has been a radical 'power shift' away from the state, the Mafia's historical model instead reveals an entwined relationship with the Italian state, in which, as suggested by the Italian expression 'pieces of the state', it is impossible to tell where the legitimate state leaves off and the Mafia begins. In this scenario of Mafia penetration of (regional) government, power is, in effect, shared between two hegemons (Jamieson, 2000). Each force would therefore only attack its political competitor as a response to an initial attack. This 'stable' and matted coexistence resulted from the symbiotic interdependent relationship fostered between both 'sovereignities'. Acting as a kind of shadow government, the Mafia for years had maintained order and delivered votes on behalf of the Italian government (e.g. Chubb, 1996). By Strange's (1996, p. 115) argument, so integrated into the society had the organisation become that 'the state delegated to the Mafiosi the functions of social inter-mediation, protection of property and persons and the preservation of order'.

Indeed, Frederic Spotts and Theodor Wieser (1986) argue that within the context of the chaotic conditions of Bourbon Naples, the Camorra – the Italian Mafia network in Campania, to be distinguished from the Cosa Nostra in Sicily and the N'drangheta in Calabria – was, at times, the city's only force for order. It is important, however, to question the premise on which a state sanctions, both symbolically and in practice, this alternative sovereignty. In the case of Italy, the historical blurring of the lines between legality and extra-legality throughout contemporary public life had, for all intents and purposes, paved the way for a passive acceptance of the Mafia as part and parcel of the politics of everyday life. Secondly, it would appear that the Italian state had compromised itself because – in the context of the Cold War – the ruling political parties, above all the Christian Democratic party, needed the votes that the Mafia could arrange in order to remain in power and exclude the Communists from the government (Chubb, 1996, pp. 277–8; Ginsborg, 1990). As a consequence, the Italian government became too compromised and enfeebled to enforce the law or protect its own citizens, hence their reliance on alternative orders for security and protection, albeit precarious. Conversely, the state relied too actively on the Mafia to assume some of the functions it no longer could perform. It is this entwinement, and hence fundamental weakness in state authority, which empowers alternative authorities and permits them to establish a degree of legitimacy with, to quote Ann Mason (2005, p. 42), 'non-citizens who lack a social contract with the State'. The Mafia has also been able to achieve 'consent' through the provision of basic services (such as protection) to the poor, coercion and sometimes genuine affinity or filial bonds. In addition, the Mafia gained legitimacy and was condoned because it also provided services to the wealthy and powerful.

Of course, this is not to say that brutal violence and predatory actions against the people they claim to 'protect' have not undermined and ultimately called into question the legitimacy of these alternative authorities. Nevertheless, in the main,

they have managed to establish, maintain and consolidate rudimentary social orders within communities spurned by 'official' civil society and neglected by central government policies. The Mafia's autocratic, albeit invisible, control of aspects of the social realm has succeeded for such a long time because the organisation guaranteed the strict observance of its code of rules by employing coercive measures. Blackmail and extortion were prominent among the sanctions applied, while murder has always been the ultimate instrument for maintaining authority and settling internal disputes. Although a threat or a bribe is usually enough to ensure silence or compliance and to disseminate and enforce political rules, murder can be stunningly efficacious – it automatically becomes an example to others, ensures the smooth conduct of business and effortlessly promotes the political rules. Mafia killings in general did not produce a queue of witnesses as the code of 'omertà' (silence) guaranteed that no-one talked to the police or magistrates. Invoked in the Italian adage, '*chi parala muore, chi tace campa*' ('who talks dies, who is silent lives') and inbred within the consciousness of many Italians, omertà has for long been a central element of the Mafia's political strategy (Spotts and Wieser, 1986).

Although fundamentally covert, it is clear that given its extraordinary influence on the use of public finance (public works contracts), elections and the functioning of particular institutions, the Mafia had, in significant ways, become an active participant in public life and a hegemonic power holder within the civil sphere. While it does not appear to have a coherent social project or even a revolutionary intent, by the very character of its leadership and the nature of its activities, it posed a grave threat to the rule of law and civil governance in this context. Of critical analytic purchase is that, as the Italian state surrendered some of its power and perpetuated the notion of 'shared sovereignty', it also renounced its right to the management and control of large constituencies of citizens. This situation has always been problematic as it allowed the Mafia sovereign space to undercut the legal, political and social citizenship rights and duties that exist within the legitimate, higher authority of the Italian state. In the meantime, the Mafia has accumulated capital, pursued power and entrenched its cultural code. As a tightly knit extra-legal organisation, it has been highly legitimated and institutionalised while civil society's right to liberty and security at the 'community' level has been compromised. An explicit reproduction of this kind of 'mob' culture is evident in contemporary Jamaica. Rooted in local urban communities, it is headed by *dons*, hence the scholarly designation, *donmanship*.

### Characterising Jamaican Donmanship

Drawing explicitly on the idea of the Mafia don, mob boss or 'godfather', the concept 'don' in local Jamaican parlance is synonymous with masculine designations such as 'big man' or '*fada*' (father). These titles refer to individuals possessed of material wealth, popularity and influence such as entertainers, politicians and drug lords. However, although denoting affluence, rank and authority, a don is not

merely a *person in charge*. Instead, he is a self-styled 'politically connected local leader who wields power, status and prestige derived from multiple sources and activities, legal and illegal' (Price, 2004, p. 79). He also assumes leadership over specific geographical areas called 'garrisons', hence the current popularity of the title 'area leader'. Although the roles of each often collapse and become blurred, it is conceptually inaccurate to classify all area leaders as dons. Neither can it be presupposed that all dons perform or even possess the capabilities to perform all the functions of an area leader. Indeed, some communities retain both an area leader and a don as separate individuals who share governorship over the same area. Using the analogy of a republic, the don, in such a case, is the 'executive president' while the area leader assumes a 'prime ministerial' role and is essentially charged with running the area's day-to-day political and 'diplomatic' agenda. This analytical distinction is significant because it demonstrates the radical metamorphosis which has taken place in the structure of civil leadership at the community level in urban Jamaica.

This is because area leaders were typically charismatic community residents with organisational capability and political savvy. They were central participants and leaders in a wider structure of power within the urban area comprising a gamut of community-based organisations – youth groups, sports clubs, church groups, school and youth initiatives, neighbourhood watches, citizen associations and a multiplicity of informal networks and relationships. In other words, the emergence and prominence of an area leader required active participation in the community and the assistance they provided to fellow residents. On this account, these individuals engendered the respect of members of their community and, at times, wider recognition among civil society. Some traditional area leaders remain locally recognised and continue to play vital roles in citizen activities and initiatives. Their previous political influence and capacity to engage with and impact on the community have, however, diminished substantially, having been outstripped by a new kind of leader who is equally legitimate in the eyes of many in the community. This new area leader, called 'don', 'is extremely wealthy and has a welfare system, is politically connected and protected, has the organized support of a large section of the community and a security structure to defend his turf and power' (Charles, 2002, p. 41).<sup>2</sup>

Long before the watershed national elections of 1980 catapulted members of Jamaica's criminal underworld into political significance, cunning figures were already building political alliances, positioning themselves as civic leaders and cementing their place within the structure of leadership of local urban communities. Obika Gray (2003), in an intriguing historical account of the careers of Jamaica's most notorious gang leaders, identifies Claude Massop, George 'Feathermop' Spence, Winston 'Burry Boy' Blake and Dennis 'Copper' Barth as among many career criminals who rose to prominence in the slums in the early 1960s. On the basis of their individual pursuit of social honour and material betterment as well as their attainment of political clout, heroic status and folk following

among the so-called 'lumpens' in the slums of Kingston, these outlaws are the most evident precursors to the present cohort of dons and the entrenchment of a new kind of community leadership and social organisation in urban Jamaica. It is worthy of note that all this was happening within the context of international developments such as the American civil rights movement and the rise of 'Black Power', intense student protests and other social movements. The era also coincided with nationalist movements at home and across the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, which culminated with Jamaica's independence in 1962 as well as the increasing popularity of Rastafarian culture and religion as well as reggae music. Reggae itself was disseminating a message of hope and resistance to oppression.

Independence in 1962 symbolised a significant break from a colonial past and the attendant search for political identity and self-actualisation. It was also a time when new economic expectations clashed with political reality. For example, despite sustained economic growth in the period between 1962 and 1972, unemployment, poor housing and extreme poverty characterised the life of the black majority at the bottom end of Jamaican society (Franklyn, 2001; Kaufman, 1985; Manley, 1974; Stone, 1980). Crime was instrumental to the survival of the poorest. Indeed, the term 'rude bwoy' (boy) came to characterise members of the Jamaican lower class who were totally disenchanted with the ruling system and who resorted to criminality for economic survival. Brandishing ratchet knives, machetes and later guns, the rude bwoys created large and small gang networks and participated in extreme acts of violence and banditry. Their deprived status justified their fury against the social system and elevated them as (extra-legal) symbols of emerging subaltern power. The immortalisation of a 'rudie culture' saw violence also employed as an instrument of political protest. In other words, criminality jelled with politics as thugs became political enforcers and contractors and effectively defined post-independence political organisation of the urban community. In what many commentators saw as (political party) 'civil wars', slum dwellers closed ranks around the poles of the Jamaica's political divide – the socialist-oriented People's National party (PNP) and the right-wing Jamaica Labour party (JLP) and behind politically recruited rebel leaders.

This 'tribal' politics encouraged in the slums a sort of 'top-ranking' leadership comprising those who were able to gain promotion to the ranks of political enforcer and acquire the requisite political clout and protection (Charles, 2002; Gray 2003; Rapley, 2003). These political mercenaries did not belong to a centralised leadership structure. Much like the urban-based Neapolitan Camorra, this absence of centralised leadership within the Jamaican slum community for twenty years (1960–80) promulgated a clan-based structure of power run by urban gang leaders. They fostered dynamic interdependent relationships with the political system which allowed them access to institutional channels of survival and political clout. It is this arrangement which really conferred dons with much credibility and power within the local community. Certainly, their capacity for murderous brutality and their enduring reputation as (political) mercenaries



cemented their power within the social space of the ghetto and their hold on civil society. Radical shifts in the global economy after 1980 were to alter even further the political dynamics of community organisation in the Jamaican slum, making way for the consolidation of a notorious dynasty of dons and the retreat of civil leadership. We now look more closely at the manifestations of 'rogue rule' in Jamaican civil society.

### *The 'Presidential' Rule of Garrisons*

Willie [Haggart] was a *Godfather* to the youths in the area. He helped to send a lot of kids to school, he had businesses, him employ youths from the area, and he was involved in contract work which helped a lot of unemployed man get jobs (Claude Mills, 2001, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, 20 May 2001).

A don really and truly is the government around here. Take for example Tivoli [referring to the West Kingston community of Tivoli Gardens] and Dudus [reputed 'don' of Tivoli] – rape, no, we don't work with that around here; robbery, no, we don't work with that, those kinds of things. Everybody just meet under *one order* and those who come to upset that *order* – well, you have to make up your mind. The sheriff [referring to Dudus] is in town (emphases added).<sup>3</sup>

Not unlike the Italian Mafia 'godfather', Willie Haggart – the deceased area leader of Lincoln Crescent in South St Andrew and the inner city clique, Black Roses Crew (read as gang) – alongside his counterparts 'Zekes' and 'Dudus', exemplify the cadre of prominent citizens who emerged after 1980 with menacing authority in Jamaican inner-city communities, some of which have acquired the notorious label 'garrisons'. To comprehend fully the new style of social arrangement and community governance they enacted in the context of Jamaica's highly charged political culture and socio-political environment, one must first come to grips with the emergence of the alternative sovereign space or autocratic site of socio-political action as embedded in the whole garrison phenomenon:

A garrison is a political stronghold, a veritable fortress completely controlled by the dominant [political] party. Any significant social, political, economic or cultural development within the garrison can only take place with the tacit approval of the leadership (local or national) of the dominant party. The garrison is therefore, in its extreme form, a totalitarian social space in which the lives of those who live within its boundaries are effectively controlled. Indeed, the core garrison exhibits an element of extraterritoriality, they are states within a state (Figueroa, 1994, p. 6).

These rigidly defined zones, popular among them the Tivoli Gardens, Jungle, Rema, Payne Land, Jones Town, Grant's Pen and Backbush garrison communities, had their fateful beginnings, according to Obika Gray (2003, p. 13), as early as the 1940s when Jamaica's two principal political parties, the JLP and the PNP, 'recruited ruffians, worthies and other notables from the ghetto as partisans for their [electoral] cause'. The presence of dons and the impact of garrisons on Jamaican electoral politics continued to intensify but was only 'officially' acknowl-

edged nearly 50 years later, after the volatile 1980 general elections took the lives of over 800 citizens in campaign violence alone. Current scholarship boldly links the institutionalisation of garrison communities to the drive by politicians assigned to these belts to win elections and guarantee the continued electoral loyalty of voters. According to the dynamics of the politics of patron clientelism (Stone, 1980), the construction of large-scale housing solutions was the irresistible offer to inner-city residents as barter for their electoral and political support. This vote seeking through resource distributions became an ingrained aspect of Jamaica's political culture, driven by the systematic and strategic dispersal of state-sponsored largesse (money, contracts, land and jobs) in a discriminatory and politically partisan fashion within the inner city.

This political strategy, usually employed by the Member of Parliament to augment his or her party's support base and mass appeal, is designed to keep the party supporters faithful and entice rival supporters to switch allegiances. Like the Italian Mafiosi, who obtained public works contracts and employment for their clients in government agencies, in exchange for delivering votes, Jamaica's dons form the core of political leadership and organisation at the community level. Politicians delegate to them the functions of encouraging voter loyalty and unseating opponents. State funds are often discharged to dons under the guise of initiating development projects such as house building, restoring derelict state properties, school repairs, renovating sidewalks, drainage and gully cleaning and sometimes the staging of 'community' events such as dances. In order to ensure that their respective parties hold the cash cow over the next few years, dons enforce territorial and political allegiance on those domiciled within garrisons by employing fierce violence, intimidation and fraud. In return for constructing communities and constituencies that are essentially homogeneous in their overt political behaviour, a don secures for himself legitimacy, prestige, status, wealth and assurance from his political patron of protection from the law (Rapley, 2003; Charles, 2002; Figueroa, 1994).

Indeed, so intertwined within the fabric of Jamaican politics and society had rogue actors become that, in recent years, high-ranking ministers and political officials were to be seen in attendance at the funerals of prominent dons, some of whose memorial services received official state authorisation to be held at the National Arena, a recognised venue ordinarily reserved for public events (Ritch, 2001).

By employing similar economic organisation and effectively replicating the criminal tactics of the globalised Mafia, Jamaican dons are today multi-millionaires, accumulating significant wealth from three broad streams of organised crime: (1) illicit trafficking in narcotics, guns and contraband; (2) money laundering, fraud and reinvestment of illicit profits into the formal economy; and (3) extortion, especially the skimming of public works contracts, illegal gambling and burglary. Like the Mafia, extortion is big business for Jamaican dons. It is a critical mainstay of their capital base, pulling in an estimated yearly income of up to J\$400 million (€4,787,175.23; US\$6,066,580.72), and it provides steady employment and income

for the 'generals' and 'shottas' (shooters) in the structure of command (Henry, 2000; Mills, 2000). The politics of extortion is analytically significant as it provides a window to the dons' economic power and makes clear the fundamental role it plays in their control of the social space. Highly organised and flourishing, the extortion scheme in urban Jamaica is most acute in the Red Hills Road and business district areas of downtown Kingston. Extortion often disguises itself as a form of civic enterprise, a 'charity' or 'community development effort' where monies are demanded 'to assist the youths in the area' or youths who are in prison, but ultimately it involves the collection of 'taxes' (cash or merchandise) from merchants, market higglers and street vendors. Street vendors are forced to pay up to J\$500 (€6; US\$8) weekly while larger retailers can be charged as much as J\$40,000–\$50,000 (€479–598.23; US\$607–758.23) monthly (Mills, 2000).

It also masks a sort of 'unofficial' security industry, whereby money is paid for the protection of municipal buildings and private businesses by higglers wishing to lessen the propensity of being robbed. The problem of extortion has raised the issue of business ethics as an area of concern in Jamaica. In a fascinating exploratory piece for the *Jamaica Gleaner*, reporters Claude Mills and Balford Henry argue that the extortion industry has the tacit support of Jamaican state and business persons, from whom monies are being solicited. Their research shows that the Jamaican government, through the established municipal authority – Kingston and St Andrew Corporation (KSAC), often disburses hefty sums – up to J\$3.1 m (€35,912.78; US\$45,499.36) to dons in 2001, to undertake the refurbishing of markets in the 'downtown' business district. In other instances, they are contracted to provide/arrange the security detail for the markets, construction sites of development projects and/or assist with the relocation of vendors in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) at a bi-weekly cost of half a million dollars. Local council revenue such as that accrued from the 'rent' paid by motorists for public parking spaces also rests in the pockets of dons (see Mills, 2000, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, September 1; Henry, 2000, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, January 31). These illicit practices have become entrenched because the dons ensure compliance by vandalising, burglarising or killing those unwilling to abide by the rules of this extra-legal economic system. A total of ten businessmen were killed between 1993 and 2003 for reportedly refusing to comply with the demands of extortionists (see Mills, 2000, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, September 1; Henry, 2000, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, January 31). Dons have thus become established patrons in their own right, with connection and clout, and thereby claim the right to autonomous governance of the urban community. Within the context of this kind of garrisonisation of the urban neighbourhood, one is in effect a prisoner, a hostage to the don. We look briefly at how this system of (outlaw) governance works.

### *In the Courtyard of Dons*

Community donmanship represents the ghetto's version of a feudal monarchy. Here, the maximum leader, like the Mafia boss, is the don who is surrounded by

a handpicked band of elite generals and *shottas*. The exception, which carries significant purchase in the conceptualisation of 'rogue leadership', is that unlike the party boss, the don is not bounded by legality, human rights or the rules of democratic participation. He may instead traverse between the realms of legality and illegality according to his own whim. Like the Mafia boss or party maximum leader, it is the don who takes critical decisions concerning the running of the community. These include its guiding principles, laws and rules and the penalties for breach of those rules, the staging of events and the implementation of development projects. Justice, security of person and property and the preservation of order, which are emphasised as central elements of a strong state, are also crucial to the leadership of the garrison community.

Retaining control over ready militias and large criminal organisations, dons usually have a personal stake in successfully defending the community from rival political or criminal gangs and 'protecting' its members from the police and punishment from legitimate state authority. By recycling some of the proceeds of their criminal work, dons have also effectively delegated to themselves the state functions of 'welfare' within garrison communities. From organising 'bashment' bus rides and beach trips, dancehall sessions and kids' treats to paying tuition fees, buying school uniforms and books as well as providing employment to youths, the civic charity of the Jamaican don is undeniable. The benefits of living under the rule of a don are not necessarily manifested individually. One gains simply by being a member of a particular community, participating in its activities and accepting its norms. These benefits include living in a government house rent/mortgage free or without a registered title to the premises and never having to pay electricity or water bills. As one insider of the inner city told the first author:

If you check Jones Town, Tivoli Gardens, Arnett Gardens, Hannah Town, you find that if a resident dies, then there might be some sort of a raffle held to determine who should get the house which is left behind. There are times when the dons arbitrate in this matter. If there is a family member living in the community and he has children, naturally the house will be given to the children but if he alone lives there, the house will be handed down, whether you like it or not, to anyone who need it more. So sometimes there is a jostling for tenancy. The community often respects the decision and the decision is final (Personal Communication, 2004; compare Charles, 2002; Rapley, 2003).

Dons also derive benefits and legitimacy from constructing and maintaining strong bonds and affective ties with community members. Indeed, the violent protests staged by massive numbers of inner-city residents in September 1998 on behalf of Mathews Lane don, Donald Phipps (aka 'Zekes') were motivated, in part, by the strong emotional attachments and sentiment that residents felt towards him. This was expressed in seemingly genuine fear of his potential mistreatment in detention by the police (see Charles, 2002; Johnson, 2005a; Price, 2004). It is worthy of note that part of this affinity stems from the don's

personal affluence and his capacity to extend welfare to members of his community. Conditions of squalor, violence, fear, unemployment and profound material deprivation characterise garrison communities, thus intensifying the needs of citizens for protection and economic security. The awareness that these benefits may only be derived from their patron–client contract with dons forces some slum dwellers to depend exclusively on ‘handouts’ and to become fiercely loyal to the proverbial hand that feeds them.

However, although significant, wealth and kinship ties are not the only weapons in the armoury of tools used by the dons to keep their power concentrated and residents compliant. Of theoretical and political significance is their heavy-handedness when undertaking social arbitration and dispensing justice in the civil sphere. Rather than the legitimate state authority, embodied in the police, crimes within the garrison are reported to the don. Disputes over social interactions, financial transactions and domestic relationships are mediated and settled personally and according to the entrenched norms and rules of the community. As a counter to the slowness of law enforcement and the elusiveness of ‘justice’ in mainstream society, justice in the garrison is swift. Our empirical research coincides with prevailing scholarship which reveals that a sort of ‘kangaroo court’ or ‘street corner’ court is usually established in which the dons assume the twin roles of judge and jury. In this fabricated judicial system, a chicken coop is used as a ‘holding cell’, where the accused is detained while the don, who also adopts the police function, investigates. The individual is then tried and invariably found guilty. Punishment is the task of the lower command of *shottas*. Severe infractions such as theft, disobeying or ‘dissing’ (disrespecting) the don and rape may attract a severe beating or the death penalty. Women in particular champion this extra-judicial system because they tend to be most vulnerable to criminals and rapists and are often spared the lengthy investigations and trauma that attend the formal system (Charles, 2002; interview, 2004).

It is worth noting here that high levels of corruption within the Jamaica Constabulary Force as well as persistent reports of ‘police brutality’ and excessive use of force have not only sullied the credibility of the police in the eyes of the Jamaican public but consolidated the role of dons. For example, some constables have become major players in the international drug trafficking industry while an implicit, sinister covenant appears to have developed in some urban communities between the police and dons (Johnson, 2005a; compare Harriot, 2003). Former Senior Superintendent of Police, Reneto Adams, acknowledged this extraordinary situation when he argued that ‘every police station has a don in close proximity as if they are a contending force. Some have control over the particular stations and its members and I have problems executing my job consistent with the law in these circumstances’ (quoted by Balford Henry, 2000, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, 31 January). Indeed, it is now established that ‘provided the dons preserve order within the community, the police will turn a blind eye to the drug trade’ (Rapley, 2003, p. 28).

This brand of community leadership, however, disguises a more menacing reality. Although it retains the confidence of some constituents, this type of 'jungle justice' is not always equitably distributed or executed. For example, it does not apply to the dons or their generals. Our research reveals that although the dons, in the main, protect women from rapists, they can and do arbitrarily select women for sexual relations and, in some cases, oblige mothers tacitly to barter their daughters during negotiations of economic assistance. Further, communities such as Tivoli Gardens, headed by self-styled don, 'Dudus' (aka 'the President'), may therefore appear 'crime free' only because they are run under a contrived style of community bureaucracy which the *shottas* the first author interviewed label 'one order': 'everybody just meet under *one order* and those who come to upset that *order* – well, you have to make up your mind. The sheriff [referring to the don] is in town (interview, April 2004, emphases added).

We use the term contrived because the term 'one order' or 'oneness' is customarily used by the Jamaican Rastafarian sect to refer to an atmosphere of 'peace, love and unity'. It is, however, transliterated in the context of the garrison to suggest the military-like imposition upon the community of a similar kind of pact. According to the unwritten, non-verbalised rules of this 'peace pact', acts of deviance are perceived to be an affront to the don and his governorship and are hence avoided. In this sense, the reverence in which community members hold the don serves as a ready deterrent to crime and maintains order. Residents, in other words, respect the don and largely display a willingness to abide by the community's rules because behaviour is regulated through force and the threat of force.

Additionally, the long-standing phenomenon which we describe as 'informer phobia' (IP) ensures that the community remains a hostage to the rule of the don. Operating in like fashion to the Italian Mafia's 'omertà', IP is a less visible but most potent governing tool in the arsenal of the Jamaican don. Informer phobia is a fear of providing or being perceived as providing information to state authority, particularly the police and increasingly to journalists. Extra-legal activities often go unreported because community members fear the consequences which include being 'burned out' of their homes or death. Aided by the cultural censure of the act of 'informing', embodied in the lyrical output of many Jamaican entertainers, informer phobia covers conversing with a police officer or visiting a police station as well as the very act of 'getting involved' in the legal system. This can range from being a witness to a crime, giving statements to the police, pressing charges, assuming jury duty or attending court to give testimony. Our research also reveals the working of a 'buy a crowd' phenomenon whereby residents are rounded up and ordered on to the streets to protest on behalf of *shottas* or as a means to camouflage criminal actions (see Johnson, 2005a). It is within this realm of autocratic control that the global Mafia and the Jamaican dons are most akin. But times are changing: over the last two decades the Mafia in both Italy and the USA has lost substantial shares of its omnipotence.

## A 'Reversible Destiny' in Italy and the USA

Especially during the last decade of the twentieth century considerable changes have taken place in the way state authorities and civil societies in Italy and the USA have coped with the impact of the Mafia on politics, the economy, the justice system and general criminality. These shifts in power and reach have been so dramatic and comprehensive that one author speaks of the 'decline of the American Mafia' (Reuter, 1995) and other well-known scholars in the field (Schneider and Schneider, 2003; 2005) – make claims of a 'reversible destiny' in Italian regions like Sicily and Calabria.

Since the late 1980s, in the USA especially, the altered structures and performance of politics and policing have led to a significant loss of power of the American urban Mafia (Reuter, 1995). At roughly the same time, the Italian state mounted a serious challenge to the Mafia, in response to which Mafiosi gruesomely attacked the symbols and representatives of the state. A war between the Mafia and the state as well as increasing infighting between rival Mafia 'families' ensued (Blok, 2001, p. 97; Chubb, 1996; Jamieson, 2000, pp. 200–35; Stille, 1995). This (internal) strife led to at least 400 Mafiosi who turned state's witness, ironically labelled *pentiti* (penitents), testifying against other Mafiosi. At the same time, these internal and external battles generated a palpable exhaustion with 'mob' violence among the Italian public and a powerful resentment against the Mafia, even from within its own ranks. Although in the early days of the anti-Mafia movement, some 'justice collaborators' were on the losing side of the internal Mafia war (Siebert, 1996), a small number of former Mafia women – mothers, sisters and daughters – became state's evidence, often after suffering the loss of a loved one and risking their own safety (Fabj, 1998; Siebert, 1996). As a consequence of these dramatic developments, many Mafiosi, including 'top brass' godfathers, were prosecuted and sentenced to tens of years of imprisonment. Arrests for membership in a Mafia-type organisation increased from 874 in 1991 to a record high of 2,136 in 1994, still being high at 1,324 in 1997 (Jamieson, 2000, p. 231). Since that time, the prosecutorial arm of the legal authorities in Sicily has become much stronger, particularly in light of the fact that the rumours that once destabilised their operations are no longer pervasive. The arrest of Mafia capo Bernardo Provenzano in March 2006 – after having been wanted by the police for more than 40 years – again illustrates the urge with which the Italian legal authorities now want to terminate the impact of criminal power.

The Mafia's once secure connections with Italian politics have come under public scrutiny, contributing to the fall of once powerful politicians, such as former prime minister Andreotti. Although extortion practices continue to exist in Sicily and other regions in southern Italy, it is now illegal for businesspeople confronted with these practices to pay the tribute and withhold testimony. If these laws are breached, businesspeople run the risk of being charged as Mafia collaborators. Importantly, the state now claims that the victims of extortion can trust the police

and the judiciary to protect them. Even though the Mafia pursues its extra-legal activities, these operations are conducted in a covert and far less sizeable way, because the organisation is devoid of the legitimacy it once enjoyed (Jamieson, 2000; Schneider and Schneider, 2003, pp. 291–303).

Unquestionably, the situation is still precarious: extortion practices continue and the Mafia's international and transnational linkages are still viable and continue to spread all over the globe. Mafiosi still try to seek political allies, and experts believe the Italian Mafia may rise again, if the current anti-Mafia climate becomes less repressive (e.g. Jamieson, 2000). Nonetheless, important results have been achieved: the Mafia has been 'extinguished as a major actor in the United States' criminal world' (Reuter, 1995, p. 89), whereas in the eyes of many international leaders, Palermo, Sicily's capital city, has become a global model and a promising if tenuous success story for anti-Mafia campaigns (Schneider and Schneider, 2003, pp. 284–8, p. 301). Whether the decline of the Italian Mafia is structural and complete, or merely cyclical (showing potential for resurgence) is, at present, difficult to deduce (Varese, 2006). Certainly, the passing of anti-Mafia legislation, state crackdown *vis-à-vis* the Italian police and greater transparency in the operation of local politics represent the kind of fundamental and systemic changes which are indispensable in bringing about the structural and enduring decline of the Mafia. Are these developments an indication of its diminishing global power? Perhaps not. Indeed, it is worth noting that at a global level, the Mafia is often compensated by other players in the field of organised crime (Albanian and Russian Mafia, Chinese triads, Colombian drug lords and Japanese yakuza), some of whom are operating in low-profile and/or invisible ways. In this sense, the decline of the Mafia would perhaps be more accurately regarded as more cyclical in nature. Yet the downturn of the (Italian and American) Mafia, particularly in light of the way that the world has known this phenomenon for so long, cannot be denied. How was this possible, in such a short time and against such a powerful, long-standing and seemingly entrenched criminal culture?

First of all, it must be noted that – contrary to common opinion – the Mafia in Italy and elsewhere has never been the result of an ingrained, homogeneous 'culture' in the areas concerned. There has always been a plurality of cultures in the regions in question, including middle-class artisans and intellectuals who have never been Mafia friendly (Schneider and Schneider, 2005). Also, game-theoretical analyses suggest that the Mafia could never have been completely successful in enforcing territorial monopolies. The mechanisms of extortion, threatening and protection will always produce turbulence due to rivalling 'families' and other competitors such as 'faking Mafiosi', emulous candidates for succession and people who simply will not cooperate (Smith and Varese, 2001; compare Blok, 2001). In the USA the Mafia has lost its importance because it was not keen enough to deal with new competitors such as Colombian and Russian gangs and find competent successors when leadership had failed or passed away (Reuter, 1995).



Probably of more significance is the fact that – both in the USA and Italy – law enforcement agencies and policies have been considerably strengthened and professionalised (Reuter, 1995; Schneider and Schneider, 2003). In both nations, higher-level institutional influences – the federal level in the USA, the European Union in Italy – have pressured lower-level authorities to address seriously the entanglement between criminality and politics, to strive radically for transparency and good governance and more specifically to fight the pervasive illegality in the urban and rural areas involved. In the case of Italy, the EU simply declines membership to nations which are in compromised standing in relation to democratic governance, human rights and institutional health. Since the formation of the EU's internal market in 1992, all EU member states – hence also Italy (Den Boer, 1996) – have been forced to improve their judicial, political and administrative systems. Without good governance, EU membership and EU money flows are simply out of reach of applicant countries (e.g. Den Boer and De Kerckhove, 2001), a situation which has been experienced by Romania and Bulgaria. After official admonishments in May 2006 for not having improved their law enforcement practices sufficiently, these two countries have been admitted to the EU, but only under the condition that the Union will strictly supervise their measures to fight corruption, governmental misbehaviour and organised crime. In both countries Mafia-type criminal practices (corruption, extortion, connections between politics and crime) are still too prevalent to be acceptable for the EU. In organised crime – also because of its entanglement with terrorist-related crimes – the EU has found a new enemy with many tentacles; this enemy the EU is resolute to fight (Den Boer, 2000).

Finally, although often understated in the assessments of the reasons behind Mafia decline, civil movements worldwide are on the rise, and an ethical and civil progression can be noticed (Fabj, 1998; Kaldor, 2003; Kymlicka, 2001). This is an interesting development, which is not unrelated to the point made above of the existence of a plurality of cultures, not all of which are Mafia-friendly, even in regions renowned for Mafia 'infestation'. In Italy, a strong anti-Mafia social movement consisting of an expanding urban and educated middle class contributed to the defeat of the Mafia. Once the 'tipping point' (Gladwell, 2000) had been reached, the anti-Mafia movement contributed to doing away with the political practices that had condoned the Mafia's criminal activities for so long. Noteworthy is the role of women in this regard. The Association of Women against the Mafia in Palermo as well as spontaneous movements like the Committee of the Sheets have also played important roles, as have the increasing number of female mayors who have been elected in Sicily's countryside over the last few years (Fabj, 1998, p. 205; Schneider and Schneider, 2003, pp. 294–5). The progressive ideas of these women proved to be unfertile ground for a flourishing of the Mafia. As elsewhere in the world, women are increasingly holding the stage and they use words as their only 'weapons', but – so it seems – those words are effective in realising drastic changes (Soeters, 2005, p. 125; Sung, 2006). Very recently, at the end of 2006, youngsters in Sicily took over a campaign protesting

against the extortion practices threatening small shop owners. This 'Addiopizzo' movement was supported by the EU, which is funding billboards against still-existing Mafia practices. One such reads: '*Contro l'estorsione non sei solo*' ('Against extortion, you are not alone').

What implication – if any at all – do these developments hold for the place and future of 'donmanship' in Jamaica and, in fact, for the whole political, social and economic situation of this nation which has given so much space to this kind of subaltern criminal culture?

### A 'Reversible Destiny' in Jamaica?

Based on the preceding discussion, it is our argument that if the comparison between the Jamaican dons and the Italian godfathers bears any validity at all, the fall of the Italian (and USA) Mafia cannot be without significance for Jamaica and other regions in the developing world where rogue leadership continues to exist. Admittedly, Jamaican governance has not experienced the kinds of revolutionary shifts that have occurred in the political, social and judicial fabric of Italian and American societies over the last two decades and that are weakening Mafiosi to such a noticeable extent. Nonetheless, there are a number of developments taking place in Jamaica, including state interventionist policies and action within civil society, with enormous potential impact on organised crime and the power of dons.

To grasp the significance of these developments, it is important to acknowledge that over the last 25 years, the Jamaican government and civil society have dealt with the presence and influence of dons on (electoral and local body) politics, the justice system, the informal economy and the local community in a variety of controversial and unproductive ways. For example, our research suggests an official state response constructed on a contradictory model of, on the one hand, accommodation (to the hegemony of rogues) and their incorporation into official law enforcement and community governance, and, on the other, brutal repression of their criminal practices *vis-à-vis* aggressive policing.

But times are changing. Paradigmatic shifts in the performance and operations of the Jamaican state over the last five years, most notably in law enforcement, have resulted in a noticeable decline in the economic power and political legitimacy of dons. For example, the Jamaican government, on 19 October 2004, launched a hardline policing offensive dubbed 'Operation Kingfish', designed to dismantle large organised criminal organisations and gang networks run by dons as well as to strike at the heart of the narcotics trafficking industry in which they are heavily involved. Premised upon the combined efforts of the Jamaica Defence and Constabulary Forces and international (intelligence and law-enforcement) collaboration among the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Jamaica, 'Operation Kingfish' has already witnessed considerable

success. Assistant Commissioner of Police, Glenmore Hinds, confirmed that in the first year of intense activity, Kingfish confiscated some 50 speedboats (used in the transnational drug trade), 1,240 firearms, over 2,500 cartridges, 12 tonnes of cocaine and 4,300 pounds of compressed marijuana and arrested 235 persons for a range of offences including murder, firearms, ammunition and drug possession (see *The Jamaica Observer*, 13 November 2005).

Of extraordinary significance has been the arrest, imprisonment and successful conviction of some of Jamaica's most notorious 'mob bosses' and warlords. For example, in 2005, the leader of the infamous Gideon Warriors Gang, Joel Andem, who held prominent status on the police's 'most wanted' list for over a decade for numerous crimes, including murder, was sentenced to 30 years in prison. This is while his co-leader, Kevin Tyndale was condemned to 90 years' imprisonment. Likewise, in 2006, Donald 'Zekes' Phipps – don of the Mathews Lane community and a high-flying henchman of the ruling People's National party – was tried for murder, found guilty and sentenced to 30 years in jail. At the time of writing, extradition proceedings were also under way for two other Jamaican crime lords, named by the US government as major 'drug trafficking kingpins'. These developments not only suggest that the judicial apparatus of the Jamaican legal system is becoming more effective, but are especially significant since the previous inability of the state to prosecute dons successfully had resulted in widespread loss of confidence in the police and given credence to the notion that the state lacked the political will to tackle organised crime. In this regard, the conviction of 'Zekes' (after escaping jail on several previous occasions on account of absent/unwilling witnesses and lack of evidence) created the biggest stir in the Jamaican criminal underworld and underscored the urgency of the state to drive down crime levels.

Also noteworthy is the seizure of (go-fast) boats used to convey drugs across international waters and the disabling of illegal airstrips used to land drug planes, also part of the new organised crime-busting strategy of the Jamaican government. Of a total of twelve criminal organisations targeted by 'Operation Kingfish', seven have been completely dismantled – the Klansman and Mathews Lane gangs, traditionally allied to the People's National party; the One Order Gang associated with the main opposition, the Jamaica Labour party, as well as the One Ten, Top Road, Ryan Richards and the Steve 'Mop Head' Halliman gangs based in Kingston. Other gangs have experienced severe disruptions in their operations due to inter-gang rivalry and the killing of some members by the security forces in open confrontations (see Williams, 2005, *The Jamaica Observer*, 13 November). Although the latter is not necessarily a positive development, the Jamaican government, through its security outfit, has, at times, felt compelled to respond forcefully to upsurges in criminality by deploying coercive and occasionally deadly measures. These surges in criminal violence are often the result of the violent confrontations between and within gangs as they struggle for turf, particularly in circumstances where state infiltration has dramatically disrupted the flow of transnational drug trafficking, and hence the extraordinary income to

be accrued from it (Phillips, 2004, p. 4). Admittedly, however, the human rights abuses and assaults on the poor which often attend these operations suggest that such tactics will ultimately prove to be untenable (see Johnson, 2005b). It is also important to note that many Jamaican gangs maintain a ready pool of recruits to replace those who have been imprisoned or killed. The tussle over leadership therefore makes this context prone to a seemingly higher proclivity for violence. This is because unlike the Italian Mafia, which is strongly rooted in fictive kinship as well as real kin relations, Jamaican gangs have often had to fall back on coercive power to maintain their internal unity. Yet it is of extraordinary theoretical and political significance that the expected violent tussle for the leadership of Mathews Lane in Western Kingston in the aftermath of the arrest and imprisonment of its area leader, Donald 'Zekes' Phipps, did not materialise. 'Crime-wise, they have been very quiet' is the assessment by the Jamaican police, premised on the noticeable absence of a successor don, the customary feuding with rival communities and the unprecedented opening of the community to 'outsiders' (the removal of roadblocks, clearing of streets and staging of shindigs). Notwithstanding the precariousness and fragility of peace there, Mathews Lane residents have experienced some reprieve, in their own words: 'now everyman equal, everyman have a say, nobody no [don't] rule nobody' (see *The Star* newspaper, 28 February 2007, p. 3).

Of remarkable significance also is the increasing professionalisation of the Jamaican police force, the strengthening of policy and the modernisation of the law enforcement infrastructure (Phillips, 2004; cf. Harriot, 2003). This includes the installation of technology such as Closed Circuit Television Surveillance Systems (CCTV) in public spaces in the Kingston metropolitan area and an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (APFIS) as well as the purchase of additional police vehicles, including some 220 motor vehicles, 100 motorcycles and six patrol boats for the Marine police. There has also been an intense recruitment and training of additional police personnel, including the present deployment of police officers from the United Kingdom's Scotland Yard. The latter is designed to improve the intelligence-gathering capability and crime-scene investigative skills of the Jamaican police (Phillips, 2004; Williams, 2005; *The Jamaica Observer*, 13 November).

Perhaps of more political purchase is the introduction by the Jamaican state, in recent years, of robust 'anti-Mafia' legislation such as the Plea Bargaining Act and Proceeds of Crime Bill as well as amendments to the Money Laundering and Corruption Prevention Acts. These critical legislative moves are aimed at weakening the financial power base of criminal bosses by seizing their assets and disrupting the avenues to profit that give context to criminal empires (Phillips, 2004). Of course, as in Italy, extortion remains central to the power of Jamaican dons and key to their economic wealth. There is, however, as yet no comprehensive strategy outlined or undertaken by the Jamaican state to combat a rampant extortion trade in the country's busy commercial districts despite the

increasingly brutal and coercive strategies employed by extortionists in Jamaica to keep it viable, including the murder of over fourteen businessmen since 1999.

Extortion, though, never simply leads to a perfect hegemony by crime lords in an area (Smith and Varese, 2001). In fact, continuous 'infighting' between competitors in the extortion industry creates continuing turbulence, thus enabling changes to occur in the criminal domain (Charles, 2002). In such circumstances, the restoration of peace is no longer the preserve of criminal dons but, instead, obliges the intervention of the higher authority of the state. As we noted above, crime-busting initiatives which assume, as a strategy, out-and-out confrontation with armed gangs, have in the past merely served to heighten distrust of the police and have increased citizen protests against 'police brutality'. As a result, new fillip is being given to the community policing strategy by the Jamaican state. Admittedly, many garrisoned Jamaican communities are overrun with violent gangs and citizens who deeply mistrust the police and hence do not easily allow for community policing. The police have, nonetheless, managed to tap into pockets of support within some communities by being more transparent about their law enforcement activities, successes and failures.

It is now widely perceived that it is to police officers operating in more amenable and amiable ways with residents in communities over which dons preside and/or criminal gangs establish their bases that are owed, in part, the recent successes of 'Operation Kingfish'. Indeed, since 2006, the police have reported that, for the first time in several years, violent crimes, particularly murders, have trended downwards by a significant 26 per cent, thanks to the assistance of the community policing unit and more innovative policing strategies in general (*The Jamaica Observer*, 10 September 2006).

To really address the robustness of criminal gangs in Jamaica also requires the support of civil society. Indeed, it is when citizens decline to participate in real ways in the governance and conduct of their lives and communities, including withdrawal from popular participation in law enforcement, that dubious actors with contradictory goals assume responsibility for governance (Barber, 1984; compare Mason, 2005; Strange, 1996). Although Jamaica has a diverse civil society and myriad civic organisations (Munroe, 1999; 2000), these are usually seen to be ambivalent and sedate (Gray, 2003; compare interview, 2004). However, mushrooming crime rates, including some 1,674 cases of homicide in 2005 alone (Police Crime Statistics, *Jamaica Constabulary Force*) and an unprecedented quotient of fear of crime, have created a Jamaican citizenry increasingly exhausted with criminality and angry with the perceived complicity of the state in the hegemony of dons and what many still perceive as lacklustre efforts in combating crime. The result has been an increased intensity of episodic mobilisations in the streets by loosely organised networks of citizens, particularly women and students, who desire to exhibit their fearless opposition to criminal violence in their communities (see Myers, 2004).

Not unlike Italy, significant elements of the Jamaican working and disadvantaged classes are clearly huge supporters of efforts to rid their communities of extra-legal actors. Whether embodied in civic initiatives such as marches, prayer vigils and crusades organised by the church, covert attempts to provide information to the police or the lyrical output of reggae and dance hall entertainers, there are always people who try to escape the don's reach and power. Moreover, like Italy and elsewhere, Jamaican women (especially within the context of the historically significant accession of Jamaica's first female prime minister, Portia Simpson-Miller) are becoming a force in themselves, raising their voices against criminality and injustice, and gaining power in popular street mobilisations as well as in the political arena (Johnson, forthcoming; Myers, 2004). While impoverishment and fear keep some women trapped in the situation of being economic clients of patron-dons, and filial bonds prevent others from assuming the much-desired *anti-don* stance, the evident courage of women in the face of real danger may contribute to real changes in the status and authority of dons in the country. The following quotations from a cross-section of Jamaican citizens represent an emerging consensus that Jamaican dons are not legitimate civic actors and therefore cannot retain real membership in civil society:

- P1: Community dons need to stop believing the hype that they get. I do not regard any don because my idea of a don or a area leader is one who supposed to set an example in him community where youths a pick up a gun, him tell them to put it down, where youths a follow him because him a set an example, not an example to say him is a thug and you can kill and rape. If his idea of being a don is to cause no war to go on in his area but war [going on] around a next man area, him can go way [bugger off]. Him not contributing positively.
- P2: No, they [dons] are not a part of civil society, no, no. They are part of the citizenry. No, no. If they are dealing with criminal activity, they are abhorrent to the very spirit of togetherness in the society.
- P3: There are involved in extreme cases of wrongdoing and that cannot be encouraged. A don to me is not a person who kills people.
- P4: No sir, there is no place in civil society for them. The only place for them as far as I am concerned is in jail.<sup>4</sup>

In the same breath, there has been public indignation in recent years, propelled by the media, over the cosy, symbiotic relationship fostered between the political establishment and members of the organised crime industry. This included the daily publishing of the details of vicious crimes as front-page stories, statistics illustrating mounting crime levels and letters from ordinary citizens expressing outrage at the state. This public objection resulted in the reluctant 'outing' of the role of politicians in legitimising donmanship. Nowadays, there is a less explicit or public display of alliance between politicians and dons and the generation of a public rhetoric by both political officials and citizens of 'the need for political disassociation' between these entities (see Ritch, 2001; Mills, 2001; *The Jamaica*

*Gleaner*, 20 May). Whereas this push from civil society has had the effect of exposing the ingrained linkages between criminal enterprise and politics, the mutually dependent relationship which has been cultivated and sustained for more than half a century between dons and the political order clearly requires more than rhetoric to shatter. After all, if political parties are to be viewed as a vital part of the functioning of the state as well as an indispensable element of a mobilised and engaged civil society, then those within its employ cannot serve to undermine it.

Like Italy, Jamaica also knows a middle-class-based civil society, comprised of intellectuals, professionals and a sizeable merchant element whose constituents favour good governance, healthy economic and social institutions and are, for the most part, anti-dons and donmanship. The middle class is likely to profit most from institutional reforms which deepen its affinity for that agenda. Of crucial purchase therefore is that this very powerful merchant class, itself often accused of complicity in the extortion practices of dons (Henry, 2000; *The Jamaica Gleaner*, January 31) and detached from the problems in the society, has – for the first time – pledged its financial support for the government's latest initiatives to tackle organised crime.

It is important to emphasise here, however, that unlike Italy within the context of the tenets of membership in the European Union, Jamaica does not, at present, experience immediate pressure from higher political levels, despite the existence and increasing influence of a regional political body, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). As such, we reiterate that the reasons dons and donmanship have persisted in Jamaica is powerfully connected to those that informed its development – a compromised Jamaican state, which continues to foster a symbiotic co-dependent relationship with alternative, outlaw authorities through the contrary patron–client practices of some Members of Parliament and a police force, some members of which continue to be in collusion with narcotics trafficking and banditry. Although the government is emphatic that it has no current ties with dons, informal practices by public officials in reality constitute *de facto* approval of their autonomy and independent authority. As a consequence, dons, like their Mafia counterparts worldwide, find themselves in the haughty position of being able to operate outside the rule of law. Nevertheless, the United Nations and other supranational institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are increasingly stressing the importance of good governance; the World Bank even going so far as explicitly demanding good governance and the disappearance of corruption as preconditions to the funding of large-scale projects.<sup>5</sup> If this policy holds, small developing countries, including Jamaica, will need to address comprehensively the current illegal practices of donmanship which are currently compromising the country's political, administrative and judicial systems.

### Concluding Remarks

All in all, pursuing the comparison between Jamaica's dons and Italian godfathers may lead one to become somewhat optimistic about the island's future. If

representatives of the middle and disadvantaged classes, including Jamaican women and members of the reggae and dance-hall industries, feel increasingly confident in playing a role centre stage, and if authorities are serious about the 'de-garrisonisation' of urban communities and are able to evade the risk of the 'wars on crime' becoming assaults on the poor (compare Schneider and Schneider, 2003, p. 301), then – perhaps – Jamaica may undergo a decline of 'don-power' in much the same manner as Italy and the USA have experienced the downturn of the Mafia. In such a case, Jamaica may also encounter a 'reversible destiny'.

Previously, scholars planning to study the Mafia in Sicily were often warned against the risks they would run doing their fieldwork. This situation has clearly changed for the better. The first author of this article was explicitly told of the dangers and politics involved in conducting field studies on Jamaican donmanship. Perhaps, in some future, other scholars will be able to do this work in Jamaica's communities without seeking advanced consent from dons or facing warnings of possible compromises to their safety. If this article contributes to such a development, it will have fulfilled its intentions.

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### Notes

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- 1 For many, the word godfather evokes the image of the Godfather movies which, as many film scholars have pointed out, represent the Mafia in an overly romantic and somewhat misleading way. In this sense, this article helps to demystify the Mafia phenomenon.
- 2 Gangsters, robbers and 'shottas' (shooters) are not to be misconstrued as dons. Gangsters and *shottas* engage solely in criminal activities and do not possess the enormous wealth and clout of the don. They are nonetheless crucial members of the don's vast network of hirings. They tend to fall at the lower end of a rigid hierarchical command structure and aspire to occupy the envied role of don or area leader. Where there is an absence of centralised leadership such as in the case of the death of a don or infighting among the ambitious, a vacancy in the leadership structure may usher in fundamental changes in the socio-economic and political variables at play in this social space. See Charles, 2002, p. 41; *The Jamaica Gleaner*, 20 May 2001, 'Death of a Don'; Radio Interview, HOT 102 FM, 16 April 2004.
- 3 The second quotation is from a self-styled gangster the first author interviewed during field research in Jamaica between 2003 and 2004.



- 4 These quotations are based on field interviews with Jamaican citizens carried out between 2003 and 2004 in Jamaica by the first author. Quoted respectively are a female Rastafarian entertainer, former Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice, a radio disc jockey and a senior police officer. 'P' here indicates 'participant'.
- 5 O. Velthuis, 'No Money for Grabbing Governments', *Volkskrant*, 27 February 2006. See also Drezner (2001).

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