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Garth Rattray | The Price For Independence

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Contrary to how things may appear, nothing is free; everything comes with a price attached. Even the oxygen that we breathe comes at a cost. Plants of all kinds on land use photosynthesis to produce oxygen and phytoplankton in the oceans do the same. Without the constant work of these plants, there would be no life as we know it on this planet. Something or someone has to sacrifice something for us to survive.

This general principle of sacrifice also holds true for communities and countries. I've observed that the countries with the most unified citizens went through bloody wars/major upheavals or serious threats of bloody wars/major upheavals in achieving self-determination. It seems to be the high price paid for their national independence. It's as if becoming unified to tackle a common enemy or the need for some sort of blood sacrifice created a bond between the citizens. It's not necessarily a permanent bond, but it's a bond nonetheless.

Jamaica's independence did not require a revolution of any kind. There were no battles and no social upheavals. There was no coup and no assassination. It was a peaceful, amiable transition that saw the transfer of power from the British to our government. Additionally, we have never relinquished our bond with Britain. Our system of governance is based on their model and we still look to them for guidance in certain affairs.

That is all well and good, but many within our society transferred dependence on the Crown to dependence on the politicians, and then dependence on area leaders /'dons'. The resultant dichotomous governance was never addressed because it was useful to the politicians. It facilitated their control over their constituents.

ALTERNATE 'LAWS'

Alternate governance led to alternate 'laws' and alternate acculturation. Most of us shriek and recoil in horror at the crass behaviour and unspeakable violence portrayed throughout society. But, if you were to speak with those carrying out such despicable behaviour, you would be further shocked to learn that they think little or nothing of what they are doing. In fact, to them, their actions fall within the realm of 'normal/appropriate behaviour', given the prevailing circumstances at that time.

A good example of this is Tivoli Gardens. The citizens of this alternate society depended on an unofficial leader for guidance, support and governance. The society became so autonomous, from a governance standpoint, that it effectively sought secession. It sought to officially operate outside of Jamaica's governance and pledged allegiance to a leader from within their ranks.

I recognised the existence of alternate societies, existing and operating within our own, a long time ago. Their commonalities were poverty, marginalisation, dependency, being exploited and abandoned; so they developed on their own. It was also glaringly obvious that no administration was willing to deal with this burgeoning problem because, as already stated, it was politically convenient. The troubling issue is that, instead of acknowledging the problem and dealing with it systematically, it was left alone in the apparent expectation that, somehow, it would work itself out.

However, now, instead of those alternate moralities and social behaviours becoming subdued and falling in line with the greater society, the greater society is slowly evolving to deal with the problem by incorporating like mannerisms.

Independence comes with a price. It requires guided social development for every community. No citizen should have been left behind. Many ignored the less fortunate who had to adapt to their hardships to survive. However, that adaptation entailed setting their own rules, standards and ethics, none of which is in keeping with our country's ideals. Hence the rampant aggression, selfishness, indiscipline and violence that we are experiencing. What did we really expect?

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